

Reverend Bishops,
Dear churchpeople,
Dear guests!

The Estonian state and the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church started out together. The Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church started as a free people's church in Tartu ninety years ago, the Republic of Estonia started as a democratic state a little over six months later. Those two beginnings are very closely related – not only by the events ninety years ago, but also by much more recent ties.

The birth of written culture in Estonia is, through literacy, directly and inextricably related to the church, translations of the Bible, hymn and prayer books. Without the Lutheran church's requirement that both girls and boys must be able to read their catechism, Estonians would never have acquired the literacy that enabled them, in the 19th century, to read Perno Postimees, and this way, to grow into a civilised nation. All this is what makes us part of the European cultural space. Even if we do not conceive this ourselves, and even for those who have not gone to church for several generations. We owe a great deal of Estonia's European roots to the Protestant church. The spiritual space that shaped our thinking has given us strength to endure.

Otherwise, we might have been assimilated – this is what happened to so many other Finno-Ugric peoples. Or perhaps we would have embraced the ideology of foreign powers, made a fetish of their attributes, and worshipped their deities. The shaping of Estonian statehood, and the period preceding it – the time of national awakening – also has strong ties to the church, the work of pastors Jakob Hurt and Villem Reimann and many others – to say nothing of the time when Estonia already was an independent country.

According to our Constitution, state and church are separate. Estonia is probably one of the most secular states this side of France. With Lutheran perseverance, we have embraced Martin Luther's doctrine of two kingdoms (Zwei Reiche Lehre), the separation of God and government. Yet the state and the church do not lead separate lives, members of the church are part of our state. The Church has grown and suffered with the country.

This constitutional separation is in fact fortunate for the church, especially in two respects – as a freedom and an opportunity.

Separation from the state means a great freedom to the church. It means the freedom not to ask for the state's approval, freedom not to serve as a mouthpiece for some politician or a tool for the state – an occurrence not unknown in some countries even today. It also means freedom to fight against the dictate of an unethical state, as Pastor Harald Tammur did – he struggled against the paganism of two dictatorial occupying powers, the Nazis and the Communists, and was imprisoned by both. He won that battle many decades later. But he did win.

This way, I come to the other aspect of the separation of church and state. It is also an opportunity. If people or the state are neglecting ethical principles, becoming unethical, then it is the church that, relying on its freedom, can lend a helping hand and remind them of some simple basic truths. For example that thou shalt not steal – or lie.

I am inclined to think that the church could be more outspoken when it comes to voicing opinions on matters of ethics. Some would say that this would mean interfering with matters of state, but I would like to ask them – where is your own ethical voice? We are facing a dilemma here. The separation of church and state has gone so far that in case of legally correct but unethical matters, people lack the ethical touchstones for measuring the deeds that are formally legal but still unethical. Here, the voice of the church that is separate from the state would have more weight and credibility. As a psychologist I know that words touch our hearts and are a powerful means of shaping human beings. Words are the tool of the church. But words are a tool only when made use of. A tool hanging in a shed is nothing but a mere object.

As a state, Estonia is a whole, and her security is a whole. We have brave policemen, border guard and defence forces. Yet also ethical and moral security is essential. Unfortunately, there is too much inconsideration, boasting and bragging. Ethical norms are deficient, happiness is measured in money and the insolent and presumptuous become heroes. They have no moral scruples, in fact, their bragging gets only haughtier.

This is where the church comes in – it has the opportunity as a free people's church and a duty proceeding from its own articles of faith to support the state in providing moral security. This is not an easy task – rather, it is a hard and arduous one, but the more necessary for that.

A free people's church is more aware of the needs of the modern society. These are also relevant to the role of congregation members in the church and in society, which both are essentially free.

Finally. It is especially significant that today's festive ceremony is taking place in St. John's Church in Tartu, with its terracotta sculptures that are so important to European cultural heritage. Next door, we can see the Hugo Treffner Secondary School – not, of course, the original Treffner schoolhouse where the first Church Congress took place, but a school named after him. This is the meeting place of the long traditions of the church, our European identity, enlightenment work and the Word of God.

I extend my best wishes of happiness and fortitude to all members of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church.

Thank you!