

SUMMARY

*„The Visible Church“: Lutheran Church
Construction in Livland and Estland During
the Reign of Alexander II (1855–1881)*

Following the 1832 ecclesiastical law, Lutheran church governments of Russia's Baltic provinces were subordinated to the central control of Saint Petersburg. The Faculty of Theology at Dorpat University still stood as the stronghold of Lutheran theology. More knowingly than ever before, professors of theology took the responsibility for Lutheran teachings, fostering theology based on confessional Lutheranism and securing the church's position with liturgical reform and particular decorating practices in the churches. The general understanding at the time was that artworks in the church have a missionary function. Therefore, even during reconstruction work, the decoration of a church was changed.

Theodosius Harnack, professor of systematic theology, played an important role as an initiator of liturgical reform and of a movement to decorate churches. The design of a church had to complement the service culminating in communion – altar and commemoration of sacrificial death of Christ. This approach was also reflected in art during the second half of the 19th Century, when old altars and altar paintings were replaced.

Many of Harnack's colleagues followed his lead in creating a “visible church”. As a result of their persistent efforts, decorating parish churches became a common enterprise for congregation members. There was a clear unity in the Lutheran church art on Estonian inhabited territories during the era of Alexander II, especially in Northern Livland. This harmony was achieved by contacts between theologians and rectors, and also by personal contacts with artists. The altar painting tradition changed to some extent in 1879, when Estonian artist Johann Köler finalised his apse fresco “Come to me all...” in Reval *Kaarli* Church. Nevertheless, it did not mean that the tradition of the depiction of Christ's death had disappeared, but rather it paved the way towards more “soft” themes in Estonian church paintings. This, in turn coincided with the deepening liberalisation of Lutheran church and theology and the emergence of Estonian national consciousness during the final decades of the century.