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THE REFORMATION MOVEMENT IN ESTONIA

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A Thesis Presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of Historical Theology  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Divinity

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by

Heino Olavi Kadai

June 1960

Approved by: Carl S. Meyer  
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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF THE REFORMATION MOVEMENT IN ESTONIA

A casual glance at the historical studies and literature dealing with the Reformation movement available today may give the impression that the field has been nearly exhausted. A closer examination of the many facets and historical problems connected with the movement, however, reveals that this is not so. For example, the topic of this thesis, the Reformation Movement in Estonia, is one of these areas where there is welcome room for further investigation. In this field there exists a conspicuous lack of thorough studies. To our knowledge the American reader has only one magazine article of less than ten pages on this topic at his disposal. The purpose of this thesis is to make a contribution to the study of the Reformation movement in Estonia, a small and thoroughly Lutheran country which embraced the principles of the Reformation early in the sixteenth century and has never since relinquished them.

In treating the Reformation movement in the land of the Estonians the attempt is made to maintain a scholarly objectivity in relation to all the national groups involved. It seems that some previous studies which were not made by the natives of Estonia often exhibited a tendency to overestimate the importance of the part that certain foreign



groups have played in the history of the movement and at the same time failed to give sufficient consideration to the role of the natives. This pitfall must be avoided.

It is hoped that the thesis at hand is not welcomed only because it adds to the completeness of Reformation research in the English language. The study of the Reformation movement in Estonia will help to demonstrate the fact that the Great Reformation, as Lutherans like to think of the Lutheran Reformation, spread in many different ways and moved by diverse roads, not always following the same pattern in every territory. As the study will bear out, the Reformation movement in Estonia carried many characteristics of its own that differ greatly from the development of the Reformation in Germany, Sweden, or Prussia, just to mention a few distinct types of the movement.

Since the country, the people, and the history of Estonia are relatively little known outside the immediate confines of its geographical location, it is necessary to supply a more generous measure of background material than ordinarily would be expected or called for. This is absolutely necessary for a proper comprehension of the topic. Likewise, it would be ill advised to limit the study to a decade or so, which has been sometimes done in the past. Such an approach overlooks the continuous nature of the Reformation in Estonia.

Besides the modest scholarly contribution that the



thesis aims to make it possess also a very timely and practical value. During the past decade about twenty thousand Estonian Lutherans have settled temporarily or permanently in the United States of America. In the majority of cases these people have remained true to their faith and their church, the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church, now in exile. As may be expected, any migration of such dimensions and distance would create problems. Often the complaint is heard that the sister churches do not fully understand the position and the needs of the Estonian Church. Likewise the frank admissions of the sister church is voiced that it is difficult for them to understand the nationalistic stand of the Estonian Church. This thesis, of course, will not delve deeply into such misunderstandings and problems that may exist, but it is hoped that it can offer information and clarification which in turn can further mutual understanding. It is likely that a historical approach can serve the Lutheran Church in this case.

The writer regrets that some limitations must be placed upon the study of the topic. Even though the topic may seem limited to the uninitiated, it is actually quite broad in scope. Its full treatment, and a need for such a work exists, would go far beyond the dimensions of the work at hand. Furthermore, such a complete study would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, because the primary source material is not readily available to the scholars of the free



world. This thesis relies almost in all cases upon secondary sources. Unfortunately even all the secondary sources that are desirable are not available. However, the important works on the topic that have been published in Estonian, German, or English and can be found in the United States have been consulted. Also use is made of the important works that can be found only in the Scandinavian countries. In a few instances quotations from a work as they were reported by another author have been used. Realizing the danger of such a procedure, this practice is kept to a minimum. Chronologically the major emphasis of the study falls upon the third decade of the sixteenth century. However, the treatment of the topic is not limited to this short period of time. The immediate and wider historical context receive treatment to the extent the format of the work allows.

In order to pursue the study successfully an agreement must be reached in the use of the terminology. It seems that there exists a general confusion in the use of geographical names in the historical works on Estonia. This is partly due to the fact that the historians and church historians who have worked on this or related topics come from a wide variety of backgrounds and have written in different languages; it is partly due to the fact that the land of the Estonians has known many foreign occupations down through the centuries which have left their mark by



renaming certain locations. It is not unusual to find three names for one and the same place, all of which have been in use at a given time in history. In order to avoid confusion a uniform method of labelling locations is adopted throughout the thesis. All names appear in the original Estonian form. In cases where the German name is known well enough to be of help to the reader, it appears in the brackets immediately after the first appearance of the Estonian designation. From then on only the Estonian designation is used.

The attention of the reader is directed to what is meant by Estonia. As it is used here, Estonia is the geographic area occupied by the Estonians for the past centuries. This area more or less coincides with the boundaries of the Republic of Estonia at the time of its independence. The reader is warned that at times when an author speaks of Estonia, Livonia, and Kurland, he most likely does not mean by Estonia its entire territory but only the northern half of it. On the other hand the reader does well to keep in mind that historians, speaking of the sixteenth century, have labeled the entire eastern coast of the Baltic Sea as Livonia, thus including also all Estonia in the term.

Before embarking on the study of the Reformation movement in Estonia, it would be of help to the reader to acquaint himself with the organization of the thesis. It is also recommended that the reader consult the general



chronology of the history of Estonia which is included in the appendix of the thesis.

The second chapter of the thesis describes the location of Estonia and tells something about its inhabitants, language, and early religion. The chapter concludes with an overview of the Christianization of Estonia. The third chapter paints a word picture of the conditions, establishments and institutions together with their major problems of mediaeval Estonia. Many of the factors that contributed to the ultimate success of the Reformation were already then present. The German Order, the Roman Catholic hierarchy, the monastic orders, the nobles, the cities and the peasants, all must be dealt with briefly so that the reader may appreciate fully the spiritual and secular environment before the dawn of the Reformation. Chapter four deals with the ways and means that brought the Reformation ideas to Estonia. Here men as Andreas Knopken, Sylvester Tegetmeyer, and Melchior Hofmann are introduced. The following chapter is by far the most central in the thesis. Here the development of the Reformation movement itself in Estonia is described. Note is taken how the cities embraced the reforms under the leadership of a few evangelical pastors, how the nobles reacted to the new teaching, and finally how the Gospel reached the socially and economically underprivileged peasants. The development of the Reformation movement is followed by a study of the immediate results



of the movement. Theological, liturgical and economic changes become evident. Also of great importance is the creation of the written vernacular language for the Estonians in which theological literature becomes available for the first time to a large number of natives. Chapter seven offers a brief but comprehensive overview of the history of the Estonian people and their church, beginning with the Russian invasion of 1558 and ending with her latest invasion. This brings us up-to-date. Much happened during these last four centuries, but the main emphasis falls upon the two highlights of the Lutheran Church in Estonia: the Swedish occupation in the second half of the sixteenth century and the establishment of the free Estonian Lutheran Church in the second decade of the twentieth century. Now it remains to give a summary sketch of the Reformation movement in Estonia in chapter eight. It may be of benefit to the reader to go through the summary chapter before a general reading of the thesis. The thesis closes with a chapter devoted to the discussion of earlier works on the topic. A broad discussion of the secondary sources and their availability today is of help to the student of the Reformation. Rare works will be listed together with their location. Also a general discussion of the bibliographies available on the subject is included. The chapter closes with a brief consideration of the present-day trends in treating the Reformation history of the Baltic countries



in general and of Estonia in particular. The bibliography and an appendix conclude the thesis.

The bibliography of the thesis will inform the reader about the material used in research. It may, however, be of some help to consider at this point briefly a few works that form the foundation upon which the thesis was built. From the point of view of importance and availability the first place goes to Leonid Arbusow's Die Einführung der Reformation in Liv-, Est- und Kurland. It is a thorough piece of historical scholarship, well documented and based on primary sources, whenever possible. Its style and organization detracts somewhat from its ready usefulness. A much shorter work, Otto Pohrt's Reformationsgeschichte Livlands, ein Überblick, makes up in clarity what it lacks in detail. Two excellent Estonian works are not readily available for the student in the United States: Olaf Sild's Besti kirikulugu vanimast ajast olevikuni (Estonian Church History from the Earliest Times to the Present), and a joint effort by a scholarly committee Usupuhaustus eestlaste maal (Reformation in the Land of the Estonians). Special credit is due to M. Ojamaa and T. Varmas' Esti ajalugu (History of Estonia) and J. Aunver's Esti rahvakiriku ristitee (The History of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church since 1917 until the Present Time).



## CHAPTER II

### ESTONIA: THE LAND, ITS PEOPLE, LANGUAGE, AND RELIGION

A sixteenth century chronicler described in his quaint German the territory on the eastern shore of the Baltic Sea, where in more recent times the Estonian and Latvian Republics prospered:

Zu merckenn. Lieflandt ist ohngefehr 100 meil wegs lang medt 20 meil breit, Ein gut Konigreich, hut in sich sechs Fürstentumb, den Teuzschenmeister mit seinen Comtorn undt gebietern, undt den funf Bischofthumb mit ihren zugehörigen Embtern, Nembich das Erzstift Riga das grosste, das stift Derbt das gewaltigste, das stift Oesel das Reichste, Reval das geringste und Churlandt das geruhsambste.<sup>1</sup>

Estonia, a small Baltic country, lies at the outfall of the Finnish Gulf in the northern part of the continent of Europe. It covers an area of about 47,550 square kilometers, inhabited by more than a million people.<sup>2</sup> Geographically Estonia forms a part of the East-European plain stretching from the Baltic Sea to the Ural mountains. In the north the Finnish Gulf separates it from Finland; in the west the Baltic Sea forms a waterway toward the Scandinavian

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted from Grefentals Chronic in Otto Pohrt, Reformationsgeschichte Livlands, ein Überblick (Leipzig: Eger & Sievers, 1928), Jahrgang 46, Heft 2 (Nr. 145), p. 6.

<sup>2</sup>E. Kareda and others, Estonia, Basic Facts on Geography, History, Economy (Stockholm, Sweden: Estonian Information Center, 1948), p. 3.



shores. Its only land neighbors are the Russians and the Latvians from the east and from the south respectively. Estonia also owns about eight hundred islands, the largest being Saaremaa.

A look at the map readily reveals that the location of Estonia is much exposed strategically. No wonder that the geographical factors have played a decisive part in the history of its people. It forms sort of a bridge linking Western with Eastern Europe. In the past all the western nations on the Baltic have made use of the great natural highways of Estonia in their contacts with Russia. Since Estonia is located on the crossroads from West to East and to a lesser extent from South to North, many a bitter conflict between the great powers has been settled just there. Thus repeatedly the country suffered under foreign invasion and military conflict, but was somehow always able to recover from its wounds.<sup>3</sup> The location has also had its blessings. The close contacts, forced or voluntary, with other nations have enriched the cultural development of its people and in times of peace and prosperity offered an excellent opportunity for trading activity.

The philologists and the archaeologists do not seem to agree as to the origin of the Estonian people. The former

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<sup>3</sup> Evald Uustalu, The History of Estonian People (London: Boreas Publishing Company, 1952), p. 12.



suggest that the Estonians, Finns, and Hungarians, as well as certain other peoples in central and northern Russia spoke a common primary language. Their original home was the European Russia, around the bend of the Middle Volga and along the banks of its tributaries. According to the theory of the Finnish Professors Setälä and Gastren, the individual branches of the tribes started to migrate already very early, the Baltic Finns (Carelian, Vepsa, Vadga, Livonian tribes, the Estonians and the Finns) arriving at their present location about the time of the birth of Christ.<sup>4</sup>

The archaeological theories, more recently advanced under the leadership of Dr. Indreke, speak of an improbably early period of "reindeer-hunters" who were the original Europeans. Some of them, supposedly, settled in the Eastern Baltic and became "fishermen-hunters." According to this theory the ancestors of the Estonians came from central and western Europe. Some of the related tribes later migrated to the Volga area where they spoke a language that belongs to the Finne-Ugrian group.<sup>5</sup>

The details of the theories are subject to debate, but it is known with a fair degree of certainty that the Estonians, Finns and Livs spoke a Finne-Ugri language, entirely distinct and dissimilar from the language of the

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 14.



Slavs, the Germanic Groups, the Latvians and Lithuanians, and settled in their present-day home at the latest during the first centuries after Christ. It is possible and even probable that the migration took place already much earlier.<sup>6</sup>

The secular historians usually begin the history of the Estonian people with the Stone Age (until 1300 B.C.). There seems to be reliable archaeological proof of human colonization in the territory at that time. The findings from the period include hunting and fishing gear and some pottery, crude in design and made of clay heavily mixed with sand.<sup>7</sup> During the Bronze Age (1300 B.C.-500 B.C.) tools, weapons, and ornaments of bronze were used. It is believed that the metal was brought into Estonia from the south, probably from central or western Europe by way of Prussia, Lithuania, and Latvia. Later on bronze was also imported from Scandinavia. Incidentally, the Bronze Age in Estonia ushered in a new burial custom. Up to this time the dead were buried without any visible mark on the ground. Now, however, they were placed in a stone-slab cist on the ground covered with a cairn, a type of grave well known in East Prussia.<sup>8</sup> It seems that iron was first brought

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<sup>6</sup> Eesti Teatmeteos (Geislingen, Germany: Eesti Rahvusfond Saksamaal ja Eesti Uliopilaskond Saksamaal väljaanne, 1949), IV, 10.

<sup>7</sup> Uustalu, op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 17.



into the country about 500 B.C. Consequently the subsequent period, until the end of the prehistoric era, about 1200 A.D., is known as the Iron Age. It is usually subdivided as follows: (1) the Pre-Roman Iron Age (500 B.C.-1 A.D.); (2) the Roman Iron Age (1-400 A.D.); (3) the Middle Iron Age (400-800 A.D.); the Late Iron Age (800-1200 A.D.). Especially the Roman Iron Age seems to have been favorable for economic and cultural development in Estonia. This was due most likely, to the degree of cultural progress and prosperity of the Roman Empire. Even territories as far as Estonia seemed to benefit by the general prosperity of southern Europe.<sup>9</sup> Beginning with the middle of the first millenium after Christ, a noticeable lag in progress was in evidence. Only during the Later Iron Age, particularly in its last two centuries, did the prehistorical culture in Estonia attain its peak. By then trade, seafaring, and agricultural activity had become the principal forms of making a living. In fact, for a time the Estonians managed to hold a predominant position among the seafaring peoples of the east coast of the Baltic Sea. Culturally the Estonians, from the earliest times on, turned their eyes toward the West. Politically they seemed to be moving towards one common state. By the end of the Late Iron Age

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<sup>9</sup>M. Ojamaa and A. and T. Varmas, Eesti ajalugu (Stockholm, Sweden: "Eesti Raamat," 1946), p. 23.



the eight tribal states of Estonia had established a confederation and were generally collaborating.<sup>10</sup> This development was for defense purposes against the attacks from the West and the East. Estonian strength was severely tried in the face of Russian westward expansion policy on the River Narva-Lake Peipsi line.

The details of the religion of the ancestors of the Estonians are not well known. It is fairly certain that the pagan Estonians believed that every person, thing, or natural phenomenon was inhabited by a force that directed it. This force was pictured as a concrete entity that was able to change his location and even migrate into another being.<sup>11</sup> The word vain (ghost) appears early in the Estonian language. This "ghost" was thought to be able to leave the body and exist independently. Some have thought of the ghost as a shadow that always accompanied the person. Somewhat later the word hing (soul) appears which was thought to be the life principle in breath. A person who was credited with powers to control, dominate, or direct the inner forces of others was known as a witch. Already very early, in the language of the common dialect, death was understood as the exit of the soul from the body. The soul was thought to continue to live on as a shadow which

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<sup>10</sup>Kareda, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>11</sup>Esti Teatmateos, IV, 7.



occasionally would appear to the living in dreams and revelations, or it would choose to inhabit some animal, bird, or inanimate object. The daily life of the dead person was thought to be much like the one he had led on earth. Therefore attempts were made to care for the dead person's soul if it was loved or to sacrifice to it if it was feared. There were mainly two types of cultic expressions among the pre-Christianized Estonians: sacrifice and worship of the dead and of the forces of nature.<sup>12</sup>

At the end of the twelfth century the Estonians knew little if anything about Christianity. It is true that already in the beginning of the previous century the King of Denmark and the Archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen decided to direct their efforts toward the Christianization of the Baltic territory. In 1103 the Archbishop of Lund was consecrated who together with the Bishop of Upsala was supposed to work out a plan of missionary action. The Bishop of Upsala turned his attention to the Christianization of the Finns, with apparent success. The Archbishop of Lund appointed a certain monk Fulco to be a missionary to the Estonians; he was consecrated as their bishop in 1164. Bishop Fulco made two missionary journeys to Estonia without much success. His work, however, attracted the attention of the Swedes, the Danes, and even the papal court. In

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<sup>12</sup>Esti Testametos, IV, 8.



1197 the Danes made a missionary trip to the shores of Estonia without any better results. All the attempts at Christianization were connected with physical force. An Estonian historian warns the reader to think historically and not be too severe in judging the mission methods, sword and fire, used at the time. They were the accepted methods.<sup>13</sup> Many may be inclined to disagree with this judgement but few would agree that such methods were effective in really leading people to Christ.

The first effective attempt to Christianize the Estonian and Latvian people came from Germany. Together with some German traders from Bremen came the Augustinian monk Meinhard, who settled just south of Estonia.<sup>14</sup> His activity was peaceable; his main weapons were the Gospel and personal testimony. Such a ministry had success. In 1184 monk Meinhard was able to see the completion of a wooden church in Uskõla. It is said that Meinhard also carried on some work in Estonia. When Meinhard died in 1196 the Archbishop of Bremen named Berthold to succeed the deceased bishop. By this time the natives had realized that the motives of the German merchants who had come along and supported the

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<sup>13</sup> Philip Tammaru, Usuopetuse conspect (Germany: n.p., 1948), p. 51.

<sup>14</sup> A. Torma, The Church in Estonia (New York: World Association of Estonians, Inc., 1944), p. 3.



missionaries were not peaceful.<sup>15</sup> This caused a sharp change in the attitude of the natives toward the missionary activity.

Bishop Berthold, who, it is said, did not possess the same fine personal qualities as his predecessor did, appealed to Rome to have a crusade proclaimed against the peoples of the Eastern Baltic. This request was granted. He came as a warrior and died as one on the battlefield (1198). The life of the leader was lost but the battle was won. Latvians made peace and submitted to baptism.<sup>16</sup>

The following summer Ūkskāla had a new bishop by the name of Albert, a relative of the Bishop of Bremen. This man remained for thirty years in the leadership of mission activity and German expansion in the East Baltic. In order to carry out his plan effectively, he, with the permission and blessing of the Pope, constantly sought new crusaders for the Land of Mary, a new name for the territory. In 1201 he built a fortification for his troops and thus also founded the city of Riga. The following year he organized the Order of Brothers of the Sword (Fratres Militiae Christi), a military order with Christian ideals but unchristian methods.<sup>17</sup> A German priest in Chronica Livoniae

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Tammaru, op. cit., p. 51.

<sup>17</sup>Karl Lasntee, "The Beginning of the Reformation in Estonia," Church History, XXII (December, 1953), 269.



describes their own activity:

When we arrived there (Estonia) we spread troops over all the roads, villages and districts of the country; we set on fire and destroyed everything, we killed all who were of masculine sex, captured women and children and took away much cattle and horses. . . . and returned to Livonia with great rejoicing.<sup>18</sup>

During more peaceable hours new churches were built and monasteries established. At the same time more and more Germans flocked to the rich shores of the East Baltic.

As far as can be ascertained, the first clash with the Estonians occurred in 1208 as the Order, on its own initiative, tried to increase its landholdings. Thus started a fierce struggle which lasted for some twenty years. The Estonians offered a vigorous resistance but gradually were forced to surrender and become Christians as the German occupied their land. By 1215 the Germans had extended their territory to include the whole south of Estonia. What the natives lacked in military might they made up by a fighting spirit. Under the leadership of elder Lembit a six thousand man army attacked the German forces near Viljandi (September 21, 1217). Unfortunately for the Estonians the Germans knew about the attack beforehand and were able to defeat the natives.<sup>19</sup> An important battle was lost but the Estonians in the North were not ready to surrender.

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 269.

<sup>19</sup>Ojamaa, op. cit., p. 52.



Since the Germans were in constant danger from the East, Bishop Albert turned to seek help from the outside. In the summer of 1219 King Voldemar II of Denmark arrived with his fleet and established a foothold on the northern shores of Estonia. Later this place became the capital of the Estonian Republic. By the fall of 1220 Järvamaa and Virumaa, two northern counties of Estonia, were also in the hands of the Danes. In the same year the Swedes also made an unexpected attack against Läänemaa. Their temporary victory was soon wiped out by Saaremaa. Two years later the Danes attacked Saaremaa but found themselves soon ousted again. Under the inspired leadership of the courageous inhabitants of the island the Estonians rose against the entire occupation forces and succeeded almost in freeing the whole country. But the sweet victory was shortlived. By the spring of 1227 the whole country was under Christian domination. Only minor rebellions, excepting one, occurred from that time on, and they all were unsuccessful.<sup>20</sup> Christianity and foreign dominion were the masters.

After the surrender of the Estonians, difficulties developed between the two conquerors, the Germans and the Danes. For a while the Pope tried to establish a buffer state of his own between the two forces. Eventually also this arrangement failed. The Duchy of Estonia was purchased

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 54.



from the King of Denmark in 1346 by the Teutonic Order of Prussia.<sup>21</sup> This order had previously opened its doors to the Brothers of the Sword (1237) when the latter's existence had been seriously endangered by the Lithuanians. The Livonian branch of the Teutonic Order continued to maintain a considerable autonomy. The Master of the Teutonic Knights was in fact the most powerful person in East Prussia.<sup>22</sup> Yet the territory was far from being under one man's rule. During the middle ages four important powers emerged: the Order, the bishops, the nobles, and the cities. The fifth estate was made up of the politically powerless and economically exploited natives.

Chapter three of this thesis will deal with the development of these powers and with the problems they faced or created. In one way or another all these forces contributed to the final success of the Reformation movement in Estonia.

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<sup>21</sup>Kareda, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>22</sup>Laantee, op. cit., p. 269.



### CHAPTER III

#### FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE SUCCESS OF THE REFORMATION MOVEMENT IN ESTONIA

This chapter deals with the mediaeval world as it pertains to Estonia. Far-reaching movements usually do not succeed unless the time is ripe. The Reformation certainly did not take place in a vacuum, but political, economic, and social factors were deeply involved in preparing the way. Among the major factors that contributed to the success of the movement were the weakening of the Order, the popular opposition to the Roman Catholic clergy, the evils of the monastic establishments, unfair policies of the nobles, rise of the cities, and the deplorable lot of the native peasants.

As has been previously mentioned, the armies of the Order of the Teutonic Knights dealt the death blow to the dreams of Estonian independence. The major part of Estonia and Latvia, at that time known together as Livonia, was under the immediate rule of the Livonian branch of the Order, more popularly known simply as the Livonian Order. With the Grand Master residing far off in East Prussia, the Master of the Livonian branch, residing first in Riga and later in



Cesis (Wenden) became the real local ruler.<sup>1</sup> His territory was divided for administrative purposes into regions, which in turn were under the supervision of Konturs and bailiffs who usually built an awesome castle for their own protection and for housing their military forces. The Master together with the Konturs and bailiffs made up the administrative council which filled all the vacant offices and decided on political issues. Since the Order pursued a sensible policy, favorable to trade, the land prospered, soon becoming one of the richest states in Northern Europe.<sup>2</sup>

However, the Order was only the major power in the land, not the only one. Actually the political structure of Livonia was exceedingly complex. The Order had to deal with the other powers, primarily the ecclesiastical landowners and the vassals. Theoretically, in the beginning, the Order itself had been a vassal of the Archbishop of Riga and the Bishop of Tartu.<sup>3</sup> As it became the strongest military power in the area and succeeded in annexing further territorial possessions, it disregarded the former relationship. Naturally

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<sup>1</sup>M. Ojamaa and A. and T. Varma, Eesti ajalugu (Stockholm, Sweden: "Eesti Raamat," 1946), p. 63.

<sup>2</sup>Evald Uustalu, The History of the Estonian People (London: Boreas Publishing Company, 1952), p. 49.

<sup>3</sup>Leonid Arbusow, Die Einführung der Reformation in Liv-, Est- und Kurland, in Quellen und Forschungen zur Reformationsgeschichte (Leipzig: Vermittlungsverlag von M. Heisius Nachfolger, 1921), III, 27.



this created a sharp conflict between the Order and the ecclesiastical princes. The struggle between the Church (bishops) and state (in this case a religious order), after coming to a focal point in the fourteenth century when the latter obtained a complete independence, continued into the sixteenth century. It has been questioned why the Order did not establish one unified state. There are several reasons why this could not materialize. The Order had to fight on and off with the enemies from the outside, notably the Lithuanians from the South and the Russians from the East. The Grand Master's occasional interference into the internal affairs and policies, motivated by a desire to keep the Livonian branch under his own rule, did not help matters any. There were also difficulties within the Order. Namely, the Rheinlandish and the Westphalian brothers of the Order bitterly fought for the leadership of the organization. Both the Order and the bishops joined forces to fight the influence of a rapidly developing city system. The vassals, in turn, were not slow in taking advantage of the situation to further their own political ambitions.<sup>4</sup>

The Livonian Order was blessed with fine leadership, notably the long rule of Wolter von Plettenberg who deserves praise for defending the country against foreign attacks. But his underlings did not always measure up to their leader.

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<sup>4</sup>Arbusow, op. cit., III, 29.



Actually the Order had lost its original purpose of existence: conquest for Christ, or rather Mary (Livonia was also known as Terra Mariana).<sup>5</sup> As a result the Order lost some of its compactness and original warrior zeal. Luxurious living undermined the nobler qualities in the soldiers and laziness changed them into weaklings.<sup>6</sup> The monastic vow of poverty was soon forgotten when the opportunity beckoned to lead a life of ease as a feudal lord. The vow of chastity did not fare much better. A young historian wrote not too long ago: "The Knights fornicated like soldiers and married like country gentlemen."<sup>7</sup> Also the third vow, that of obedience, was often conveniently disregarded if not openly neglected.

In the face of moral laxness, lack of fresh zeal, difficulties with other local powers, and internal conflicts sapped much of the original vigor of the Order by the beginning of the sixteenth century. When the Roman Catholic Church needed help most desperately, the Order was unable to furnish it.

Our attention is directed now to the ecclesiastical powers in Estonia. The territory not ruled by the Order

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<sup>5</sup>Uustalu, op. cit., p. 34.

<sup>6</sup>Karl Laantee, "The Beginning of the Reformation in Estonia," Church History, XXII (December, 1953), 269.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.



was governed by bishops. The Bishops of Riga, Tartu, and Saaremaa-Läänemaa held considerable tracts of land. The Estonian county of Ugandi and the neighboring smaller counties north of the River Emajõgi (Embach) belonged to the Bishop of Tartu. The Bishop of Saaremaa-Läänemaa was the lord of the counties with the same names. The Archbishop's territory surrounded the city of Riga in Latvia. The Bishop of Tallinn had practically no land under his secular rule. The bishop's ecclesiastical rule extended beyond their secular holdings, covering also the entire territory of the Order. The ecclesiastics did not only wield the spiritual sword but the secular one as well, the latter often being of greater immediate importance to them. Thus the bishops became actually secular nobles; the clergy was under the spell of secularization. In such spirit neither they nor their close advisers who formed the Domkapitel bothered to offer pastoral care to the people.<sup>8</sup> There was always some clergyman to perform the high mass and keep the canonical hours. These duties were usually assigned to chaplains and vicars. The higher clergymen busied themselves with more profitable endeavors such as managing their secular estates.

The Roman clergy also excelled in finance. When the money system came into use the clergy developed into a

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<sup>8</sup>Arbusow, op. cit., III, 39.



great financial power in Livonia. Gradually the church took in more money than was needed for salaries and building purposes. Thus clergymen became bankers or principal money lenders, earning as much as six per cent profit. The vassals were the most frequent borrowers.<sup>9</sup> The main sources of income for the church were gifts, endowments, and taxes. The whole mediaeval system of taxation was also employed in Estonia. The riches, however, brought with it a curse upon the church; it became secular-minded in proportion to its income.

Almost without exception the clergymen were foreigners who did not understand the vernacular. It is of interest that in Estonia bishoprics never became shelters for the younger sons of the nobles as was the case in Germany. The Order preferred to have bishops from among the city dwellers.<sup>10</sup> In the choice of new bishops, the world-wide known art of simony in the Roman Church of the time was diligently practiced also by the local parties.

The secularized clergy was easy prey of moral corruption. It is said that there was "hardly a church council where priests were not rebuked for having concubines or indulging in drink and gluttony."<sup>11</sup> To illustrate the point,

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., III, 42.

<sup>10</sup>Arbusow, op. cit., III, 40.

<sup>11</sup>Laantee, op. cit., p. 270.



in 1513 at the Diet of Wolmar the subject of concubinage was discussed at length. The problem seemed to be that the "wives" of the clergy were proud and lived in luxury equal to that of the nobility.<sup>12</sup> The nobles were ready to forgive concubinage itself, but not the high-and-mighty behavior of the women.<sup>13</sup> This is not to imply that all the clergymen sinned in such a manner. For some of them that was a financial impossibility.<sup>14</sup>

It is known that there was a lack of churches especially in the country. The ones that were available for people offered services mostly in Latin. At times the natives made no effort to secure intelligible services. They preferred the incomprehensible Latin prayer and cultus, thinking it to be of greater efficacy. In rare cases pastors did preach in the vernacular, however, already before the Reformation. Priest Bruno Wetberg delivered sermons in German and Estonian near Narva (1504-1506). It is an understatement to say that the language difficulties played an important role in Estonia. Doctrinally the Livonian clergy held the official teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. This would naturally include all its errors and misconceptions. The saints were worshiped, the worship of

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Arbusow, op. cit., III, 66.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., III, 67.



Mary was exalted, masses were said for the dead. The proof for this comes from the contemporary wills and testaments.<sup>15</sup> The sermon topics often strayed far from the inspired Scriptures. Dreams, fables and extraordinary works of St. Dominic formed the basis of many discourses.<sup>16</sup>

It is no wonder that the popular spirituality relied mostly on outward actions and signs. Especially among the urban element it was popular to retire into a monastery. Sometimes the entire family left the "sinful world" at once. Much emphasis was placed upon indulgences, pictures, statues, the magic act of transubstantiation, the worship of relics, and pilgrimages. The local saints Meinhard, Berthold, and Albert, as far as can be ascertained, were never officially worshiped.<sup>17</sup> The encouragements by the lower clergy to attend services and receive help for the soul ex opere operato did not go unheeded by the somewhat superstitious populus. The higher clergy were not able to perform such duties, because they usually were not in residence. With the non-Germans, as some German historians like to label the natives, the clergy experienced difficulties. The old pagan religion was still very much a part of them, in spite of their baptism. In hostility

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<sup>15</sup>Arbusow, op. cit., III, 103.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., III, 59.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., III, 87-101.



toward Christianity they turned to their old religious customs of bringing food and drink to the departed souls, worshipping thunderstorms and trees and even washing off the Christian baptism of their children.<sup>18</sup> In the urban churches too much money was spent on visual splendor. In one case sixteen marks (a relatively large sum of money) were used for the purchase of a piece of cloth. This extravagant spending prompted some to lift their voices in protest already in the middle ages.<sup>19</sup> Such spiritual and religious conditions alone warranted a reformation and certainly helped to create an environment where the success of such a movement was insured.

Frequent hostilities with the Order did not help the Roman Church. The secular ambitions of the bishops angered the Livonian Order and made them reluctant to help the former in their struggle against the forces of the new teaching.<sup>20</sup> The bishops managed to offend also the vassals by a selfish and irresponsible use of their religious weapons. This relationship later proved fatal to the Roman Church in Livonia.<sup>21</sup>

When the Catholic Church finally realized that reform

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<sup>18</sup>Ojamaa, op. cit., p. 101.

<sup>19</sup>Arbusow, op. cit., III, 110-111.

<sup>20</sup>Laantee, op. cit., p. 270.

<sup>21</sup>Arbusow, op. cit., III, 157.



was needed, the situation was too far gone for an easy remedy. At both councils, Constance (1414-1418) and Basel (1431-1449), Livonia was represented. A very important Decree (Landesordnung) of 1422 made baptism mandatory within one month and established compulsory church attendance. Also the basic minimum of Christian training was prescribed.<sup>22</sup> A synod called to Riga (1424-1428) drew up forty-eight points in order to raise the level of spirituality and eliminate abuses.<sup>23</sup> It was required that all people believe what the Church taught, that baptism be pronounced clearly in the vernacular, and all be confirmed at the age of twelve.<sup>24</sup> Efforts for reform within the Church continued. At the Fifth Lateran Council the Bishop of Tallinn was representing the Livonian Order. Certain individuals, notably Bishop Kievel of Saaremaa-Läänemaa, carried on a crusade for the improvement of morals and pastoral care.<sup>25</sup> However, all these efforts were too weak and came too late.

A truly positive contribution of the Roman Church in Livonia was its interest in education. Schools were established in connection with parishes, promising young people

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., III, 52.

<sup>23</sup>Philip Tammaru, Usuõpetuse conspect (Germany: n.p., 1948), p. 57.

<sup>24</sup>Arbusow, op. cit., III, 55-62.

<sup>25</sup>Arbusow, op. cit., III, 129-133.



were sent to study at foreign universities, even as far as Rome.<sup>26</sup> But the improved educational facilities and the ideas brought in from abroad actually helped the cause of the Reformation.

Closely connected with the secular clergy were the monastic orders. Soon after the conquest of Livonia, monasteries were built in or near the larger urban centers. Cisterciens established monasteries in Kärkna near Tartu and in Padis near Tallinn. Among others also Dominican and Franciscan monasteries were established in Estonia. The Cisterciens cared little for the spiritual welfare of the people, devoting their attention to their own salvation. The land that they owned and ruled like feudal lords was tilled by natives.<sup>27</sup> The mendicant orders, on the other hand, lived inside the city walls and enjoyed close contact with the outside world. They even made long trips into the country to help people and bring spiritual comfort to them. Not a few of the monks even managed to learn Estonian. They enjoyed some degree of success and popularity. The nunneries, and there were a number of them, were often quite exclusive, accepting mostly ladies from the nobility. As time passed on, the ascetic monasteries became more worldly in their outlook and more unpopular

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., III, 80.

<sup>27</sup>Ojamaa, op. cit., p. 100.



with the people. Some managed even to win a bad reputation by the end of the middle ages.<sup>28</sup> Even the popularity of the mendicants was not unanimous. The Dominicans in Tallinn, it seems, had acquired a special talent in gaining legacies and in appropriating the wealth which was left without owner. The city officials felt themselves cheated. In fact, the City Council of Tallinn accused the monasteries of protecting thieves and murderers. There were also general complaints that the monks were lazy and greedy.<sup>29</sup> Even the priests had no special liking for the monks, fearing to lose some income to the latter. Thus, in spite of their intellectual and spiritual labors, they enjoyed poor public relations. Later when the Reformers used the misdeeds of the monks as a matter of public discussion "there was no power to protect them."<sup>30</sup>

In the early part of the thirteenth century important towns developed in Estonia: Tallinn (1219), Tartu (1225), Viljandi (1225), Old Pärnu and New Pärnu. Somewhat later Rakvere, Narva, and Paide appeared. Tartu and Tallinn developed into big cities by the standards of the time.<sup>31</sup> At the time when Lubeck had ten thousand inhabitants, Tartu

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<sup>28</sup>Arbusow, op. cit., III, 69.

<sup>29</sup>Laantee, op. cit., p. 270.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Ojamaa, op. cit., pp. 82-83.



boasted of six thousand and Tallinn was not far behind with its four thousand.<sup>32</sup> Many nationalities were present in these urban communities. The majority of the people were German merchants but, especially in smaller towns, a large number of natives also lived there besides the Swedes, the Finns, the Danes, and the Russians. The reason for the growth and prosperity of the Estonian towns was trade. All the above mentioned towns, except Narva, were part of the great German Hanseatic League. Tallinn was especially in a favorable position: all trade going and coming from Russia had to be reloaded there. Such trade activity brought immense wealth to the Estonian shores and more German merchants to win it.

In the beginning the towns had been governed by the bailiffs of the overlords, but soon the power was vested in an autonomous Town Council (Rat) which consisted of Council-lors (Ratherren) and Mayors. By the sixteenth century Tallinn had fourteen Councillors and four Mayors. All the citizens were organized into Guilds. In Tallinn three Guilds were known, here listed in order of their importance: the Great Guild, St. Kanut's Guild, and St. Olav's Guild. The German merchants who came for a longer stay joined the Black-heads, a special Guild of their own. The whole Guild system functioned very much like the one in Germany, after

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<sup>32</sup>Laantee, op. cit., p. 271.



which it was patterned. One historian sums up the position and the influence of the cities thus:

As a result of their autonomy, which included even the administration of justice, and even more because of their wealth, the Livonian towns almost completely effaced the earlier influence of the overlords and bailiffs. The bigger towns developed gradually into almost independent States, whose relationship with the rulers of the country resembled that of allies.<sup>33</sup>

Merchants travel much and carry the news of the world, or at least they did in the middle ages. As a result the cities were exposed to the ideas of the outside world. They were the first to receive and carry the banner of the Reformation movement, long before their slower rural brothers would catch up.

Another political power which made itself felt in the history of Livonia was the feudal nobility. The overlords, the Livonian Order and the Bishops, often granted large territories in fief to German nobles and merchants, and in isolated cases even to Estonians. Historians have estimated the number of the lucky natives in North Estonia to be up to two per cent. The bishops were especially inclined to place their land into the hands of the vassals because they needed the latter's military services. It did not take long, however, when the new class banded together and formed an independent power. By the end of the thirteenth century

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<sup>33</sup>Uustalu, op. cit., p. 53.



the Harjumaa-Virumaa vassals had already established a corporation to protect their rights and eventually acquire the right to entail their fiefs on their sons and even their daughters. This they succeeded in securing. In the fourteenth century the vassals claimed that Denmark had given the land a secular law. This assertion was unhistorical, but the mediaeval world tolerated unhistorical happenings, and the bishops lost part of their jurisdiction.<sup>34</sup> From the meetings of the nobles eventually developed the Diet (Landtag), an important social development. Diets were attended by all the four major powers: Order, clergy, nobility, and the representatives of the town citizens. Their importance increased in the later middle ages when the power of the Livonian Order and the Roman clergy had declined somewhat. As one of the major powers, the nobles played a major role in the development of the Reformation movement, furnishing some of its most loyal supporters.

Attention is now directed to the native peasants. They, too, played a part in the Reformation. In the beginning of the German domination the lot of the peasant really was quite tolerable. He had to accept baptism, he had to pay tithe, and he had to render military service in case of war. Naturally he did not like the loss of his political freedom, but he still could enjoy justice based on local tradition

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<sup>34</sup>Arbusow, op. cit., III, 37.



and often administered by men of his own nationality. In the beginning of the fourteenth century, however, the vassals began to overlook some of the rights granted to the peasants by the peace treaties. The peasants raised their voice in protest which only helped them to lose further privileges. On St. George Day (April 23) in 1343 the Estonians staged their last large-scale revolt. At first success seemed within their grasp but soon their armies were defeated. The estimate is that tens of thousands of Estonians fell in battle before their courage and strength was broken.<sup>35</sup> The final result was this: the previous treaties were considered void; the peasants were now dependent solely on the pleasure of their masters. Their economic situation had been comfortable previously but now deteriorated rapidly. In many cases land was confiscated and the peasants were forced to earn their keep in the newly established large farms of the nobles. If the farmer was lucky he kept his land and merely gave a number of working days to the Vassal.<sup>36</sup> Actually there were many types of peasants still in existence: the freeholders, the free peasants (artisans), uncus-peasants, "one-foot men," and laborers. All these men had one thing in common: they did not like the heavy burdens placed upon

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<sup>35</sup>Uustalu, op. cit., p. 55.

<sup>36</sup>Vassal refers to a nobleman of lower rank who received his land from the lord for military services rendered.



them by their foreign masters.<sup>37</sup>

No wonder that the peasants were ready to jump on the Reformation bandwagon and cry for liberty and equality much earlier than the teachings of the Reformation actually meant much to them.

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<sup>37</sup>Uustalu, op. cit., pp. 58-59.



## CHAPTER IV

### REFORMATION IDEAS COME TO ESTONIA

Saxony, the home state of the great German Reformer, Martin Luther, naturally formed the original spring from which the streams of the newly re-emphasized Gospel truths found their way into the wide world of theological drought. From Central and Northern Germany the Reformation ideas spread north-eastward to the shores of East Baltic, reaching Livonia and more particularly Estonia in the third decade of the sixteenth century. In the chapter at hand the road which the Reformation ideas travelled to reach Estonia, is examined.

The circumstances are indeed particular under which Livonia was officially introduced to the ideas and teachings of Dr. Martin Luther. The name of that great champion of faith first appeared in the records of the Prelates' Conference at Ronneburg on July 28, 1521. This contact had not been initiated by the Reformer himself nor his loyal followers but by the Roman Catholic Church. It all started with the papal ban which Pope Leo X had promulgated about six months earlier, placing Luther and his followers under the curse of the Church. A copy of the bull had arrived in Riga and the Archbishop was dutybound to see that its contents were made known to all the faithful. At the meeting



in Ronneburg where Archbishop Jasper Linde met with Bishop Johann Blankenfeld of Tallinn and Tartu, Bishop Johann Kievel of Saaremaa-Läänemaa, Bishop Basedorf of Courland and other church dignitaries. One of the items on the agenda was: concerning the matter of Doctor Martinus Luther.<sup>1</sup> No record of the discussions is known to exist but the following was resolved:

In Sachen Martin Luthers sollen die Prälaten nach der Rückkehr in ihre Diözesen, ein jeder zu gelegener Zeit ihre Diözesanen (populus) persönlich oder durch ihre Offiziale bei der Kathedralkirche versammeln und die gegen Martinus erlassene Bulle dem Volk in den Hauptsachen (summarie) bekanntmachen und ihrem Inhalt nach vollziehen lassen, und den apostlischen Mandaten ehrerbietig gehorchen.<sup>2</sup>

From this resolution it seems that the Livonian clergy took a more definite stand in the issue than did their colleagues in Germany. There just simply was no doubt that the pope's orders should or could be carried out. Some have deduced from the resolution that already in 1521 the bishops saw the possibility of the spread of Luther's teachings in Livonia.<sup>3</sup> In the opinion of the writer this con-

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<sup>1</sup>Otto Pohrt, Reformationgeschichte Livlands, ein Überblick (Leipzig: Eger & Sievers, 1928), Jahrgang 46, Heft 2 (Nr. 145), p. 19.

<sup>2</sup>Leonid Arbusow, Die Einführung der Reformation in Liv-, Est- und Kurland in Quellen und Forschungen zur Reformationgeschichte (Leipzig: Vermittlungsverlag von M. Heisius Nachfolger, 1921), III, 188.

<sup>3</sup>Karl Laantee, "The Beginning of the Reformation in Estonia," Church History, XXII (December, 1953), 269.



clusion is not necessarily valid. At any rate, the name of Martin Luther became known in Livonia before the movement he inspired had arrived.<sup>4</sup>

Not very long afterwards, very likely already at the end of the same year, the evangelical ideas did reach Livonia. They received a start in Riga where a few evangelically minded clergymen settled and began to preach the Scriptural doctrine of justification by faith.

At this time a few words are in order about the men who became the first reformers in Livonia and whose direct or indirect influence upon Estonian religious life can hardly be overestimated. After all, Estonian and Latvian territories were in close contact. Their large cities even formed a union (1524) for the protection of common interests. Riga was the unofficial capital of the entire Livonia, and thus closely watched by the provincial towns. Easy travelling conditions and small distances made personal visits and correspondence relatively easy. At the time of the Reformation the land of the Estonians and Latvians was much more of a unit than it has been more recently. The focus of our attention falls primarily upon three men: Andreas Knopken, Sylvester Tegetmeyer, and Melchior Hofmann.

If the writer had to single out one individual above

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<sup>4</sup>Philip Tammaru, Usüpetuse conspect (Germany: n.p., 1948), p. 58.



all the others in the history of Livonian Reformation, he would be Andreas Knopken (1468-1539), sometimes affectionately known as Andreas Modestinus.<sup>5</sup>

Andreas Knopken was born in the rural area of Neumark, not far from Küstrin. It is likely that his parents had originally come from Pomerania. Not much is known about his homelife except that he came from a modest home and had a brother who shared his early interest in theology. By 1492 both brothers, Andreas and Jokobus, had already received their ecclesiastical appointments.<sup>6</sup> Apparently Andreas was not satisfied with his theological training, for in 1510 he enrolled in Treptow as a student of Bugenhagen. Already before 1512 he transferred to the University of Inglostadt and somewhat later he continued his studies at the University of Frankfurt an Oder. After a few years of study the forty-two year old student returned to Treptow where he probably held an ecclesiastical office and assisted Bugenhagen with teaching in the city school. During the three years he stayed in Treptow he must have been seriously affected by the New Learning. Erasmus, above all others, made a lasting impression on Andreas. Not later than in the fall of 1517 he went to Riga where his brother was Canon at St. Peter's.

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<sup>5</sup>Ferdinand Hoerschelmann, Andreas Knopken, der Reformator Rigas: Ein Beitrag zur Kirchengeschichte Livlands (Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1896), p. 10.

<sup>6</sup>Arbusow, op. cit., III, 172.



Andreas was still seeking himself theologically at that time. At times discouraged by the environment and the life of the fellow clergymen, he turned to Erasmus for advice. At least in three letters did he inquire the way to true happiness ("Auf welchem Wege komme ich zur wahren Glückseligkeit?").<sup>7</sup> When Erasmus finally answered him, then it was to assure him that he was on the right road, else he would not possess such personal piety and zeal for the Christian Truth as his letters revealed.

In a few years Andreas had returned to Treptow. Much had happened during his absence. For one thing, Luther had nailed his famous theses on the castle door in Wittenberg. The Reformation was beginning to gather momentum. It is not probable, however, that Knopken or his teacher Bugenhagen were seriously affected by it before 1520. It was Luther's On the Babylonish Captivity of the Church that made a strong impression upon the two theologians.<sup>8</sup> In fact Bugenhagen travelled to Wittenberg in the following year. From the Capital of the Reformation movement he sent several letters to his former pupils. Soon afterwards the students in Treptow openly declared their allegiance to the New Learning.

A look at the theological development of Andreas Knopken shows that he became neither a true humanist nor

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<sup>7</sup>Arbusow, op. cit., III, 177.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., III, 181.



an unquestioning disciple of Luther; yet he learned much from both men. By studying Luther's early writings and ever readily listening to Bugenhagen's interpretation of Luther's work he learned to appreciate the cardinal doctrine of the Reformation, salvation by grace through faith in Christ. It is most likely that Andreas never communicated personally with Luther, although it is known that Melancthon wrote an official letter of encouragement to him. The letter is lost now unfortunately.<sup>9</sup>

When Knopken returned to Riga in June, 1521, he was no longer seeking light but ready to offer it to others. A major biographer of his puts it thus:

Mit Freudigkeit und Kraft hat er als erster Zeuge des Evangeliums in Riga das Wort Gottes vor allem Volk verkündigt. . . .<sup>10</sup>

As a popular and established preacher in the city, he took upon himself to prepare twenty-four evangelical theses,<sup>11</sup> which he chose to defend in public. The disputation took place on July 12, 1522. This could be used as a convenient date to mark the official beginning of the Reformation movement in Livonia.

What did the reformer teach? He preached justification by faith and the certainty of the Gospel promises. Only in

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., III, 184.

<sup>10</sup>Hoerschelmann, op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>11</sup>Arbusow, op. cit., III, 211-215.



the second place did he touch upon the evils of the church. As far as the Church Fathers were in agreement with the Scripture, he used them. He did not advocate immediate forceful reform nor did he mention the name of Luther.<sup>12</sup> At first his preaching was not even challenged by the Roman Catholic authorities.

By 1524 the brave theologian had found time to outline his teachings in print. His Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, amounting to a complete volume on dogmatics, appeared in Wittenberg. It is an extremely interesting work, showing the development of theology in Livonia. Let it suffice here to say that the author of the Commentary owes much to Luther, Melancthon, and Erasmus. Some who have studied the work in detail claim that it is not Lutheran in all aspects.<sup>13</sup> There is at least one good study available on the work.<sup>14</sup>

In passing it is noted that Knopken was married and one of his sons, Mathias, studied at the University of Wittenberg.

There are several reasons why it was necessary to spend some time in discussing the development and work of Andreas Knopken: he was the first reformer in Livonia and

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., III, 197.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., III, 249.

<sup>14</sup>Hoerschelmann, op. cit., pp. 189-235.



probably one of the greatest of them; above all, he influenced the Reformation movement in Estonia. No individual letters are available at present, but it is known that he wrote to his evangelical friends in Tallinn to encourage them in their work. His Commentary and other less well known works together with a host of well loved hymns were welcomed in Tallinn and Tartu, where they accomplished more than printed evidence would warrant to believe.<sup>15</sup>

Sylvester Tegetmeyer, "the Man with three Languages," was another outstanding evangelical preacher in Livonia. He was born in Hamburg, Germany. Later in life he spent some years of study in Rostock where he received his Master's degree (1519).<sup>16</sup> As a gifted student he had perfected his knowledge of Latin, Greek and Hebrew to a degree in which they served him as helpful theological tools. In 1520 he was elected to the office of chaplaincy of the Dom in Rostock, which post he held until his evangelical teaching caused him to leave town.<sup>17</sup> He came to Riga (1522) where Knopken welcomed him as a brother in Christ. It soon became evident, however, that the two men differed much in personality. Tegetmeyer's methods were much more radical than Knopken's. His parish, St. Jacob, became the haven

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<sup>15</sup>Laantee, op. cit., p. 272.

<sup>16</sup>Arbusow, op. cit., III, 236-238.

<sup>17</sup>Hoerschelmann, op. cit., p. 56.



for the overzealous. On one occasion he himself led an iconoclastic outburst and publicly stated that he would not be satisfied unless the monks and priests be driven out of town.<sup>18</sup>

A particular interest in Tegetmeyer is prompted by his close contacts with Estonia. His influence upon the Estonian reformation was so great that the Estonian nobles regarded him as the leader of the whole movement. His life was actually in danger in 1525. At one occasion when the people of Tartu seemed to be getting out of hand, Tegetmeyer was summoned from Riga to handle the situation, which he did by preaching the Word of God.<sup>19</sup>

Melchior Hofmann, a controversial figure in spite of his title of the Apostle of Livonia, also contributed to the spread of the Reformation ideas in Estonia. Young Melchior, born during the last decade of the fifteenth century, was kept from receiving a higher education by lack of funds. As a young man he came under the influence of mysticism which left a mark upon all his later teachings. In 1522 he embraced the teachings of Luther. He shared the Reformer's high regard for the Word of God but had a tendency to overemphasize the eschatological approach in preaching. In fact at one time he endeavored to draw all his

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<sup>18</sup>Laantee, op. cit., p. 272.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 272.



teachings from the Apocalyps.

He had much that pleased people. He was a simple layman, leather dresser by trade, with spotless life and a good appearance. He spoke with conviction and fire. Through his fiery preaching the lower classes became interested in the Gospel.<sup>20</sup>

The extreme doctrines, however, did not make him popular with the evangelical clergy. His teachings were under constant suspicion. At one time, to vindicate himself, Hofmann travelled all the way to Wittenberg to be examined by Luther. Both Luther and Bugenhagen approved of the teachings he presented there.<sup>21</sup> But this brought only temporary relief from the attacks. Later, in bitterness toward the evangelical preachers whom he called the servants of Satan, he tried to establish his own sects wherever he preached.

Even though some of Hofmann's later work was destructive, Estonia owes him a word of thanks for his labors in bringing the Reformation ideas to the unsophisticated.

Before turning the attention to the Reformation itself, a few words must be said about the part that Luther himself played in bringing his own ideas to the Baltic countries.

At first there was no direct connection between the

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<sup>20</sup>Arbusow, op. cit., III, 270.

<sup>21</sup>Laantee, op. cit., p. 272.



evangelical preachers of Livonia and Luther. On August 20, 1522, Johann Lohmüller, Secretary to the City of Riga, an unreliable character, approached Luther by letter, requesting a word of encouragement from the Reformer.<sup>22</sup> Luther took his time with the reply—a month. Before Lohmüller's second letter could reach the Reformer, a printed answer finally arrived (written in August, 1523; arrived in November, 1523). It was addressed to: "Den auserwählten lieben Freunden Gottes, allen Christen zu Riga, Reval und Dorpat in Livland, meinen lieben Herren und Brüdern in Christo." In it Luther expressed joy that the pure teaching had reached the far corners of heathendom. He was happy to hear the firmness of their faith but warned them to remain true to the new confession and to guard against false teachers. From the letter we see that he was aware of the local disputes concerning the non-essentials. The advice of the Reformer was: Faith, Love, Hope are essential; if we keep them all the non-essentials will fall in line by themselves.<sup>23</sup>

Luther also dedicated the exposition of the one hundred twenty-seventh Psalm to "allen lieben Freunden in Christo

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<sup>22</sup>Arbusow, op. cit., III, 229.

<sup>23</sup>Martin Luther, "Den auserwählten lieben Freunden Gottes, allen Christen zu Riga, Reval und Dorpat in Livland, meinen lieben Herren und Brüdern in Christo," D. Martin Luthers Werke (Kritische Gesamtausgabe; Weimar: Herman Böhlaus, 1891), XII, 143ff.



zu Riga."<sup>24</sup> In February, 1524, Luther wrote to Spalatin:

Das Evangelium geht auf und schreitet fort in Livland, besonders bei den Rigensern, von denen ich kürzlich Briefe und einen Boten empfangen habe; so wunderbar ist Christo.<sup>25</sup>

From these words we see that Luther definitely showed interest and was informed of the Reformation movement in the Baltic area. Much of the information came to him, most likely, through his students.

In this chapter consideration was given to the sources from which the Reformation ideas and evangelical spirit found the way to Estonia. The development of the movement itself follows in the next chapter.

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<sup>24</sup>Arbusow, op. cit., III, 278.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.



## CHAPTER V

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE REFORMATION MOVEMENT IN ESTONIA

The general pattern of the whole Reformation movement followed these lines. An early success in large city parishes was followed by the spread of the movement to the country at large.<sup>1</sup> The pattern usually called for a few out of town evangelical preachers who sowed the seed. As the movement gathered momentum the conservative elements usually rebelled. Quite often the champions of the Roman Catholic cause were the monks. The hostilities mounted steadily until the populace staged a destructive, iconoclastic outbreak which usually marked the turning point in the religious affiliation of the city. The Old Church, being disturbed if not destroyed, made room for the building of the new.<sup>2</sup>

In the early years the Reform movement, the evangelical cause, was not consciously identified with the teachings of Luther. It is certain that the ideas in essence came from

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<sup>1</sup>Leonid Arbusow, Die Einführung der Reformation in Liv-, Est- und Kurland, in Quellen und Forschungen zur Reformationsgeschichte (Leipzig: Vermittlungsverlag von M. Heisius Nachfolger, 1921), III, 625.

<sup>2</sup>M. Ojamaa and A. and T. Varmas, Esti ajalugu (Stockholm, Sweden: "Esti Raamat," 1946), p. 104.



Luther, but they were applied independently by the local leadership. Due to the difficulties that Luther was experiencing in Germany, the local clergymen and civil leaders often took great pains to make it clear that they were no underlings of the German Reformer but merely were trying to reform the abuses in the Church and to bring back the Gospel into the pulpit.

Such an approach had its advantages and disadvantages. One of the most obvious of the latter was the lack of united effort from which the movement suffered sorely.<sup>3</sup> As an advantage, may be counted the somewhat tolerant attitude of the Order, the vassals, and even at times the ecclesiastical princes who underestimated the dimensions of the movement in the beginning. These early independent efforts soon attained some degree of unity, as in the case of the large cities, and later welcomed conscious Lutheran leadership.<sup>4</sup>

There is no doubt that the political and social environment in Estonia which has been treated already at length in Chapter two, made the success of the Reformation possible. There was no single force in Estonia that had the power and desire to wipe out the new ideas by force.

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<sup>3</sup>Arbusow, op. cit., III, 625.

<sup>4</sup>Karl Laantee, "The Beginning of the Reformation in Estonia," Church History, XXII (December, 1953), 273.



Notably, the nobles protected the Reformation in order to weaken their perennial political opponents, the ecclesiastical princes. The Livonian Order, remaining Roman Catholic to the end, made no decisive effort to destroy the movement but preferred to wait and see how the issue would be finally settled in Germany. This indecisive approach offered an invaluable opportunity for the New Teaching to take root, mature, and expand.

The Reformation movement was entirely a Lutheran movement, however, in the sense that it did not partake of the major Protestant disputes of Europe. To this day the overwhelming majority of the Estonian people is Lutheran. A minor exception here was the sectarian approach by Melchior Hofmann and his followers, who, by the way, did not survive for long.

One of the characteristics of the Estonian Reformation is the lack of outstanding leadership. It was more of a group effort than the accomplishment of one or a few individuals. This statement in no way is meant to discredit the efforts of the evangelical pastors who assumed local leadership. They worked hard and with devotion to the cause. In fact, it is hard to imagine the success of the movement without their labors. However, it is still true that no towering personalities can be found in the Estonian Reformation history. Johann Lange, Zacharias Hasse, and Hermann Marsow are best known of the reformers. But the fact that



their life stories are shrouded in mystery indicates the relative unimportance of their persons.

Johann Lange was born in Germany; it is not known exactly where or even when.<sup>5</sup> He had previously belonged to the Premonstratensian Order. The extent of his theological preparation and the reason he left Stade to come to Tallinn remain unknown.<sup>6</sup> In 1523 Lange received the post of chaplaincy at St. Nicolus, where he preached regularly. This afforded an excellent opportunity to communicate his evangelical view to the people and win a following. In the sermons he was courageously polemical but also evangelical. Soon he was elevated to the regular pastorship of the church. Next year he was instrumental in getting the first Evangelical Church government, which he was called to head, approved by the City Council (September, 1524).<sup>7</sup> He worked the remainder of his life in Tallinn where he died (August, 1531) and was buried.

Probably soon after Lange's arrival in Tallinn, Zacharias Hasse joined him there. Of Hasse's previous activities little else is known except that he used to preach in Breunsberg and Elbing. It is difficult to decide whether he was already under the influence of the New Teaching before

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<sup>5</sup>Laantee, op. cit., p. 273.

<sup>6</sup>Arbusow, op. cit., III, 282.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., III, 585.



he arrived in Tallinn. It seems logical that this was the case. The fact that he brought along books may indicate that he used them and possibly was well educated.<sup>8</sup> Once in Tallinn, he assumed the duties of the chaplain at St. Olaf's Church. His evangelical preaching attracted a following who ousted the old pastor, Reinhold Grist, and replaced him with Hasse. He died in 1531 as a victim of the plague.<sup>9</sup>

The only reformer in Estonia, or in Livonia for that matter, who had studied directly under Luther was Hermann Marsow. He was a clergyman from Riga who had studied earlier at the University of Greifswald (1505-1507) from where he received his Bachelor's degree. As a mature man he matriculated at Wittenberg and from there moved to Tartu (1523). If it is true that the evangelicals were already in Tartu, as Luther thought, then nothing is known about them. Marsow was a successful preacher and soon found himself in the pulpit at St. Mary's under the patronage of the Small Guild.<sup>10</sup> The Bishop of Tartu banished him from the city the following summer. He moved to Tallinn.<sup>11</sup>

Something has been said about Melchior Hofmann previously and there will be an opportunity to hear of him again

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., III, 582.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., III, 283.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., III, 326.

<sup>11</sup>Laantee, op. cit., p. 273.



in connection with the Reformation of Tartu.

Some records indicate that Heinrich Bockhold was the evangelical preacher at the Church of the Holy Spirit in Tallinn. The source, however, is not very reliable. Since practically nothing is known of his activity, the question of the historicity of his person has been raised.<sup>12</sup> The existence of an evangelical preacher by the name of Johann Massien, supposedly an assistant of Lange at St. Nicholas, is even more doubtful.<sup>13</sup>

These few men carried the Reformation ideals in their heart and on their lips. There must have been many others of whom nothing is known today.

The development of the Reformation movement in the cities will now be considered. Tallinn is our starting point. The reader knows already that the city tolerated or rather enjoyed the evangelical sermons of Lange and Hasse already since 1523. The Roman Catholic cultus, however, was continued in the Cathedral and the monasteries. It became obvious that sooner or later the two types of theology would clash. By the early part of 1524 the situation had become so serious that the City Council proposed a theological debate between the monks and the evangelicals to settle the differences. This the former declined, explain-

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<sup>12</sup>Arbusow, op. cit., III, 283.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., III, 283.



ing that they were not allowed to debate on doctrinal matters.<sup>14</sup>

Knowing public opinion and having lost their love for the money hungry Dominicans, the City Council decided to reform the monastery. On April 9, 1524, the Council delivered instructions to Prior Johann Buxstrup to have all Roman Catholic preaching in the vernacular stopped. The pure Gospel was allowed to be proclaimed in German.<sup>15</sup> The Council also required the reduction of the number of religious holidays so that the workers could earn enough to make a living. Naturally the Roman Catholic authorities objected. They complained to Wolter von Plettenberg, the Master of the Livonian Order, accusing the city of heretical tendencies and of the violation of the rights of the monastic establishments.<sup>16</sup> Plettenberg responded with a letter to the city, requesting that (1) the Gospel be preached in the cause of general peace and wellbeing; (2) monks be treated with respect; and (3) peasants be encouraged to obey their masters.<sup>17</sup> To this the City Council promptly replied in the name of "Christlichen Gemeinde der Stadt," assuring the Order that

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., III, 287.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., III, 278.

<sup>16</sup>Usupuhastus eestlaste maal. Published by the Reformation Jubilee Commission. (Tartu, Estonia: Ed. Bergmann, 1924), p. 45.

<sup>17</sup>Laantee, op. cit., p. 274.



nothing objectionable was taught by the evangelicals: no heresy was proclaimed, only the message of peace and brotherly love abounded.<sup>18</sup>

Meanwhile the Dominicans were not idle. Seeing that they were not effectively protected from the reforms, they began to carry the wealth of the monastery out of the city. When the City Council received word of this activity, it ordered an immediate inventory of all the monks' property. When property still disappeared, in spite of repeated warnings, all of it was confiscated, the basement of St. Cathrin's monastery was turned into a storehouse for munitions and the monks were asked to house the sick upstairs. While the Dominicans were "saving their souls while caring for the sick," the Cistercian nuns at St. Michael were also experiencing the effects of the Reformation. Their vows were declared void and they were permitted to marry. Their noble relatives, however, did not approve of marriages to commoners. In fact they demanded that the nuns be sent back and the men involved be punished. The nobles of Harjumaa-Virumaa drafted a letter requesting the Order to enforce "justice." Characteristically Plettenberg preferred to take no action except to wait.<sup>19</sup> It was obvious that the prelates and the Livonian Order were without power against the growing cities.

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<sup>18</sup>Arbusow, op. cit., III, 288-289.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., III, 320-321.



Finally Plettenberg decided to reproach the city by letter. He insisted that all the treasures of the monastery be returned immediately and the nuns be forced to return to celibate life. This letter proved to be the match that started the explosion. It was read to the public on the tenth of September, 1524. When the citizens of Tallinn heard the contents of the letter they turned in rage upon the Roman Church property. Within three hours a crowd of Germans and Estonians stormed the Dominican monastery, the Church of the Holy Spirit, and St. Olaf's Church. St. Niculus escaped destruction narrowly. Many invaluable objects of art were destroyed and much of the treasure was carried off. The mob stopped only when there was nothing left to pull apart.<sup>20</sup>

It became obvious that some sort of an orderly program for the Evangelical Church was needed. To fill the need, the reformers prepared a plan for the organization of the Evangelical Church on city-wide scale. Der Entwurf christlicher Ordnung im kirchlichen Regiment provided that a superintendent be named for the churches of the city with powers to appoint or discharge the clergy (with the approval of the council). From henceforth divine services were to be conducted in Estonian or German, and the treasures of the churches used for the relief of the poor. The management

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., III, 357.



of the financial affairs of the Church was entrusted to a council of eight laymen.<sup>21</sup> The acceptance of the plan by the City Council definitely established the organization of the Evangelical Church in the city. From then on the influence of the Reformation penetrated into all aspects of daily life.<sup>22</sup>

In the early part of the next year the Dominicans monastery had its downfall. The monks started it by trying to hide their property in the homes of the citizens. An angry City Council sent them the ultimatum: either they accept the evangelical faith and become useful citizens or leave town. Many persisted in their faith and moved out within an hour.

By this time the ecclesiastical force of the city was evangelical, excepting the Cistercian nunnery in the lower part of town and of course the Cathedral where Roman Catholic services still continued. The arrangement of having Roman and evangelical services legally existing side by side became the characteristic phenomenon in Livonia after the Reformation.

In Tartu the Reformation movement experienced greater difficulties than in Tallinn. There were many reasons for this, the main one being the person of Bishop Blankenfeld.

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., III, 587.

<sup>22</sup>Laantee, op. cit., p. 275.



Educated in Berlin and Bologna, the ecclesiastical jurist was as able as he was ambitious. He was known to be an enemy of the cities and suspicious of all heretical movements which might further the power of the City Council. The enthusiastic preaching of Hofmann and the riots that it incited did not help the orderly formation of an Evangelical Church Government either.<sup>23</sup>

In the beginning Bishop Blankenfeld was successful in arresting the spread of the Reformation as he forced the banishment of Hermann Marsow, the first Lutheran preacher in Tartu. But in the fall of 1524 Melchior Hofmann settled in the city and began his radical preaching activity. This layman's enthusiastic approach together with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures, proved very successful.<sup>24</sup> Blankenfeld thought that all he had to do was to banish Hofmann to stamp out the new disturbance. This, however, did not prove to be the case. When an attempt was made to arrest Hofmann on January 7, 1525, as he was preaching, the congregation interfered and a tumult resulted. It turned into an iconoclastic outbreak. The evangelicals forced their way into St. Mary's and lifted Hofmann into the pulpit. The Roman service which had been in progress was interrupted and the priest together with the choir chased out. The

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 276.

<sup>24</sup>Philip Tammaru, Usuõpetuse conspect (Germany; n.p., 1948), p. 60.



next target of the angry mob was St. John's. Church historian Leonid Arbusow describes the activity thus:

Der aus Bürger und jungen Gesellen bestehende Haufe, der sich gewiss auch durch Zulauf proletarischer undeutscher Elemente rasch vergrößerte, stürzte auch die zweite Pfarrkirche zu St. Johann, hob die Altäre aus, zerbrach die Heiligenbilder, demolierte die Orgel und übergab alles dem auf den Markt lohenden Scheiterhaufen.<sup>25</sup>

Also the Dominican monastery of St. Mary-Magdalene and the Franciscan nunnery were disturbed. In the latter, in spite of the tears of the women,

Schleier und Kopftücher wurden abgerissen, einige aus der Schar an den Haaren aus ihren Zellen gezogen und der ganze Konvent aus dem Hause getrieben.<sup>26</sup>

A few days later (January 10, 1525) two hundred men were attacking the Cathedral and the bishop's residence. They were forced by gunfire to retreat. The incident claimed two German and two Estonian lives, and about twenty were wounded. Soon church bells were ringing in the lower part of the city, calling for a new attack upon the Cathedral. In a few hours its doors were broken down and destruction prevailed. Even crucifixes were not spared. Tartu had reached a point of no return; no reconciliation with the Roman Church was possible. The City Council addressed a letter to Plettenberg, explaining the situation, asking for help in restoring peace, and accusing Bishop Blankenfeld of

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<sup>25</sup>Arbusow, *op. cit.*, III, 382.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*



violating the liberty of the citizens. Again Plettenberg took no action, except to assure the city that their Bishop meant no harm.

The Mayors together with the City Council approached Tegetmeyer of Riga and requested him to come and restore peace. He preached in Tartu for four weeks, beginning February 1, 1525. Although the tention between Bishop Blankenfeld (the Roman Church) and the city continued for some time, a more settled state of affairs was reached when Tartu adopted an Evangelical Church Organization similar to that of Tallinn.<sup>27</sup> The information on further development of the Reformation in Tartu is scanty. It is told that the Roman services were no longer attended by the citizens. The monks who were sent out of town, could return only if they gave up their vows and were married. Later on the Dominican monastery was used as an armory, and the Franciscan abode as a lime kiln, both of which had probably served earlier as hospitals. All church income was placed into a common treasury from where the evangelical pastors received their salary. Beginning with 1526 a regulated relief program was established.

The theological battles that raged in Tartu at the time were caused by Melchior Hofmann's peculiar allegorical and eschatological sermons. In the beginning his teachings

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<sup>27</sup>Laantee, op. cit., p. 276.



seemed to be Lutheran enough, but soon the chiliastic ideas created an uproar. Interestingly enough, in politics Hofmann preached quietism,<sup>28</sup> which was in sharp contrast to the happenings in the city. He was most vehemently against all ceremonies and oral confession before the Sacrament, but he strongly favored the preaching of sanctification. As time passed, his teachings on the Lord's Supper seemed to be closer to Karlstadt than Luther. Besides, his many battles with the fellow clergymen convinced him that the evangelicals were even more dangerous enemies of Christ than the Church of Rome. He was sure that a formal theological education disqualified a man for the work of the ministry.<sup>29</sup>

As a result of an open attack from the pulpit on the Mayor's daughter, concerning some ornaments she was wearing, Hofmann was asked to leave Tartu and never to return (1526). In all probability this was for the good of the Evangelical Church here. He travelled to Tallinn, Sweden, Denmark, and finally to Germany. Because of his Anabaptist views, which he later adopted, he was put in prison in Strassburg (1533) where he stayed for the rest of his life (d. 1543).<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Arbusow, op. cit., III, 601.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., III, 613.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., III, 624-625.



The Hofmann case was, no doubt, the most acute doctrinal controversy of the Reformation within the evangelical camp in Estonia.

Very little information is available on the Reformation movement in smaller towns. In April of 1524 or possibly already earlier, evangelical preaching appeared in Narva. The movement was most likely an offshoot from Tallinn. The names of the early preachers are unknown. Soon differences developed with the Dominicans in connection with the building of a new monastery. The citizens of Narva sought help from Plettenberg. Already in the fall of 1524 the Dominicans had given up the building project. There is no further mention of them in connection with Narva. By 1532 the community was definitely won by the Reformation for its name appeared in a list of small evangelical towns. The first known evangelical preacher there was Ambrosius Zoega (1532?).<sup>31</sup>

In New-Pärnu, the fourth largest city in Livonia, the City Council was at first unfavorably disposed toward the new movement. The news about the first evangelical preaching here is uncertain. It is possible that the preacher's name was Johann Eck (Eycken or Meke). The iconoclastic uprising in March, 1526, the last one in Livonia, marks a definite outward break with the Old Church order. An

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., III, 323-325.



evangelical pulpit was established here by Black-heads, a German merchant Guild. In 1530 pastor Johann Swaning freely proclaimed the Gospel in New-Pärnu.<sup>32</sup>

By 1526 most of the small Estonian towns had embraced the Lutheran faith. The few exceptions, Hapsalu, Old-Pärnu, and Saaremaa, surrendered to the movement within a few years.<sup>33</sup>

So far little has been said about the attitude of the nobles (vassals) toward the Reformation. On the whole the political and economic calculations determined their actions. From this rule exceptions must be allowed. Generally, in the beginning the nobles favored the Reformation movement for they saw in it a force that would weaken the ecclesiastical rulers.<sup>34</sup> On July 17, 1524, a number of them banded together in the north and decided to answer the frantic pleas for help from Tartu. The motto of the vassals was: "Das Wort Gottes bleibt ewig."<sup>35</sup>

Although it is said that their stand was merely conditioned by their desire to stand against the prelates, their leader, Jürgen Ungern, was definitely a conscientious evangel-

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<sup>32</sup>Arbusow, op. cit., III, 467-475.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., III, 475.

<sup>34</sup>Ojamaa, op. cit., p. 105.

<sup>35</sup>Arbusow, op. cit., III, 343.



ical.<sup>36</sup> When the nobles realized that the Lutheran teaching would bring about social changes which eventually would demand more freedom for the peasants and thus hurt not only the Catholic prelates but also themselves, they turned against the movement. Only somewhat later, mostly in the middle of the sixteenth century, and then very cautiously, they, too, became Lutherans.<sup>37</sup>

The peasants, the only thoroughly native element in Estonia, were introduced to the Reformation early. The ideas most likely spread from the cities, through market places and travelling salesmen.<sup>38</sup> Preachers also went out among the farmers to proclaim the message of the Gospel. Mention is made of such preaching already from 1524. There were some peasant uprisings near Tallinn and Narva at the time. The bishop's residence was burnt down in Harjumaa. In the Harjumaa-Virumaa region peasants put the Reformation slogans to practical use. They demanded a right to choose their own pastors, the abolition of corporal punishment, and free use of forests and waters. These demands must have been patterned after the Twelve Articles of the German peasants. This assumption is probably correct since a copy

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., III, 340-347.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., III, 435.

<sup>38</sup>Otto Pohrt, Reformationsgeschichte Livlands, ein Überblick (Leipzig: Eger & Sievers, 1928), Jahrgang 46, Heft 2 (Nr. 145), p. 101.



of the Articles was found in the archives of Tallinn.<sup>39</sup> Also Blankenfeld complained that near Tartu the peasants were poisoned with ideas that prompted them to disregard their obligations and taxes.<sup>40</sup> The peasant movement, however, soon wore out without precipitating into a full scale peasants' revolt. Of course the nobles did not know that beforehand, and regarded the movement with fear. Someone has said that the only important result of these uprisings was the alienation of nobles from the cities and the teachings of Luther.<sup>41</sup> The writer is inclined to agree with this statement.

From the theological point of view the peasants remained strangers to the Reformation for a while to come. The only way to make an impression upon the country folk was to supply them with evangelical preaching and teaching in the vernacular.<sup>42</sup> This was not done adequately in the beginning. Their outward evangelization came when the nobles became evangelical. To the peasant, in most cases, this meant a change in pastors and in the order of service which he did not understand in the first place. It is entirely probable that many Estonian peasants were directly won for Christ from paganism even though they and their ancestors had been

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<sup>39</sup>Laantee, op. cit., p. 276.

<sup>40</sup>Arbasow, op. cit., III, 432.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., III, 435.

<sup>42</sup>Pohrt, op. cit., p. 102.



members of the Christian Church for centuries. The seventeenth century is often held to be the date of the evangelization of the countryside, but an outstanding Estonian church historian asserts that it was only through the activity of the pietistic Moravian Brethren (1734ff.) that evangelical Christianity became a living experience for the Estonian peasants.<sup>43</sup>

This briefly covers the development of the Reformation movement in Estonia. The Estonians and the Germans living in the cities, under the leadership of incoming evangelists, embraced the Reformation first. Slowly the nobles also accepted the evangelical faith and in turn made the Gospel available to the peasants. The underprivileged farmers and farmworkers were the last in Estonia to be affected by the teachings of Dr. Martin Luther.

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<sup>43</sup>Olaf Schild, Eesti kirikulugu vanimast ajast olevikuni (Tartu: n.p., 1938), p. 184.



## CHAPTER VI

### IMMEDIATE RESULTS OF THE REFORMATION MOVEMENT

When a major movement, and the Reformation certainly was one, sweeps the country major changes may be expected to occur. Therefore, it is somewhat startling to hear that "it (the Reformation) made rapid progress without, however, affecting seriously the relationship between the now Lutheran German pastor and his Estonian congregation."<sup>1</sup> In other northern countries the Reformation was closely connected with nationalistic aspirations. It usually created a national church and produced a vernacular literature. Often the Bible was almost immediately translated into the native tongue, founding the modern written language of the country. Thus, for example, the Finns, close and good neighbors of the Estonians, were able to have their own New Testament translation already by 1548 (the Bishop Mikall Agricola's translation).<sup>2</sup>

Things were different in Livonia and Estonia. The foreign leadership (German) in the country was not primarily interested in the development of the natives. This is borne

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<sup>1</sup>A. Torma, The Church in Estonia (New York: World Association of Estonians, Inc., 1944), p. 6.

<sup>2</sup>H. Ojamaa and A. and T. Varma, Eesti ajalugu (Stockholm, Sweden: "Eesti Raamat," 1946), p. 106.



out by the fact that the Estonians had to wait over a century longer than their neighbors in the North before they could have the Gospels in the only language they really knew.

Also on the political scene the influence of the Reformation on Estonia differed radically from her neighbors. Instead of helping to centralize the political power, it loosened the grip of those who ruled the land. The lords of the land, the ecclesiastical princes and the Livonian Order, were dependent upon the Roman Catholic faith. Once that was broken, much of the power was transferred to the large number of nobles and cities. The only chance for a unified Livonia seemed to be in Wolter von Plettenberg's becoming an evangelical secular ruler, much like the Grand Master Albrecht of Prussia. Whatever the reasons may have been, personal, religious, or plain traditionalistic, this did not occur. Thus the by-product of the Reformation was a complete political disintegration which left the country vulnerable to foreign attacks at a time when military protection was urgently needed.

Theologically speaking, it is hard to be specific about the period immediately following the Reformation. It is true that the bishops, cathedrals, and some Franciscan monasteries were still there but they really belonged to a

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 107.



structure that had already collapsed. The new Evangelical Church, however, had not developed enough to take the place of the Old Church. It is probably correct to describe the situation as the funeral of the Roman power and the childhood of the Lutheran Church. One thing was certain, the Roman Catholic power had no chance of recovery in Estonia.<sup>4</sup>

Since the Reformation had been mostly a political movement outside the cities, the high officials were not excited by the religious differences that obtained. This explains why there was almost no bloodshed as the new movement took over, nor were there any pyres for heretics as in Protestant Geneva. Both Lutheran and Catholic nobles lived as good neighbors in peace.<sup>5</sup> Even the evangelical members of the City Councils found it easy to work with their colleagues who had remained Roman Catholic.

What has been said so far does not imply that the Reformation did not bring anything new with it. On the contrary, many innovations occurred. Also many new problems were created that needed immediate attention.

One of the immediate problems was the lack of evangelical pastors. Already in the days of the Roman Church there

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<sup>4</sup>Leonid Arbusow, Die Einführung der Reformation in Liv-, Est- und Kurland, in Quellen und Forschungen zur Reformationsgeschichte (Leipzig: Vermittlungsverlag von M. Heisius Nachfolger, 1921), III, 825.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., III, 821.



had been a shortage of clergymen; now the situation became extremely acute. Where to find a sufficient number of pastors who knew the language of the people and also had firm evangelical convictions? During the turbulent twenties of the sixteenth century few students had studied abroad and there were no schools at home where they could obtain their theological training.

Another problem was the building of a sound economic foundation for the evangelical parishes. Much of the responsibility was shouldered by the enlightened nobles who, however, demanded the right of patronage. By that the evangelical pastor became merely the hireling of the Vassal in whom the peasant had little confidence. Many of the administrative problems in the Church were not, and probably could not be, solved at the time. They had to wait until the Swedish Period.<sup>6</sup>

The school system was one of the most important issues with which the evangelicals had to deal. As in the middle ages so also during the new era the Church in Estonia was the champion of education. The Lutheran Church was particularly interested in bringing the level of education higher because it believed that every person had the right to the privilege of reading the Word of God himself in his own language. With due respect for previous Roman Catholic

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., III, 823.



efforts, the Lutheran Church was really the father of the widespread educational program for the natives of Estonia.<sup>7</sup> The Roman Catholic schools near parishes were evangelized. New ones were added to offer adequate opportunity for the children in the cities. In the country, however, the peasant's children were largely unschooled at the time. In larger cities as Tartu and Tallinn, the Latin Schools offered training in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, singing, rhetoric, and other subjects.<sup>8</sup> These schools prepared young men for university training in ecclesiastical or secular fields. The latter was gaining popularity fast in the post-Reformation era. Of course, no university training was available at this time in Estonia. The mature educational facilities in theology became available for the Estonians later when the Swedish King Gustavus II Adolphus founded the University of Tartu on the eve of his death (1632).<sup>9</sup> This institution of higher learning became the primary source of Lutheran clergymen in Estonia.

The topic of education in the post-Reformation Estonia suggests one of the important contributions of the Reformation to the culture of the nation: the printed Estonian

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<sup>7</sup>Ojamaa, op. cit., p. 161.

<sup>8</sup>Arbusow, op. cit., III, 666.

<sup>9</sup>Jaan Olvet-Jansen, editor, Pühendusteos (Agophoreta Tartuensia) (Stockholm, Sweden: Eesti Teaduslik Selts Rootsis, 1949), XI.



language. As can easily be surmised, in the early years after the Reformation there was an urgent need for a catechism. The Reformation period produced two of them-- a worthy contribution for the training of the young and old alike. At present it is believed that the first book published in the Estonian language was Wanradt-Koell's Catechism. It was published by Hans Lufft in Wittenberg on August 25, 1535. Only a few pages of this work have survived which makes it possible to identify it as a Lutheran catechism but not that of Dr. Martin Luther himself. The text was in two languages; Simon Wanradt prepared the German text and Johann Koell provided the Estonian translation. The book has more historical than practical value. Due to the many errors it contained, the City Council of Tallinn ordered the work destroyed soon after its publication.<sup>10</sup> Almost twenty years later (1554) pastor F. Witte of Tartu published a Lutheran Catechism which was more extensively used.<sup>11</sup> The translation of the Bible into the vernacular does not, unfortunately, fall into the immediate post-Reformation period. The first Estonian New Testament, Vastne Testament, appeared in 1686 in the southern dialect. Its counterpart in the north had to wait until 1715. The manuscript of this work is extant in the Royal Library of Sweden. It is commonly known as the

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<sup>10</sup> Philip Tammaru, Usuõpetuse conspect (Germany, n.p., 1948), p. 61.

<sup>11</sup> Ojamaa, op. cit., p. 106.



Stockholm manuscript. Its translator, Heinrich Gutsleff, based the work on the original text. Up to this time the Estonians still did not have the entire Bible in the vernacular. The situation was remedied when Anton Thor-Helle published the first Piibli Raamat, the complete Bible in 1739. Of other theological literature we mention Heinrich Stahl's Kasi- ja Koduraamat (1632-1638), a Christian handbook for the home containing prayers, hymns, and Scripture selections; Martin Luther's Catechism and Gospels and Epistles (1632) by Joachim Rossihnius; and The New Estonian Hymnal (1656), edited by Abraham Winkler.<sup>12</sup>

It is interesting to note that the doctrinal unity among the clergy was not regulated by a norm such as the Augsburg Confession. The City Council made sure that the individual preachers did not deviate from the doctrine of the "Wittenberg Fathers."<sup>13</sup> Not all the cities had the same type of liturgy or common service books. They all considered themselves to be united by the belief of Justification of Faith.<sup>14</sup> No detailed discussion of the doctrinal position of the Church is possible because of the lack of written records and the great disunity from congregation to congregation. In order to promote greater unity in teaching,

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<sup>12</sup>Tammaru, op. cit., p. 63.

<sup>13</sup>Arbusow, op. cit., III, 813.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.



the City Council made it a practice to send preachers from time to time to Wittenberg for further study.<sup>15</sup> Thus as time went on, close ties were established with Wittenberg and Dr. Luther himself. In 1531, there was a plan to call a spiritual evangelical supervisor for Livonia to regulate and coordinate the ecclesiastical affairs. This plan did not materialize, however.<sup>16</sup> The lack of unity was at times aggravated by wandering evangelical preachers who befriended the people and then preached against the local pastors, purely from selfish motives.<sup>17</sup> Professional jealousy and personal pride sometimes stood in the way of closer Christian unity and fellowship.

The victory of the Reformation was recognized by the Catholic authorities when at the Diet of Wolmar (January 17, 1554)<sup>18</sup> they sanctioned that every man had the right to choose his own church affiliation. In 1555 George Sieberg von Wischlingen signed the Peace of Augsburg as a representative of Livonia, "which act may be interpreted as a sanction of the Reformation in Estonia."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., III, 698.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., III, 807.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., III, 693.

<sup>18</sup>Tammaru, op. cit., p. 60.

<sup>19</sup>Karl Laantee, "The Beginning of the Reformation in Estonia," Church History, XXII (December, 1953), 277.



Now that the Lutheran Church was officially established in Estonia, inquiry must be made as to who the people were that made up the Church. The cities had been in the evangelical camp from the beginning; the nobles had by this time joined the evangelical ranks, but the peasants were still far removed from the Reformation ideals, even though their names appeared on the rosters of evangelical parishes.

The first phase of the Lutheran Church in Estonia was coming to an end but not everything was yet accomplished. It remained for the Swedish period to establish a practical church organization, for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to bring Christ Crucified to the Estonian peasants, and for the twentieth century to allow the Lutheran Church in Estonia to become the Lutheran Church of Estonia.

This concludes the review of the problems and accomplishments of the immediate post-Reformation period. It is readily admitted that the discussion has not touched all the aspects of the period. The writer hopes, however, that none of the important issues have been neglected.



## CHAPTER VII

### HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF LUTHERANISM IN ESTONIA

Much that is said in the chapter at hand is not directly connected with the Reformation movement in Estonia. But as no movement can and does exist entirely independently, as in a vacuum, the inclusion of this chapter which sketches the history of more than four eventful centuries that followed the Reformation movement is in order. Besides, there are many seeds that took root in the sixteenth century and only much later grew to fruition. The reader is certainly entitled to hear of the far reaching results of the movement even though they are separated from it by great intervals of time. Finally, the chapter will serve as a wider context for those who are not quite familiar with the history of the Estonian people.

In the previous chapter an attempt was made to portray the disintegration of the ruling powers as one of the results of the Reformation. There were many lords in Estonia in the middle of the sixteenth century but none powerful enough to protect the whole country in case of foreign attack. When Ivan IV, "The Cruel," became lord of Moscow and annexed the title of Czar of Russia, he decided



on an expansion program to the west.<sup>1</sup> In the beginning of 1558 the Russians launched a persistent attack on Estonia. Without too much difficulty they were soon the proud possessors of Tartumaa, Viljandimaa, Järvamaa, and Virumaa.<sup>2</sup> In the beginning of the hostilities little interest was shown by those nobles and rulers who were not immediately involved. Now, however, a general panic swept the country. Everyone tried to procure foreign military aid. The Emperor was approached in Germany with the result of a letter of encouragement. Hanseatic League did not show greater resourcefulness. The only nations that showed interest were Estonia's closer neighbors who seemed to have personal designs in mind. At any rate, Denmark purchased from the Bishop of Saaremaa-Läänemaa his holdings in 1559. Sweden acquired Tallinn together with Harjumaa-Virumaa, and the Livonian Order placed its territory in the south under the protection of the Poland-Lithuanian Kingdom. By the end of 1561 the German colonial power in Livonia in general and in Estonia in particular had come to a sad end. The years that followed were filled with bloodshed and destruction of property. The successive wars, one of the important ones being the Northern War of 1563-1570, reduced the number of contending powers.

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<sup>1</sup> Evald Uustalu, The History of Estonian People (London: Boreas Publishing Company, 1952), p. 65.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 65-66.



By 1583 there were only two left: Sweden and Poland-Lithuania, the former ruling the Northern part in Estonia, the latter the cities of Tartu, Viljandi, and Pärnu together with the territory of southern Estonia.<sup>3</sup> This Protestant-Catholic curtain halved the country until the whole territory became the possession of King Gustav II Adolf's forces in 1629.

It goes without saying that the development of the Reformation movement was almost slowed to a standstill when the hostilities began.<sup>4</sup> But as conditions settled somewhat, new and real progress was made in North Estonia. What the Lutheran Church in Estonia most needed was a clearly defined church organization. This became a reality when Kristian Agricola, Bishop of Estonia (1584-1586) and son of the famous Mikal Agricola gave reality to the growing demand.<sup>5</sup> Later, under the rule of Gustavus II Adolphus, speedy progress was made in spiritual as well as secular spheres of life. Under the able and conscientious leadership of Swedish Bishop Johannes Rudhekius definite improvements were devised within the Church. Annual synods were scheduled, regular visitations to parishes planned, the tithe was re-established, a consistory was created to offer local leadership in the Church, and certain minimum academic requirements were

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<sup>3</sup>M. Ojamaa and A. and T. Varnas, Eesti ajalugu (Stockholm, Sweden: "Eesti Raamat," 1946), p. 122.

<sup>4</sup>Karl Laantee, "The Beginning of the Reformation in Estonia," Church History, XXII (December, 1953), 277.

<sup>5</sup>Ojamaa, op. cit., p. 156.



established for pastors, one being that a candidate was required to have a sufficient knowledge of the vernacular to make it possible for him to preach in it.

In the south, however, different conditions obtained. When the Order surrendered its territory to Poland-Lithuania, it obtained favorable terms for the local nobles. The Privilegium Sigismundi Augusti granted the vassals the following privileges: assurance of retaining the Augsburg Confession, self-government in ecclesiastical affairs, German Law, and the general privileges of nobility.<sup>6</sup> After 1582 the promises were forgotten and a systematic re-Catholicization was promoted by the overlords. Also the Jesuits came to Tartu (1585) in order to work for the Roman Catholic cause. The occasional wars and the relatively short duration of the Polish-Lithuanian occupation did not, however, bring about any lasting results.<sup>7</sup> As already mentioned, the whole Estonian territory came under the Swedish rule in 1629. Many innovations stand out in the joint Swedish period.

The nobles lost much of their power together with the right of patronage. Pastors were appointed by secular powers, making them independent servants of their flock.

The last quarter of the seventeenth century produced

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 157-158.



a network of schools in the country. The subjects taught were reading, Bible study, Catechism, memorizing of prayers and hymns. This project, in spite of its potential, was slow to get started. At first the peasants regarded the schools with reserve if not suspicion, and the nobles did everything in their power to prevent the Estonian peasants from acquiring an education. They needed laborers in their fields. Also the physical facilities were often far from desirable.<sup>8</sup> But it was a brave beginning of a force that eventually produced the Lutheran Church of Estonia.

The seventeenth century was crowned in 1692 with the Swedish Church Statute of 1686.<sup>9</sup> Some authorities regard this statute as one of the most outstanding legislative acts in its field at the time.<sup>10</sup>

The founding of the Lutheran University in Tartu and the development of Estonian religious literature and philological study of the vernacular in general was the outstanding achievements of the Swedish regime. The general characteristic of this period was the spiritual enlightenment of the Estonians. "By the encouragement and help of the . . . Protestant rulers of Sweden, the Lutheran

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 161.

<sup>9</sup>Jaen Olvet-Jansen, editor, Pühendusteos (Apophoreta Tartuensia) (Stockholm, Sweden: Eesti Teaduslik Selts Rootsia, 1949), p. 1.

<sup>10</sup>A. Torma, The Church in Estonia (New York: World Association of Estonians, Inc., 1944), p. 9.



Church was firmly established in Estonia."<sup>11</sup>

The promising development of the cultural and spiritual forces was suddenly halted by the Great Northern War (1700-1721). When the fighting was all over, Estonia was under the Russian occupation that was destined to extend into the twentieth century. The immediate effect of the Russian rule was the worsening of the lot of the peasant as the German nobleman regained his powers. In the following decades the Lutheran clergyman played an important part in the struggle for social justice and human rights.

Even the Russian period had its spiritual significance. After the war, the pietistic Moravians appeared in Estonia. Their leader and protector, Count Zinzendorf, made a personal visit to Tallinn (1736). He was favorably received and so were the Moravian Brethren. Their unassuming friendliness, concern for the lowly, and sincere approach made an impression upon the common man that was not easily forgotten. It is said that in Saaremaa where the Brethren were particularly successful, not one criminal case was heard in the courts within a five year period. The Lutheran Church was divided in its attitude toward the pietistic visitors. Some pastors were eager to collaborate; others were publicly hostile. The nobles did not like the poor wanderers nor their activity among their peasants. Under the influence

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<sup>11</sup>Laantee, op. cit., p. 277.



of the nobles, the Russian government outlawed the movement (1743) but could not destroy it. Later the Brethren were again given a free hand in their work (1764).<sup>12</sup> The pietistic movement reached its peak of popularity in the first half of the nineteenth century and since then has slowly diminished in influence. The Estonians who joined the Brethren usually retained their membership in the Lutheran Church.<sup>13</sup>

Serious difficulties arose in the middle of the nineteenth century when the Russian government started its policy of Russification. The Orthodox Church was used as a tool. We quote a contemporary account to show what type of proselytizing was used.

an army of Greek priests was sent into the provinces. . . . Promises of material advantages were held out --freedom from taxes, even exemption from military organizations and other favours--towards all who would conform to the dominant faith; and these bribes, which we may say, in passing, were not, and were never meant to be fulfilled, won over not a few.<sup>14</sup>

The Russification developed into a full scale persecution of Lutherans. It hit hardest those who in a moment of weakness changed their faith and then found that the law prohibited them from returning to their own faith. This was

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<sup>12</sup>Torma, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>13</sup>J. Aunver, Eesti rahvakiriku ristitee (Stockholm, Sweden: EELK Komitee, 1953), p. 69.

<sup>14</sup>Torma, op. cit., p. 13.



an international issue; the Council of Evangelical Alliance took steps to bring about a change in Russian policy. But even in the years of persecution the Lutheran Church in Estonia was a legal religious body. In 1832 Czar Nicholas I had sanctioned the statute of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia, Livonia being one eighth of the entire Lutheran church there. A complete codification of the statutes and decrees of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Estonia was published and approved. The Greek Orthodox faith was the official religion in the Empire but the Lutherans were allowed to exist as a sect.<sup>15</sup>

A truly important event for the Lutheran Church in Estonia was the establishment of the independent Republic of Estonia together with an independent Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church. The Second General Assembly of the Church met in September, 1919, and approved the Constitution for the new Lutheran Church. The Constitution states that the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church is a free people's church, and as such an autonomous body. Its teaching is based upon the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and the Symbolical books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church<sup>16</sup> which have been accepted into Liber

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<sup>15</sup>Olvet-Jansen, editor, op. cit., p. 1.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 7.



Concordiae (paragraph 4).<sup>17</sup> The church was to be headed by a bishop, who as it happened, was usually consecrated into office by the Swedish Archbishop. Paragraph eight of the Constitution stated: "There is no State-Church in Estonia."<sup>18</sup> We underscore the last statement because there is generally a lack of information in this matter. It is of importance to note that the leadership of the Church fell, by election, into the hands of the Estonian clergymen. The number of native clergymen was gradually growing until the Germans formed only a minority district within the Estonian Church. Theologically one could discern three main currents: pietistic-conservative, the confessional, and the liberal-protestant wings. The confessional group by far outnumbered the others and thus supplied the leadership for the Church.<sup>19</sup>

At the time of the founding of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church it was decided that all members of the Lutheran Churches in Estonia be assumed to hold membership in the new church unless they cancelled their membership by letter. In 1937 the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church had a membership of eight hundred fifty-one thousand, 24½ per cent of whom had communed during that year.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Aunver, op. cit., p. 42.

<sup>18</sup>Aunver, op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., pp. 45ff.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 81.



No attempt is made to count the blessings that came upon the Church during the years between 1917 and 1940, except to say that the Church in Estonia became the Church of the Estonian people where the truth of the Reformation prevailed.

This happy Church has since had to live in captivity and exile. The years of 1940 and 1941 brought to Estonia the Russian occupation forces. The Russians did all short of outlawing the Lutheran Church. The Government's attitude was accurately portrayed by these pronouncements in the official communist press.

On March 7, 1941 the Rahva Hääl had this to say:

All religions are hostile to communism. Religion is the adversary of every kind of progress and science. Religion will not by itself vanish from human consciousness. On the contrary, to overcome religion, patient and hard educational work must be carried out among the masses. It will take a long time to liquidate it from the human minds. It is our duty to explain systematically every day the perniciousness of religion and of religious ideas. It is necessary to create all over the country an all-embracing net of the League of Anti-Religious Fighters. The communist party, trade unions and organizations of communist youth must in every way assist the League of Anti-Religious Fighters.<sup>21</sup>

The Soviet Culture had this to say in 1940:

It is obvious that socialism and religion have nothing in common, since they are two things quite opposite to each other. Religion obscures the mind and dupes the people. It cannot be tolerated in the country of

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<sup>21</sup>H. Perlitz, The Fate of Religion and Church under Soviet Rule in Estonia, 1940-1941 (New York: World Association of Estonians, Inc., 1944), p. 33.



the proletarian dictatorship that antisocialist, reactionary, and ignorant ideas are allowed to spread freely. The Soviet State which protects the interests of the people, does not permit free propaganda of religious ideas, since this intoxicates the workers' consciousness.<sup>22</sup>

The hostile attitude of the communists prompted them to abolish the great festivals of the church year. Martin Luther was accused of having "fought a bloody battle against peasants making the 'reformed' church the same instrument of exploitation and oppression as all other Churches."<sup>23</sup>

The occupation ended on a sad note with twenty-nine ecclesiastics murdered, fifteen deported, and seven lost in war. We let the record speak for itself.<sup>24</sup>

The Russian occupation was replaced for four years by the German one before it returned.

At present the Lutheran Church exists in Estonia, but it is inactive; in fact it is rather silent. The silence, however, is meaningful: cum tacent clamant.

But the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church is far from having collapsed. It exists and operates in exile under the leadership of the Primate of the Church, Dr. Johann Köpp. The statistics of 1955 show that there were 26,457 members of the Estonian Church in Exile and 2,173

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., pp. 49-51.



vernacular services were held in that year in the United States of America, Canada, Sweden, England, France, Germany, South America, and Australia, or some other remote part of the world. In all the above mentioned territories organized congregations of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church in Exile exist. There is still work to be done, however; the potential membership is estimated to be sixty-five thousand.<sup>25</sup>

The Estonian Lutherans in general and their pastors in particular believe that their Church will have a chance to work again in their native land. This is probably a major reason why the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church in Exile prefers to remain an autonomous body, although it welcomes the hand of fellowship from other Lutheran Churches.

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<sup>25</sup>Year Book of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church 1958-1959 (Toronto, Canada: EELK USA nõlema praostkonna valitsemine, 1957), pp. 44-45.



## CHAPTER VIII

### A BRIEF SUMMARY SKETCH OF THE REFORMATION MOVEMENT IN ESTONIA

The aim of this chapter is to go over the material thus far covered in a concise manner in order to impress upon the reader the highlights of the Reformation movement in Estonia.

Estonia, one of the Baltic states of today and the northern part of Livonia of the sixteenth century, lies at the outfall of the Finnish Gulf in the northern part of the Continent of Europe. The ancestors of the Estonians, a Finno-Ugrian race, are supposed to have settled there in the first centuries after Christ's birth at the latest. An earlier date for the settlement is very likely. The language of the people belongs to the Finno-Ugrian group, thus differing radically from Germanic and Slavic languages. In the early days the Estonians were pagans with relatively high ethical concepts. Politically their country was divided into a loosely connected federation of tribal states. By the twelfth century first attempts were made to Christianize these people. After several unsuccessful attempts from other countries, the Germans succeeded in gaining a foothold in Livonia by 1136, from where they brought the Christian faith by force to Estonia, at the same time also establishing



their colonial power in the territory. By 1227 the entire land of the Estonians had fallen into the hands of the Christians.

Four major powers developed in Livonia during the middle ages: the Livonian Order (a branch of the Teutonic Knights), the Prince-bishops, the vassals who were usually of noble birth, and the cities. The peasants, mostly Estonian natives, were the underprivileged who were forced to till the soil for their lords. All the above mentioned groups helped in one way or another to create a favorable atmosphere for the coming Reformation movement. The Livonian Order had lost the original purpose of its existence and with it had succumbed to the weaknesses of secular life. Their constant struggle for power with the Prince-bishops created feelings of animosity between the two parties. The Roman clergy had also fallen prey to the forces of secularization. In their quest for secular authority they had become greedy and morally corrupt. In spite of some good that the mendicant orders did for the people, the monks were generally disliked. An important factor in preparation for the Reformation movement was the growing power of the cities which developed almost into independent city-states. The steady growth of the urban communities was due to no small extent to their membership in the rich and powerful Hanseatic League. The peasants, economically oppressed and socially underprivileged, were always eager for a change of conditions,



although they were not as yet ready to embrace the teachings of the Reformation.

The ideas of the Reformation first came to Estonia from Riga. Before the teachings of the Reformation had reached Livonia, the Roman Catholic authorities already warned the people against Martin Luther's "errors" (1521). Soon after the publication of the bull condemning Luther, evangelical preaching started in Riga. The outstanding evangelist in Livonia were: Andreas Knopken, the Reformer of Riga with a calm personality and much academic ability; Sylvester Tegetmeyer, a zealous man who personally visited Estonia; and Melchior Hofmann, the lay apostle of Livonia who with his radical teachings caused as much harm as he did good. Luther himself was also aware of the movement among the Livonians--he even wrote a letter of encouragement and advice to them in August, 1523.

By letters, personal visits, and religious literature the Reformation movement came up north. The most important men among the reformers in Estonia were Johann Lange, Zacharias Hesse and Hermann Marsow. Hofmann's name might also be mentioned here. The Reformation started in big cities. Usually a few evangelical preachers appeared who won the loyalty of the townspeople (Germans and Estonians). The evangelical party eventually clashed with the Roman Catholic authorities and usually an iconoclastic outburst followed, marking a definite break with the Old System.



The evangelical city government usually also made the life of the monks, the champions of Roman Catholicism, uncomfortable.

The nobles also were favorable to the Reformation at first, hoping to weaken the lords of the land. Later they turned against the movement because of the fear of peasant revolt. Only slowly and very cautiously they accepted the evangelical faith by the middle of the sixteenth century.

The Livonian Order preferred to take no action against the evangelicals beyond verbal reprimands. Itself it remained Roman Catholic to the end as did the Roman Catholic hierarchy in Estonia. Nominally the peasants became members of the Evangelical Church when their lords made the change of faith. Actually, however, their hearts were won to evangelical Christianity only in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The immediate results of the Reformation movement in Estonia were just the opposite of those of the other northern countries. The Reformation in Estonia was not a nationalistic movement but rather a political and religious one. Instead of strengthening the national consciousness of the people and consolidating their military strength, the Reformation movement, religiously a change for the better to be sure, helped to weaken the already decentralized power of the ruling class and thus made the country vulnerable to foreign attacks. On a more positive note, the



movement gave the Estonians two catechisms, one of them being the first book ever published in the Estonian language (1535). The Lutheran victory was officially recognized when at the Diet of Wolmar (1554) the Catholic authorities recognized the right of the people to choose their own faith. It is of interest to note that the Catholics and Lutherans continued to live side by side for a long time with no bloodshed or particular animosity.

In 1561, under a Russian attack, the German colonial power in Livonia fell apart. The country was partly taken over by Danes, Swedes, and Poles-Lithuanians. Soon the Danes were eliminated, leaving the northern part of Estonia under the Swedish rule and Southern Estonia under the protection of the Polish-Lithuanian Kingdom. In the north the work of the Reformation was continued and some real progress was made in bringing the Gospel to the common people in the country. The Polish-Lithuanian forces started a re-Catholicization campaign with the aid of the Jesuits. No lasting results, however, were effected. In 1629 the entire land came under the Swedish rule. Now progress became noticeable in the Estonian Church: the Swedish Church Statutes were applied to Estonia, a Lutheran university was established, and Lutheran theological literature flourished. Many say that the Swedish period was the time when Estonians really became Lutherans.

The Great Northern War (1700-1721) brought Estonia



under the Russian occupation. In the second half of the nineteenth century the Lutherans had to suffer persecution under the pressure of a Russification campaign which aimed to lead the people of Estonia into the Orthodox faith.

In 1917 the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church was organized and proclaimed itself the Church of the Estonian people. For the first time in the history of Christianity in Estonia, Estonians themselves became leaders in their Church. The growth and the development of the national Church was cut short in 1940 by another Russian occupation which was hostile to all religious movements. This was followed by the German occupation, which in turn was replaced in 1944 by the Russian occupation. The Lutheran Church exists in Estonia at the present time, but little is known of its activity. The Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church in Exile, however, carries on an active program in all parts of the free world. Its membership is about twenty-six thousand five hundred (1955 statistics). It is the hope of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church in Exile to continue its activity again on native soil some day.



## CHAPTER IX

### HISTORIOGRAPHY

Since the topic, the Reformation movement in Estonia, is one with which the average church historian has little contact, the writer feels justified in including a discussion on the research done in the field thus far and the availability of the material.

It is to be regretted that the history of the Reformation movement in Livonia in general and in Estonia in particular has not received adequate treatment. To be sure, there have been some valuable studies made on the subject but none of them are in the English language (except a relatively short article in a periodical). Probably the outstanding work in the field is Dr. Leonid Arbusow's Die Einführung der Reformation in Liv-, Est- und Kurland (from now on cited as Die Einführung for the sake of brevity) which appeared in 1921 in the series of Quellen und Forschungen zur Reformationsgeschichte. This 851-page study is a thorough work of a scholar who has relied, whenever possible, on primary sources and contemporary accounts. Ample background material is provided for the movement by a thorough treatment of the pre-Reformation era in Livonia. The writer feels, however, that often the important issues tend to be somewhat hidden by the wealth of minor detail.



All in all Dr. Arbusow's work is the best one to date in the German language. Otto Pohrt's Reformationsgeschichte Livlands, ein Überblick (1928) is a much shorter work, also in the series Quellen und Forschungen zur Reformationsgeschichte. It is well organized but seems to emphasize the Latvian Reformation. Ferdinand Hoerschelmann's Andreas Knopken, der Reformator Rigas, Ein Beitrag zur Kirchengeschichte Livlands is particularly interesting since it discusses the theology of one of the foremost Livonian reformers. The following German works deserve mention, although the writer has not considered them important enough to be consulted for the purposes of this thesis: Leonid Arbusow's Grundriss der Geschichte Liv-, Est-, und Kurland (1918); Beiträge zur Kunde Est-, Liv- und Kurlands published by the Estonian Literary Society in Tallinn (1863ff.); Friedrich Biedermann's Aus Livlands Luthertagen (1883); Gotthard von Hansen's Die Kirchen und ehemaligen Klöster Revels (1873); Dr. Leonard Lemmens' Die Franziskanerkustodie Livland und Preussen (1912); F. O. zur Linden, Melchior Hofmann, ein Prophet der Wiedertäufer (1885); Aem. Richter's Die evang. Kirchenordnungen des 16. Jahrhundert (1846); Carl Schirren's Verzeichnis livlandische Geschichtsquellen aus Swedischen Archiven und Bibliotheken (1861, 1868); Wilhelm Schöring's Joh. Blankenfeld in Verein für Reformationsgeschichte, no. 86 (1905); George B. Taubenheim's Einiges aus dem Leben Mag. Joh. Lohmüllers, ein Beitrag zur Reformationsgeschichte



Livlands (1850); Ludvig Albrecht Gebhardi's Geschichte von Livland, Estland, Kurland und Sengallen (1785); Ernst Benz's Die Reformation und der Osten (1939); Hans Kruus' Grundriss der Geschichte des estnischen Volkes; Scriptorum rerum Livonicarum, Sammlung der wichtigsten Chroniken und Geschichtsdenkmale von Liv-, Est- und Kurland in genauen wieder abdruck der besten, bereits gedruckten, aber selten gewordenen ausgaben (1848-1853); Otto Rutenberg's Geschichte der Ostseeprovinzen, Liv-, Est- und Kurland (1859-1860).

In the Estonian language two works on the Reformation movement are outstanding: Olaf Sild's Eesti kirikulugu vanimast ajast olevikuni (The History of the Estonian Church from the Oldest to the Present Time [1938]); and a joint effort published by the Reformation Jubilee Commission Usupuhaest eestlaste maal (Reformation in the land of the Estonians [1924]). Also M. Ojamaa, A. and T. Varnas' Eesti ajalugu (History of Estonia [1946]), contains a wealth of material related to the Reformation period and, of course, covers very adequately the entire history of the Estonian people. Philip Tammara's Usuõpetuse Konspekt (Studies in Theology [1948]) also contains some valuable material on the history of the Estonian Reformation.

The English reader may want to consult Karl Laantee's article, "The Beginning of the Reformation in Estonia," Church History, XXII (December, 1953). A fine general history is Evald Uustalu's The History of the Estonian People.



Unfortunately this work completely neglects the Reformation itself.

The difficulty for anyone interested in further research in the field is the lack of readily available research material. The two important German works, Leonid Arbusow's Die Einführung and Otto Pohrt's Reformationsgeschichte Livland, ein Überblick, are relatively easy to obtain for the Reformation scholar. This is not the case with the two important Estonian works: Olaf Sild's Eesti kirkulugu vanimast ajast olevikuni and Usupuhastus eestlaste maal published by the Reformation Jubilee Commission. According to the research of this writer there is only one copy of the former in the free world. It is in the private library of Dr. Johan Köpp in Hägersten, Sweden. Usupuhastus eestlaste maal can be found in the library of the University of Lund, Sweden.

The major libraries in the United States offer surprisingly much material on Estonia and its people but relatively little of it concerns the Reformation movement.

New York Public Library has, among others, the following to offer: Leonid Arbusow, Die Einführung; L. A. Gebhardi, Geschichte von Lifland, Estland, Kurland und Semgalden; Hans Krus, Grundriss der Geschichte des estnischen Volkes; Ernst Benz, Die Reformation und der Osten; J. H. Jackson, Estonia; J. Parijõgi, Eesti ajalugu algkoolile (History of Estonia for the Public Schools); Jean Cathala,



Portrait de l'Estonie.

Columbia University has an extraordinarily fine and extensive collection of books on Estonia but not much on the Reformation era. It offers the following: Leonid Arbusow's Die Einführung; Scriptores rerum Livonicarum, Sammlung der wichtigsten Chroniker und Geschichtsdenkmale von Liv-, Est- und Kurland in genauem wieder abdrucke der besten bereits gedruckten, aber selten gewordenen ausgaben; August Torma, The Church in Estonia; L. Arbusow, sen., Grundriss der Geschichte Liv-, Est- und Kurlands; Hans Kruus, Grundriss der Geschichte des estnischen Volkes; Otto Rutenberg, Geschichte der Ostseeprovinzen Liv-, Est- und Kurland; Olaf Sild, "Kirikuvisitatsioonid eestlaste maal varemast ajast kuni olevikuni," in Acta et Commentationes, XL, 4 (1937).

Fritzlaff Memorial Library at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis has Arbusow's Die Einführung and Pohrt's Reformations Geschichte Livlands.

The library of Union Theological Seminary in New York City has, besides Arbusow's and Pohrt's works, D. F. Hoerschelmann's Andreas Knopken, der Reformator Rigas.

The University of Chicago offers Arbusow's and Pohrt's works. The Newberry and Public Libraries offer nothing important beyond the two works mentioned above.

The works so far listed have mostly had a direct connection with the Reformation movement in Estonia. Now a few bibliographical aids that would be of use to the student



of Estonian history are suggested: Salme Kuri, Estonia: a Selected Bibliography (1958), found in the U. S. Library of Congress, Slavic and Central European Division; Edward August Winkelmann, Bibliotheca Livonicae historica: Systematisches Verzeichniss der Quellen und Hilfsmittel zur Geschichte Estlands, Livlands und Kurlands (1878), to be found at Columbia University; Evald Uustalu's The History of Estonian People (1952) contains a comprehensive bibliography (pp. 257-261). The last mentioned book is probably in the major English Libraries. A copy is in the private library of the writer of the thesis. J. Aunver's  Eesti rahvakiriku ristitee (The History of the Church in Estonia [1953]), devotes a few pages to the discussion of the scholarly research done by Estonian church historians. This book should be easily located in Swedish libraries. A copy is in the personal library of the writer of the thesis.

The standard works on Reformation history in general such as Thomas M. Lindsay's two volume work A History of the Reformation; E. G. Schwiebert's Luther and His Times; and Philip Schaff's The German Reformation, Volume VII of his monumental History of the Christian Church, hardly mention Livonia or Estonia.

Even most of the recent works on Reformation history, such as Will Durant's The Reformation and Grimm's The Reformation Era entirely by pass the Reformation movement



in Estonia. The exception here is the excellent New Cambridge Modern History, Volume II, which devotes four pages to the Reformation history in the Baltic states.

CHRONOLOGY

Before Christ	Settlements on the eastern shores of the Baltic Sea
1-400 A.D.	Roman Iron Age
400-600	Middle Iron Age
600-1000	Late Iron Age
1100	Julius is named Bishop of Estonia
1180	Richard comes to Ikskõla
1200-1217	Estonia is conquered and Christianized
1218-1265	Roman Catholic power in Estonia
1283-1326	Reformation of the middle iron where the new ideas spread to the entire land
1310	Marcus-Kaali's Catechism
1350	P. Ulmer's Catechism
1501	The German colonial power is broken
1563-1570	Seven-year Northern War
1580-1585	An attempt to re-Catholicize Estonia
1585	The Jesuit school in Tartu
1611-1632	Alexander III Adolphus
1632	University of Tartu
1636	Virgilian's translation of the New Testament
1700-1721	The Great Northern War
1710	Estonia is under Russian occupation



## APPENDIX

### CHRONOLOGY

Before Christ	Estonians settle on the eastern shores of the Baltic Sea
1-400 A.D.	Roman Iron Age
400-800	Middle Iron Age
800-1200	Late Iron Age
1164	Fulco is named Bishop of Estonia
1186	Meinhard comes to Üksküla
1208-1227	Estonia is conquered and Christianized
1227-1523	Roman Catholic power in Estonia
1523-1526	Reformation of the cities from where the new ideas spread to the entire land
1535	Wanradt-Koell's Catechism
1554	F. Witte's Catechism
1561	The German colonial power is broken
1563-1570	Seven year Northern War
1582-1585	An attempt to re-Catholicize Estonia
1585	The Jesuit school in Tartu
1611-1632	Gustavus II Adolphus
1632	University of Tartu
1686	Virgilius' translation of the New Testament
1700-1721	The Great Northern War
1710	Estonia is under Russian occupation



- 1729 Moravian Brethren come to Estonia
- 1739 A. T. Helle's Bible in Estonian
- 1743 The Moravian Brethren outlawed in Estonia
- 1832 A new Church Constitution for the Lutherans
- 1844-1846 The Russification efforts; the Orthodox faith is foisted upon Estonians
- 1857-1861 Estonian Epic: Kalevipoeg
- 1905 Revolution in Russia
- 1917 Revolution in Russia
- 1917 (May) Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church founded
- 1918 The Republic of Estonia
- 1921 Estonia's first native bishop: Jakob Kukk
- 1940-1941 Russian occupation of Estonia
- 1941-1944 German occupation
- 1944- Russian occupation



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