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# Is There Something More Than Crusades, Inquisition and *Opium of People*?

## Vai tur ir kaut kas vairāk par krusta kariem, inkvizīciju un *opiju tautai*?<sup>1</sup>

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The article speaks on Religious Education (RE) in schools as one of the most essential subjects of discussion in Estonian society. According to the Estonian legislation non-confessional RE is an optional subject, but nevertheless there exists controversial attitude toward the necessity of RE and religion as such. The following article has two main tasks: 1) introducing some insights into Internet discussions on religious topics in one of the portals DELFI; 2) presentation of empirical research, reflecting the attitudes regarding religion and RE in different groups of society (teachers, pupils, students of humanities in Tartu University) and analyses about the possible influence of RE upon students attitudes regarding religion. Research explores the attitude of respondents toward statements grouped into following series: Religion and violence; Religion and science; Religion and legislation; Religion and morality; Religion and personal life. The research results reveal that the negative attitude towards religion and RE prevail strongly in Internet discussions. In comparison with the critical debates in Internet, the wider chart of social attitudes regarding religion is more positive, colorful and balanced than this in the Internet. It gives hope that the development of RE in Estonian schools will help to overcome the shadows of the atheistic propaganda and to rise the level of religious literacy in the society.

**Keywords:** Religious Education, Internet discussions, empirical studies, statements on religion

*People who support secular education and deny compulsory Religious Education will gather on Monday, 23rd of April on the Town Hall Square to march to the Ministry of Education to hand over a memorandum about compulsory Religious Education as an offence against the Constitution. (...) Elf- and Earth-believers are allowed to use their religious attributes. Demonstration is dedicated to the 660th anniversary of the St. Georg's Day revolt.*

*Anonymous advertisement from the Internet portal DELFI*

### Introduction

Religious Education (RE) has been one of the most debated topics in education during the last decade in Estonia. Actually, the tradition of controversy about RE has

even longer history in Estonia. Teaching of RE in public schools was an object of heated discussions also in the early 1920's, in the framework of building up the national school system of the newborn independent state. At first, Estonian Parliament excluded the subject from school curricula. But this decision did not correspond to the will of people. The problem was brought to the first referendum in Estonian history (February 1923) where 72% voted for the RE to be taught in schools again. It was the beginning of non-confessional optional RE in Estonian schools (Valk, 1997, 2002b). Although RE was an optional subject, almost all pupils participated in the classes of RE, until the subject was banned in 1940 by the authorities of Soviet occupation. During the following 50 years of the Soviet rule two generations of Estonians experienced and were shaped by a strong and broad atheistic ideology (Valk, 2002; Nõmmik & Kilemit, 2004; Salo, 2000). Teaching of RE became possible again after collapse of the Soviet Union when Estonia restored its independence in August 1991. According to the Estonian legislation non-confessional RE is an optional subject. The year 2003 brought several important news into development of the subject – a new concept of RE, based on the contextual theology and socio-constructivist theory of learning (Valk, 2002b) and a new syllabus with teaching-learning materials were developed. These developments, when introduced by the media, awakened a new wave of debates. When comparing the former debates about RE with the latest ones, the Internet, as a new medium for discussions, must be considered. Several Internet portals offer possibilities for debates on a wide variety of issues, including religious topics.

What religious viewpoint can one see through Internet discussions? How does this viewpoint correspond to the outcomes of some empirical studies, where respondents have been asked about their attitudes regarding religion? And at last but not least – is it possible to develop some way to change one's very critical and sceptical attitude towards religion on the bases of empirical research? These are the main questions the author would like to deal with in the following presentation.

According to the problems mentioned above, the following presentation has two main parts:

- 1) Introducing some insights into Internet discussions on religious topics in one of the portals DELFI.
- 2) Presentation of empirical research, reflecting the attitudes regarding religion and RE and analyses about the possible influence of RE upon students attitudes regarding religion.

## **1. Religion in DELFI**

DELFI, probably one of the most popular Internet portals in Estonia, started with the special rubric of columns to awake discussions on actual daily topics in February 2000. Columns on religious topics are published weekly. Everybody is free to send comments on the column, no identification is needed. As a result, absolute majority of comments are anonymous. Following table gives an overview about the amount of comments given to the DELFI columns during the last year and a half. Data is collected from the archive of the portal. *Table 1* presents number of columns on religious and all other topics, means and medians of the numbers of comments given to the columns, minimum and maximum numbers of comments and standard deviations for the whole sample for both groups.

Table 1/ 1. tabula

**Comments on DELFI columns January 2003 – June 2004 /  
Komentāri DELFI rubrikās no 2003. g. janvāra līdz 2004. g. jūnijam**

Topics / Temati	N / Skaitis	Mean / Vidējais	Median / Mediāna	Min / Max	Standard deviation / Standart- novirze
Religious topics / Reliģiskas tēmas	75	2318	2239	537 / 8165	990
All other topics / Visas pārējās tēmas	541	118	78	2 / 976	94

Looking at this data, it is obvious that the religious themes are the most popular topics to discuss in DELFI. When comparing the mean of the number of religious comments with all others, the difference is about 20 times. Constant high attention to religious topics is also evident by the fact that the mean (2318) and median (2239) of this variable are very close. The column *Evolution or Creation*, (published 19.07.2003) received the maximum number of comments. Author, Toomas Jürgestein, a biologist, is regarded as one of the best teachers of RE in Estonia.

The article *Can the Communist Ideology Be Condemned?* (22.08.2003) received the highest number of comments (976) among the other topics. Two other topics dealing with Estonia's entry EU, *What will NO Bring Along?* (30.07.2003) and *Government is Frightened*, (29.07.2003) received 849 and 617 comments respectively.

When reading the comments on religious themes, one can recognise that the majority of comments are critical, sometimes even desecrative towards religion.

To give a concrete example I would like to present a closer look at one of the columns and the comments it received. This will give some insight as to what is going on in such debates?

For the analyses I chose a column *Ministry of Education gets in a Flurry in Vain* written in 21.04.2003 by Toomas Haug, a journalists from Radio "Free Europe". This article was selected as an example because of following:

- 1) It dealt directly with the question of RE.
- 2) It was written as a reaction on the first interview of the new minister of Education prof. T. Maimets, where he declared that compulsory RE would bring shame to Estonia.

T. Haug, who is a supporter of RE in schools, gives a contrary opinion to prof. T. Maimets' article. His arguments speak of the necessity of religious literacy in today's multi-religious world and the important role of Christianity, especially of the Lutheran Church, in Estonian history and cultural heritage. He also points out the issue that since Christmas and Easter are public Holy Days in Estonia schools are obliged to educate students in religious as well as secular subjects.

This article received 537 comments from 172 commentators during the first 4 days. It is interesting to note that only three persons used their names when giving their comments, all others used pseudonyms. This shows that it is impossible to identify the

real range of the participants in Internet discussions without, at least, the admission of e-mail addresses or servers from where the messages originated. Other striking results concerned the number of comments written by different participants: three persons wrote 34% of comments. The most productive commentator, HK, who always subscribes his comments with full name, wrote 88 comments (18% of all comments). To increase the rate of identified commentators to 53% would require raising the number of authors from three to 10. It means that the debates in Internet portal could actually be the “conversations” between few people (“experts?”), commented and interrupted by much less active participants.

Comments themselves were analysed on the following way:

First, the comments were divided into two larger groups:

- 1) Generally positive attitudes towards religion and RE, marked with “+”.  
Generally negative attitudes towards religion and RE, marked with “-”.
- 2) Neutral or non-relevant comments from the viewpoint of the attitudes towards religion and RE that were left aside.

The second step of the analyses took a more in-depth look at two first groups. Comments, dealing directly with the question of RE that contained concrete *pro* or *contra* arguments on the subject, were selected. Results of the analyses are presented in the following *Table 2*:

*Table 2/ 2. tabula*

**Content of the comments / Komentāru saturs**

<b>Comments / Komentāri</b>	<b>N / Skaits</b>		<b>%</b>	
+	110		20	
+C		48		9
-	217		40	
-C		97		18
?	210		40	
<b>Total / Kopā:</b>	537	145	100	27

[+] – positive attitude towards religion and RE / pozitīva attieksme pret reliģiju un RI;  
[-] – negative attitude towards religion and RE / negatīva attieksme pret reliģiju un RI;

[+C] – positive arguments, connected with the topic of the article / pozitīvi argumenti, kas saistīti ar raksta tēmu;

[-C] – negative arguments, connected to the topic of the article / negatīvi argumenti, kas saistīti ar raksta tēmu.

[?] – neutral on non-relevant comments / neitrāli vai nederīgi komentāri;

Looking at the data, presented in the table, one can point on the following:

- 1) Comments with the negative attitude towards religion and RE prevail strongly in this series of comments.
- 2) A remarkable number of comments are not connected to the topic of the column.
- 3) Only about a half of comments, both negative and positive ones are connected to the topic of the discussion and present arguments.

- 4) It appears that anonymous comments seem to favour tendencies towards rough self-expression, especially by the people critical towards Christianity. Because of such circumstances DELFI is sometimes called a “*public toilet wall*”.

Reading the comments in DELFI, a question could be raised, how representative are these attitudes for Estonian society?

If comparing the latest debates about religion in Internet portals with the former ones, one can mention significant similarities in arguments (Valk, 1997; 1999; 2002b). Main critical statements could be grouped into following series:

- 1) **Religion and violence:** The spread of Christianity is strongly connected with violence (crusades, inquisition, witch-trials etc). History of Christianity is soaked through with violence. In words Christians preach love and goodness, but the ways to reach it are violent.
- 2) **Religion and Science** are antagonistic. Christianity is full of contradictions. Religion obstructs the development of science.
- 3) **Religion and legislation:** RE is violation of human rights. Church tries to increase its membership unfairly by using RE.
- 4) **Religion and morality:** Christianity creates hypocrisy. Religion has nothing to do with morality.
- 5) **Religion and personal life:** Religion is the way to escape from the real life – it is *opium of people*. It is only for weak people. Religion obstructs free development of human. The Church prohibits doubts and nonconformity.

## 2. Attitudes towards religion in different studies

Next I would like to turn to the attitudes towards religion and RE in different groups of society by presenting the outcomes of three studies. In all of them the list of similar statements about religion and RE was used. The list of statements was composed in 2001 on the bases of the analyses of discussions about RE in Estonian media (Valk, 1999).

### *Study 1*

157 teachers from 11 Estonian schools anonymously completed a questionnaire in 2001 (Valk, 2002a). The questionnaire included 28 statements about religion and RE. Most of teachers had worked in the school for about 15 years. Schools were chosen according to the following principles:

1. Participation from different geographic areas of Estonia. The sample of schools contained schools in larger cities (Tartu, Tallinn, Pärnu and Viljandi) as well as in rural areas (Ahja, Pärni-Jaagupi, Turba).
2. Participation by different types of schools. Nine of schools were upper secondary schools, two were basic schools.
3. Participation by schools with and without RE. Seven schools in the sample had and four did not have RE classes.

### *Study 2*

Study 2 is a part of wider research in the schools where RE is taught on the bases

of the new concept of RE (Valk 2002b). These schools participated in the so-called Pilot Project of RE. For the current presentation I took 102 anonymously completed questionnaires by students from three schools. The questionnaires included 28 statements about religion and RE, similar to the statements, used in the questionnaire to teachers. First school, where questionnaires were completed by 51 students, has a longer and well-known high-level tradition of teaching of RE. The second school began with RE classes only in this year. 30 questionnaires came from this school. The third school is a rural upper secondary school, where RE is taught for three last years. 21 completed questionnaires came from this school.

### Study 3

This study was carried out among students of humanities in Tartu University in 2004. Students were asked to complete anonymous questionnaires before and after the course about Christianity. The first round of research contained 23 statements, the second one 28 statements about the topic. The first round of research brought 276 responses, the second one 322. 190 respondents from the second round of research fulfilled the questionnaires also during the first round.

In all the questionnaires similar scale range was used: 1 = agree strongly; 2 = agree; 3 = uncertain; 4 = disagree; 5 = disagree strongly.

The data were analysed by the STATISTICA package, using the descriptive statistics, frequencies and differences significance-test routine.

## 2.1. Results

Table 3 presents the mean scores on the 5-point scale and standard deviations (SD) for the statements about religion and RE by teachers, upper secondary school students and university students before and after studies on Christianity.

Table 3/3. tabula

**Mean scale scores and standard deviations (SD) for statements about religion and RE by teachers, upper secondary school students and university students before and after studies of Christianity /**

**Vidējās skalas rādītāji un standartnovirzes (SN) apgalvojumiem par reliģiju un RI, anketējot skolotājus, vidusskolēnus un universitātes studentus pirms un pēc kristietības studijām (3. tabulas latvisko versiju skat. Pielikumā)**

Statements	Teachers N = 157		Upper secondary school pupils N = 102		University students before studies N = 276		University students after studies N = 324	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Religion has been used as means to coerce working people into obedience by oligarchy	2,71	1,20	2,46	0,99	2,51	1,17	2,56	1,22

Table 3 continued / 3. tabulas turpinājums

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
2. History of Christianity is soaked through with violence*	<b>2,67</b>	1,10	<b>2,51</b>	0,98	<b>2,16</b>	1,01	<b>2,49</b>	1,13
3. Christianity is violently forced upon Estonians through ages	<b>2,89</b>	1,32	<b>2,59</b>	1,07	<b>2,77</b>	1,21	<b>2,89</b>	1,19
4. The spread of Christianity has always been connected with violence	<b>3,07</b>	1,10	<b>2,75</b>	1,0	<b>3,2</b>	1,23	<b>3,19</b>	1,22
5. RE is another form of ideological brainwashing	<b>3,95</b>	0,98	<b>4,21</b>	0,98			<b>4,24</b>	1,01
6. Religion gives completed answers to all questions	<b>3,76</b>	0,95	<b>3,8</b>	1,1	<b>4,14</b>	1,22	<b>3,93</b>	1,11
7. Religion obstructs the development of Science*	<b>3,87</b>	0,88	<b>3,46</b>	0,96	<b>3,42</b>	1,27	<b>3,89</b>	1,1
8. Science liberates people from religious trammels*	<b>3,24</b>	0,92	<b>3,22</b>	1,03	<b>3,11</b>	1,16	<b>3,51</b>	1,07
9. RE breaks the formation of the scientific thinking	<b>3,76</b>	1,03	<b>3,38</b>	1,05			<b>3,9</b>	1,1
10. Positions of Christianity clash with con-temporary science*	<b>3,15</b>	1,02	<b>2,73</b>	0,91	<b>2,64</b>	1,17	<b>3,06</b>	1,2
11. One can't take Christianity seriously because of many contradictions in it	<b>3,38</b>	0,95	<b>2,99</b>	1,0	<b>3,46</b>	1,04	<b>3,57</b>	0,99
12. Introduction RE into school violates the principle of religious freedom	<b>3,8</b>	1,12	<b>4,07</b>	1,16			<b>3,96</b>	1,12
13. Religious literacy is an important guarantee of religious freedom	<b>2,03</b>	0,95	<b>1,89</b>	0,94	<b>1,9</b>	1,12	<b>1,72</b>	0,96
14. All religions have to be treated equally in RE.	<b>1,87</b>	1,09	<b>1,49</b>	0,83			<b>1,54</b>	0,95
15. Church tries to increase its membership by using RE	<b>3,28</b>	1,01	<b>3,45</b>	1,18			<b>3,49</b>	1,19

Table 3 continued / 3. tabulas turpinājums

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
16. Religion makes people hypocritical	<b>3,64</b>	0,99	<b>3,41</b>	1,11	<b>3,63</b>	1,09	<b>3,65</b>	1,18
17. Religion helps to make right moral choices	<b>2,31</b>	1,03	<b>2,5</b>	0,98	<b>2,46</b>	1,14	<b>2,28</b>	1,02
18. Believers are morally better people than others*	<b>3,04</b>	1,06	<b>3,92</b>	1,1	<b>3,94</b>	1,2	<b>3,52</b>	1,19
19. Every human being believes into something*	<b>2,43</b>	1,03	<b>1,63</b>	0,96	<b>2,16</b>	1,13	<b>1,5</b>	0,95
20. Faith helps to overcome difficulties and disappointments	<b>2,28</b>	1,04	<b>2,28</b>	0,95	<b>1,93</b>	0,95	<b>2,05</b>	0,98
21. Religion is a way to escape from the real life	<b>3,69</b>	1,19	<b>3,58</b>	1,06	<b>3,61</b>	1,26	<b>3,61</b>	1,15
22. Religious canons demand unconditional obedience*	<b>3,23</b>	0,96	<b>2,98</b>	0,87	<b>2,78</b>	1,12	<b>3,11</b>	1,05
23. The Church banes nonconformity	<b>3,41</b>	0,97	<b>3,13</b>	0,99	<b>2,95</b>	1,31	<b>3,21</b>	1,21
24. By its nature, Christianity is foreign to Estonians	<b>3,52</b>	1,08	<b>2,9</b>	0,99	<b>3,28</b>	1,15	<b>3,34</b>	1,13
25. Religion obstructs free development of a human*	<b>3,62</b>	1,0	<b>3,5</b>	1,08	<b>3,23</b>	1,22	<b>3,75</b>	1,08
26. Knowledge about religions is necessary to understand the world's cultural heritage	<b>1,71</b>	1,03	<b>2,2</b>	1,06	<b>1,66</b>	0,93	<b>1,62</b>	0,995
27. Religion helps to deal with ultimate questions	<b>2,61</b>	0,99	<b>2,6</b>	0,94	<b>2,34</b>	1,18	<b>2,3</b>	1,1
28. RE defends pupils form extremist religious groups	<b>2,17</b>	1,03	<b>3,09</b>	1,06				1,05

\* Statistically remarkable changes in the attitudes before and after the studies on Christianity

## 2.2. Discussion

### 2.2.1. Religion and violence

Three statements about the violent role of religion “*Religion has been used as means to coerce working people into obedience by oligarchy*”, “*History of Christianity is soaked through with violence*” and “*Christianity is violently forced upon Estonians through ages*” got all received a mean under 3 by all respondent groups. Although



there is a lot of truth in these statements such agreement could also be interpreted as an influence of the paradigm of religion one recognizes in Estonian textbooks of History where religions, especially Christianity are represented in mostly negative way (Rajamäe-Volmer). Violent baptism of Estonians during the crusades in the beginning of the 13th century, as one of the cornerstones of popular history, emphasised by literature and adjusted by Soviet atheistic ideology is still very much alive. Mean (2,75) for the statement “*The spread of Christianity has always been connected with violence*” by upper secondary school students could reflect same circumstances.

At the same time the statement, “*RE is another form of ideological brainwashing*” with the highest mean by all respondents (3.95; 4,21; 4,24) points delightedly on the issue that they don’t blame RE to be in favour of mental violence.

### 2.2.2. Religion and science

Treatment of the relationships between religion and science as antagonistic was characteristic to the Soviet ideology. Mean scores of the statements, “*Religion gives completed answers to all questions*”, “*Religion obstructs the development of Science*”, “*Science liberates people from religious trammels*”, and “*RE breaks the formation of the scientific thinking*” identify that most of respondents tend not to agree with such statements. There were more agreement with the statements, “*Positions of Christianity clash with contemporary science*” and “*One can’t take Christianity seriously because of many contradictions*” in it, among upper secondary school students and university students before their studies in Christianity.

### 2.2.3. Religion and legislation

Four statements in questionnaires dealt with the legislative problems. Remarkable high means for the statement “*Introduction RE into schools violates the principle of religious freedom*” (3,8 by teachers, 4,07 by secondary school students and 3,96 by university students after their studies in Christianity) testify that students who have experienced RE don’t see such problem.

Statements “*Religious literacy is an important guarantee of religious freedom*” and “*All religions have to be treated equally in RE*” scored the lowest means pointing to the wide spread consciousness about necessity of following the principles of religious freedom in society and in RE classes in particular. It is also worth of mentioning that respondents mostly didn’t see RE as a tool for rising church membership as indicated by the means scored for the statement Church tries to increase its membership by using RE (3,28 by teachers, 3,45 by secondary school students and 3,49 by university students after studies in Christianity).

### 2.2.4. Religion and morality

Three statements belonged to this group. Most of respondents agreed that religion does not make people hypocritical (means 3,64 by teachers, 3,41 by secondary school students and 3,63 and 3,65 by university students). Means for the statement “*Religion helps to make right moral choices*” were 2,31 by teachers, 2,5 by secondary school students and 2,46 and 2,28 by university students. An interesting difference occurred in the means for the statement, “*Believers are morally better people than others*” by teachers and students. Teachers (mean 3,04) seemed to be much more optimistic about

it than students (means 3,92 by secondary school students and 3,94 by university students before their studies in Christianity). The difference was statistically significant ( $p=.0000$ ). Here the reference could be made to the wider study among teachers, where the serious concern of teachers about the moral education, or even more, about the absence of it was clearly pointed on (Valk, 2002a).

Also remarkable difference came out if comparing the means by university students before and after the course about Christianity (3,94 and 3,52). The difference is statistically significant ( $p<.0002$ ).

### 2.2.5. Religion and personal life

Two positive and five negative statements from the questionnaire dealt with this issue. Respondents seemed to agree with the statement “*Every human being believes into something*”. Hereby one can mention that secondary school students’ mean (1,63) was significantly lower than the teachers’ one (2,43) ( $p=.0000$ ). Remarkable difference occurred also in the answers given by university students before (2,16) and after (1,5) their studies in Christianity ( $p=.0000$ ).

The statement “*Faith helps to overcome difficulties and disappointments*” scored the following means: 2,28 by teachers and secondary school students, and 1,93 and 2,05 by university students accordingly before and after studies in Christianity. The background of these results needs some future investigation for interpretation. Are the figures low because of the influence of the truism of atheistic propaganda (*religion is for the weak people*) or is there some positive personal reasons in these statements. The answer to these questions is beyond the scope of this article.

Negative statements “*Religion is a way to escape from the real life*”, “*Religious canons demand unconditional obedience*”, “*The Church banes nonconformity*” and “*By its nature, Christianity is foreign to Estonians*” scored quite high means, pointing on the disagreement, by teachers (accordingly 3,69; 3,23; 3,41 and 3,52). Secondary school students were more suspicious towards religious canons (mean 2,98) and Christianity being foreign to Estonians (mean 2,9). The last score was also statistically significantly different from the teachers’ mean ( $p=.0000$ ). Once again I would like to raise the question of the way Christianity is presented in our historical textbooks.

Looking at the means scored by university students, one significant change is seen, when looking at the means for the statement about religious canons. Before the studies in Christianity the scored mean was 2,78, after studies 2,49. Once again we can point on the statistically significant difference ( $p<.0002$ ).

Statement “*Religion obstructs free development of a human*” scored means 3,62 by teachers and 3,5 by pupils. Interesting difference occurred in the evaluation by students before and after their studies in Christianity (from 3,23 to 3,75). Difference is statistically significant ( $p=.0000$ ).

### 2.2.6. Religious knowledge

Statement “*Knowledge about religions is necessary to understand the world’s cultural heritage*” scored remarkable low score, especially by teachers (1,71) and university students (1,66 before and 1,62 after studies). The mean of secondary school students – 2,2 is statistically significantly different ( $p=.0000$ ) from others. The reasons for such difference require future investigation.

Certain agreement was identified with the statement “*Religion helps to deal with ultimate questions*” (means 2,6 by teachers and secondary school students and 2,3 by university students). Slightly lower mean of university students could indicate that these questions are more important to older students.

It is interesting to note that teachers agree much more with the statement “*RE defends pupils from extremist religious groups*” (mean 2,17) than young people. The difference with pupils is statistically significant ( $p=,0000$ ). Probably it is obvious that young people are more self-confidence in this point.

## Conclusion

Drawing some conclusions from discussion above following could be said:

- 1) In comparison with the critical debates in the Internet, one can see that the wider chart of attitudes regarding religion is more positive, colourful and balanced than those in the Internet.
- 2) If comparing the attitudes towards religion and RE of university students before and after the studies in Christianity, in eight cases it is possible to point on the positive influence of RE upon one’s attitudes regarding religion.

The rate of disagreement rose about the following statements:

1. History of Christianity is soaked through with violence.
2. Religious canons demand unconditional obedience.
3. Religion obstructs the development of Science.
4. Religion obstructs free development of people.
5. Science liberates people from religious trammels.
6. Positions of Christianity clash with contemporary Science.

The rate of agreement rose about the following statements:

7. Every human being believes into something.
8. Believers are morally better people than others.

3) Last but not least – there seems to be a certain degree of agreement about the necessity of RE in school curricula: 75% of university students and 78% of teachers agreed on this. The rate of agreement is similar to some other wider studies on this question. For example in the broad survey “Concerning life, belief and religious life in Estonia”, carried out in 2000, 88% of respondents supported RE in schools (Hansen). Thus – let us hope that the development of RE in Estonian schools will help to overcome the shadows of the atheistic propaganda and to rise the level of religious literacy in the society.

### *Personal endnote*

Let us turn back to the beginning – what really happened in Tartu Town Hall Square on the Monday, 23rd of April 2003? As everybody could see in evening news program “Aktuaalne kaamera” in response to the wide campaign, especially via Internet, demonstrators gathered to carry through a shamanistic ritual with casting spells and conjuring wisdom also to somebody, called P. V. Demonstration had about ten participants. “Much ado about nothing” – as it also came out from the wider research.

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## Vai tur ir kaut kas vairāk par krusta kariem, inkvizīciju un opiju tautai?

*Kopsavilkums*

Raksts aplūko reliģisko izglītību (RI) kā vienu no aktuālākajiem diskusiju objektiem Igaunijas sabiedrībā gan 20. gs. 20. gados, kad tika veidota jaunās nacionālās valsts skolu sistēma, gan atjaunotajā brīvvalstī.

Igaunijas vēsturē pirmā tautas referenduma rezultātā (1923. gada februārī) nekonfesionālā RI ar 72% balsu pārsvaru tika iekļauta skolu mācību programmā kā izvēles priekšmets. Pēc padomju okupācijas ateistiskās ideoloģijas ietekmes uz divām igauņu paudzēm RI mācīšana atkal kļūst iespējama 1991. gadā, kad Igaunija atjauno savu neatkarību. Saskaņā ar Igaunijas likumdošanu nekonfesionālā RI ir izvēles priekšmets. Vairākus nozīmīgus jauninājumus šī priekšmeta attīstībā atnesa 2003. gads – jaunu RI koncepciju, kas balstīta uz tajā izmantoto kontekstuālo teoloģiju un izglītības sociāli konstruktīvistisko teoriju (Valk, 2002b), un izstrādātu jaunu mācību programmu un mācību materiāliem. Šie notikumi, kad par tiem tika informēti plašsaziņas līdzekļi, sacēla jaunus strīdu viļņus sabiedriskajā domā, parādot kritisku attieksmi pret reliģijas jautājumiem (piem., izglītības ministra prof. T. Maimetsa (*T. Maimets*) paziņojums intervijā, ka obligātā RI būtu apkaunojums Igaunijai).

Salīdzinot ar senākajām debatēm par RI, kā jauns diskusiju mēdijs ir jāmin internets. Rakstā uzmanība pievērsta vienam no interneta portāliem – DELFI.

Raksta pamatā ir empīriski pētījumi, kas sniedz atbildes uz vairākiem jautājumiem: Kāds priekšstats par reliģiju (un no tā izrietoši, – arī par RI) dominē interneta diskusijās? Vai internetā paustais viedoklis sakrīt ar citu sabiedrības locekļu domām par doto tēmu? Vai, balstoties uz empīriskajām studijām, ir iespējams minēt kādus pieņēmumus par to, kā iespējams mazināt skeptisko attieksmi pret reliģiju?

Atbilstoši uzstādītajiem uzdevumiem raksts strukturēts divās pamatdaļās: 1) atsevišķu diskusiju analīze interneta portālā DELFI; 2) socioloģiskajās aptaujās iegūto rezultātu apskats, kas atspoguļo noteiktu sabiedrības grupu (skolēnu, skolotāju, humanitāro zinātņu studentu) attieksmi pret reliģiju un RI. Nobeigumā sniegti analītiski secinājumi par iespējamām ietekmēm uz studentu attieksmi pret reliģiju.

### 1. Empīriskais pētījums *Diskusiju analīze portālā DELFI*

Kopējā statistika par rakstiem un to komentāriem dažādās DELFI rubrikās laikā no 2003. g. janvāra līdz 2004. g. jūnijam: rakstu skaits par reliģiskām tēmām – 75; par citām tēmām – 541. Komentāru skaits par reliģisko tēmu rakstiem – 2318; komentāru skaits par citu tēmu rakstiem – 118. Reliģiskās tēmas ir absolūti vispopulārākās DELFI diskusijās: salīdzinot reliģijas tēmu komentāru skaitu ar visu pārējo tēmu komentāriem, atšķirība ir apmēram 20 reizes. Kopumā nevar nepamanīt, ka lielākā daļa no komentāriem ir kritiski, dažreiz pat zaimojoši attieksmē pret reliģiju.

Lai gūtu dziļāku ieskatu, autore analīzei izvēlējusies komentārus par rakstu “Izglītības ministrija velti niknojas”, ko 2003. gada 21. aprīlī publicējis “Brīvās Eiropas” žurnālists T. Haugs (*T. Haug*). (T. Hauga raksts ir reakcija uz minēto izglītības ministra noraidīto attieksmi pret RI.) Četrās dienās raksts saņēmis 537 komentārus no 172 komentētājiem. Tikai trīs personas komentārus paraksta ar savu vārdu, pārējie lieto pseidonīmus. Tas nozīmē, ka interneta diskusijās nav iespējams identificēt īsto dalībnieku izcelsmi.

Analīzes rezultāti: 1) dotajā komentāru virknē izteikti dominē komentāri ar negatīvu attieksmi pret reliģiju un RI (40%); 2) pozitīva attieksme pret reliģiju un RI sastopama 20% komentāru; 3) ievērojams skaits komentāru ir nederīgi un nav saistīti ar pētāmo tēmu (40%); 4) tikai apmēram puse komentāru (gan negatīvu, gan pozitīvu) izmanto argumentus; 5) iespēja rakstīt komentārus anonīmi veicina tendenci rupji izteikties, sevišķi cilvēkiem, kuri ir kritiski pret kristietību. Šī iemesla dēļ DELFUS dēvē par “*sabiedrisko tualeti*”; 6) saturiski galvenos kritiskos apgalvojumus var virknēt sekojošās grupās:

- **Reliģija un vardarbība:** kristietības izplatīšanās ir cieši saistīta ar vardarbību (krusta kari, inkvizīcija, raganu prāvas utt.). Vārdos kristieši sludina mīlestību un žēlastību, bet veids, kā to sasniegt, ir vardarbīgs.

- **Reliģija un zinātne** ir antagoniskas. Reliģija kavē zinātnes attīstību.

- **Reliģija un likumdošana:** RI ir cilvēktiesību pārkāpums. Izmantojot RI, Baznīca negodīgi cenšas palielināt savu ietekmi un baznīcēnu skaitu.

- **Reliģija un morāle:** kristietība rada liekulību. Reliģija dzīvē neparāda saistību ar morāli.

- **Reliģija un personiskā dzīve:** reliģija ir veids, kā izbēgt no realitātes, tas ir opijs tautai. Tā ir domāta tikai vājiem cilvēkiem. Reliģija kavē cilvēka brīvu attīstību. Baznīca nepieļauj šaubas un nepaklausību.

Lasot komentārus DELFI, likumsakarīgs ir jautājums, – cik lielā mērā internetā paustie viedokļi pārstāv īgāņu sabiedrības viedokli?

**2. Empīriskais pētījums Sabiedrības attieksme pret reliģiju** ietver trīs socioloģisko aptauju aprakstus: 1) skolotāju anketēšana (157 respondenti). Aptauja veikta 2001. gadā vienpadsmit Igaunijas dažādu rajonu skolās – gan pamatskolās, gan vidusskolās; ar un bez RI pieredzes (Valk, 2002a); 2) skolēnu anketēšana (102 respondenti). Aptauja veikta trijās skolās, kas piedalās *RI Pilotprojektā* (Valk, 2002b); 3) studentu anketēšana. 2004. g. tika aptaujāti Tartu Universitātes humanitāro specialitāšu studenti pirms kristietības kursa apguves (276 respondenti) un pēc šī kursa apguves (324 respondenti).

Visās aptaujās tika izmantots līdzīgs apgalvojumu saraksts par reliģiju un RI. Apgalvojumu saraksts tika sastādīts 2001. gadā, balstoties uz analīzēm par RI diskusijām Igaunijas plašsaziņas līdzekļos (Valk, 1999). Visās anketās tika izmantota līdzīga vērtējumu skala: 1 – noteikti piekrītu, 2 – piekrītu, 3 – nezinu, 4 – nepiekrītu, 5 – nekādā ziņā nepiekrītu. Dati tika analizēti, izmantojot STATISTICA paketi. Rezultātus skat. 3. tabulā Pielikumā.

Iegūtie rezultāti tiek iztirzāti atbilstoši augstākminētajām apgalvojumu grupām:

- **Reliģija un vardarbība.** Visās respondentu grupās piekrītošas atbildes ir saņēmuši sekojoši apgalvojumi par reliģijas saistību ar vardarbību: “*Reliģija ir tikusi izmantota kā līdzeklis, lai strādniekus piespiestu paklausīt kungiem*” (1. apgalvojums), “*Kristietības vēsture ir pilna ar vardarbību*” (2.), “*Kristietība gadsimtiem ilgi ir tikusi īgāņiem uzspiesta*” (3.). Šādu piekrišanu var skaidrot kā iespaidu no īgāņu vēstures mācību grāmatās sastopamās reliģijas paradigmas, kur kristietība traktēta negatīvi – padomju ateistiskā ideoloģija uzsver īgāņu kristīšanu ar varu krusta karu laikā 13. gs. Tajā pašā laikā pret izteikumu “*RI ir vēl viens smadzeņu skalošanas piemērs*” (5.) dominē noliedzoša attieksme, kas skaidri norāda, ka respondenti nenosoda RI kā garīgu vardarbību.

• **Reliģija un zinātne.** Izpratne par reliģijas un zinātnes antagonismu bija raksturīga padomju ideoloģijai. Šodien, kā rāda tabula, lielākā daļa respondentu vairs nepiekrīt izteikumiem “*Reliģija kavē zinātnes attīstību*” (7.), “*Zinātne atbrīvo cilvēkus no reliģijas paliekām*” (8.), “*RI kavē zinātniskās domāšanas attīstību*” (9.). Vairāk piekrišanas ir atziņām, ka “*Kristietības nostādnes konfliktē ar mūsdienu zinātni*” (10.) un “*Kristietību nevar uztvert nopietni, jo tajā ir daudz pretrunu*” (11.).

• **Reliģija un likumdošana.** Izteikti noliedzošā attieksme pret apgalvojumu “*RI ieviešana pārkāpj ticības brīvības principu*” (12.) liecina, ka studenti, kuri ir iepazinušies ar RI, šādu problēmu vairs nesaskata. Tāpat respondenti lielākoties neuzskata, ka RI ir līdzeklis, lai Baznīca palielinātu savu ietekmi (15.).

• **Reliģija un morāle.** Uz šo grupu attiecas trīs apgalvojumi (16.–18.). Lielākā daļa respondentu uzskata, ka reliģija nepadara cilvēkus par liekuļiem. Interesanta atšķirība parādījās skolotāju un audzēkņu viedokļos par apgalvojumu “*Ticīgie ir morāli labāki cilvēki par citiem*” (18.): skolotāju viedoklis ir daudz optimistiskāks nekā audzēkņu.

• **Reliģija un personiskā dzīve.** Pārsvarā pozitīva attieksme parādās pret apgalvojumu “*Ticība palīdz pārvarēt grūtības un vilšanos*” (20.). Vispiekrītošākie rādītāji ir Universitātes studentiem pirms un pēc kristietības studijām. Te nepieciešama tālāka fona izpēte: kādu lomu attieksmes veidošanā spēlē ateisma radītā klišeja “reliģija ir priekš vājajiem”, un kāda ir personiskās pieredzes loma. Negatīvie izteikumi, piem., “*Reliģija ir veids, kā izbēgt no reālās dzīves*” (21.), “*Reliģiskie kanoni prasa bezierunu paklausību*” (22.), “*Pēc savas būtības kristietība ir sveša igauņiem*” (24.) saņēma neviennozīmīgu vērtējumu. Iztirzājot apgalvojumu par reliģiskajiem kanoniem (22.), var pamanīt pārmaiņu Universitātes studentu atbildēs: pirms kristietības studijām uzrādās statistiski lielāks piekrītošu atbilžu skaits. Interesanta atšķirība atklājās studentu vērtējumos par apgalvojumu “*Reliģija kavē cilvēka brīvu attīstību*” (25.): pirms kristietības studijām vērojamā piekrītošā attieksme manāmi rūk, iegūstot zināšanas par kristietību.

• **Reliģiskās zināšanas.** Apgalvojums “*Zināšanas par reliģijām ir nepieciešamas pasaules kultūras mantojuma izpratnei*” (26.) saņēma ievērojamu piekrišanu, sevišķi skolotāju un Universitātes studentu vidū. Vidusskolēnu viedoklis ir ievērojami negatīvāks, un tā cēloņi prasa tālāku izpēti. Zināma piekrišana tika konstatēta apgalvojumam “*Reliģija palīdz atrisināt lielos jēgas jautājumus*” (27.) Universitātes studentu atsaucība var norādīt uz to, ka šie jautājumi ir nozīmīgāki vecākiem jauniešiem. Interesanti piezīmēt, ka izteikumam “*RI pasargā jauniešus no ekstrēmistiskām reliģiskām grupām*” (28.) skolotāji piekrīt daudz vairāk nekā jaunieši. Acīmredzami, ka jaunieši šajā ziņā jūtas daudz pašpārliecinātāki.

### 3. Secinājums

Izdarot secinājumus par abiem empīriskajiem pētījumiem, var apgalvot, ka: 1) salīdzinot ar kritiskajām debatēm internetā, plašākas sabiedrības attieksmju spektrs pret reliģiju ir pozitīvāks, daudznozīmīgāks un līdzsvarotāks; 2) salīdzinot Universitātes studentu attieksmi pret reliģiju un RI pirms un pēc kristietības studijām, astoņos gadījumos iespējams norādīt uz RI pozitīvo iespaidu – pieauga noraidošā attieksme par sekojošiem apgalvojumiem: *Kristietības vēsture ir pilna ar vardarbību; Reliģiskie kanoni prasa bezierunu paklausību; Reliģija kavē zinātnes attīstību; Reliģija kavē cilvēka brīvu attīstību; Zinātne atbrīvo cilvēkus no reliģijas paliekām; Kristietības nostādnes konfliktē ar mūsdienu zinātni.*

Pēdējais, bet ne mazāk nozīmīgais – liekas, ka jautājumā par nepieciešamību pēc RI sabiedrībā ir izveidojusies zināma piekrišana attieksme: to apliecina 75% Universitātes studentu un 78% skolotāju. Piekrišanas rādītājs ir līdzīgs dažām citām plašākām šī jautājuma studijām, piem., pētījumā “Par dzīvi, ticību un reliģisko dzīvi Igaunijā”, kas tika veikts 2000. gadā, 88% respondentu atbalstīja RI skolās (Hansen). Pastāv cerība, ka RI Igaunijas skolās palīdzēs pārvarēt ateistiskās propagandas ēnas un pacelt reliģiskās izglītības līmeni sabiedrībā.

## Pielikums

3. tabula

**Vidējās skalas rādītāji un standartnovirzes (SN) apgalvojumiem par reliģiju un RI, anketējot skolotājus, vidusskolēnus un universitātes studentus pirms un pēc kristietības studijām**

Apgalvojumi	Skolotāji		Vidusskolēni		Universitātes studenti pirms studijām		Universitātes studenti pēc studijām	
	N=157		N= 102		N= 276		N= 324	
	Vidējais	SN	Vidējais	SN	Vidējais	SN	Vidējais	SN
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Reliģija ir tikusi izmantota kā līdzeklis, lai strādniekus piespiedu paklausīt kungiem	2,71	1,20	2,46	0,99	2,51	1,17	2,56	1,22
2. Kristietības vēsture ir pilna ar vardarbību*	2,67	1,10	2,51	0,98	2,16	1,01	2,49	1,13
3. Kristietība gadsimtiem ilgi ir tikusi uzspiesta igauņiem	2,89	1,32	2,59	1,07	2,77	1,21	2,89	1,19
4. Kristietības izplatīšanās vienmēr bijusi saistīta ar vardarbību	3,07	1,10	2,75	1,0	3,2	1,23	3,19	1,22
5. RI ir vēl viens smadzeņu skalošanas piemērs	3,95	0,98	4,21	0,98			4,24	1,01
6. Reliģija sniedz pilnīgas atbildes uz visiem jautājumiem	3,76	0,95	3,8	1,1	4,14	1,22	3,93	1,11
7. Reliģija kavē zinātnes attīstību*	3,87	0,88	3,46	0,96	3,42	1,27	3,89	1,1
8. Zinātne atbrīvo cilvēkus no reliģijas paliekām*	3,24	0,92	3,22	1,03	3,11	1,16	3,51	1,07



## 3. tabulas turpinājums

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
9. RI kavē zinātniskās domāšanas attīstību	<b>3,76</b>	1,03	<b>3,38</b>	1,05			<b>3,9</b>	1,1
10. Kristietības nostādnēs konfliktē ar mūsdienu zinātni*	<b>3,15</b>	1,02	<b>2,73</b>	0,91	<b>2,64</b>	1,17	<b>3,06</b>	1,2
11. Kristietību nevar uztvert nopietni, jo tajā ir daudz pretrunu	<b>3,38</b>	0,95	<b>2,99</b>	1,0	<b>3,46</b>	1,04	<b>3,57</b>	0,99
12. RI ieviešana skolās pārkāpj ticības brīvības principu	<b>3,8</b>	1,12	<b>4,07</b>	1,16			<b>3,96</b>	1,12
13. Kompetence reliģijas lietās ir nozīmīga ticības brīvībai	<b>2,03</b>	0,95	<b>1,89</b>	0,94	<b>1,9</b>	1,12	<b>1,72</b>	0,96
14. RI jāizturas vienādi pret visām reliģijām	<b>1,87</b>	1,09	<b>1,49</b>	0,83			<b>1,54</b>	0,95
15. Baznīca cenšas palielināt savu ietekmi un baznīcēņu skaitu, izmantojot RI	<b>3,28</b>	1,01	<b>3,45</b>	1,18			<b>3,49</b>	1,19
16. Reliģija padara cilvēkus par liekuļiem	<b>3,64</b>	0,99	<b>3,41</b>	1,11	<b>3,63</b>	1,09	<b>3,65</b>	1,18
17. Reliģija palīdz izdarīt pareizu morālo izvēli	<b>2,31</b>	1,03	<b>2,5</b>	0,98	<b>2,46</b>	1,14	<b>2,28</b>	1,02
18. Ticīgie ir morāli labāki par citiem*	<b>3,04</b>	1,06	<b>3,92</b>	1,1	<b>3,94</b>	1,2	<b>3,52</b>	1,19
19. Katrs cilvēks kaut kam tic*	<b>2,43</b>	1,03	<b>1,63</b>	0,96	<b>2,16</b>	1,13	<b>1,5</b>	0,95
20. Ticība palīdz pārvarēt grūtības un vilšanos	<b>2,28</b>	1,04	<b>2,28</b>	0,95	<b>1,93</b>	0,95	<b>2,05</b>	0,98
21. Reliģija ir veids, kā izbēgt no Istenības	<b>3,69</b>	1,19	<b>3,58</b>	1,06	<b>3,61</b>	1,26	<b>3,61</b>	1,15
22. Reliģiskie kanoni prasa biežāku paklausību*	<b>3,23</b>	0,96	<b>2,98</b>	0,87	<b>2,78</b>	1,12	<b>3,11</b>	1,05
23. Baznīca nepieļauj nepaklausību	<b>3,41</b>	0,97	<b>3,13</b>	0,99	<b>2,95</b>	1,31	<b>3,21</b>	1,21
24. Kristietība pēc būtības ir sveša igauņiem	<b>3,52</b>	1,08	<b>2,9</b>	0,99	<b>3,28</b>	1,15	<b>3,34</b>	1,13
25. Reliģija kavē cilvēka brīvību attīstību*	<b>3,62</b>	1,0	<b>3,5</b>	1,08	<b>3,23</b>	1,22	<b>3,75</b>	1,08
26. Zināšanas par reliģiju ir nepieciešamas, lai saprastu pasaules kultūras mantojumu	<b>1,71</b>	1,03	<b>2,2</b>	1,06	<b>1,66</b>	0,93	<b>1,62</b>	0,995

3. tabulas turpinājums

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
27. Reliģija palīdz atrisināt lielos jēgas jautājumus	2,61	0,99	2,6	0,94	2,34	1,18	2,3	1,1
28. RI pasargā jauniešus no ekstrēmiskām reliģiskām grupām	2,17	1,03	3,09	1,06				1,05

\* Statistiski ievērojamas atšķirības attieksmē pirms un pēc kristietības studijām.



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