

PETRA KUIVALA

THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CHANGE  
PERSPECTIVES FROM FINLAND  
ACCORDING TO RECENT DEBATE

The 21<sup>st</sup> Century has meant great changes in attitudes towards Christianity. The situation is the same for all Christian churches in modern Europe. People are asking, what is the credibility of Christianity today. Does anyone need the church anymore?

In these modern times it's trendy to be an individual, to forget about traditions and history, to make your own history. It's also trendy to say you don't need the church, you don't need religion – it's also easy to see in Finland that people don't practise religion like they did 100 or even 50 years ago. Church is no more as vital, energetic part of the common society as she used to be; she's been pushed to her own corner and told to mind her own business only. The tension between the public life, economics and politics and the private life including spirituality and faith is obvious. Yet the church is still breathing, still surviving. People are still turning for church in their quest for answers they don't seem to find anywhere else<sup>1</sup>.

This article strives to draw a picture of the Lutheran spirituality of Finnish people and the topics of discussion in the church recently. Firstly, this article

---

Petra Kuivala – student of theology at the University of Helsinki, Finland. She spent the first semester of 2010/2011 as an Erasmus-student at KUL. In the future she wishes to specialize in the modern Catholic Church that continues to amaze and surprise her. As a future minister she has also spent a long time wondering the essence of the Lutheran church in Finland, mainly as an active member and a theologian with more questions than answers. Contact information: petra.kuivala@helsinki.fi or Mäkelänkatu 13 B 31, 00550 Helsinki, Finland.

<sup>1</sup> K o m u l a i n e n 2009 12-15; K ä ä r i ä i n e n et al. 2003, 149.

describes and illuminates the Finnish spirituality and attitude towards the church and Christian faith through fascinating statistics. Secondly, the recent topics of public debate are presented as the questions and challenges of the church in current time. In the end a sight will be cast into the future: what can we say from all of this – and where are we going? The first part of this article, the section of Finnish spirituality, is based primarily on statistical surveys conducted by the Church Research Institute. The second part, illustrating the current debate and questions of the church, is based on articles, news and editorials published in the major publications concerning Lutheran issues in Finland as well as recent academic research on the contemporary and future perspectives. The name of the church in question is officially The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. In this article the church is referred to as the Lutheran Church for simplicity's sake.

#### I. MEMBERSHIP AND SPIRITUALITY IN THE LIGHT OF STATISTICS IN THE LUTHERAN CHURCH OF FINLAND

What makes Finnish people Lutheran? How are they? What's the spirituality of modern Finnish people like? What's the meaning of the long history of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland?

Statistics reveal that 78,2% of Finnish people are members of the Lutheran church today. It means 4.2 million Lutherans. In 2010, more than 83 000 people left the church. In 2009 the number of people running away was almost half smaller. On the other hand, a record was broken also in the people joining the church: in 2009 somewhat 12 000 people signed into the church. In 2010 the number was 13 000 – still not very comforting. The amount of people running out of the church still outnumbers the people willing to join into a Lutheran community. What on Earth made the numbers drop so quickly?<sup>2</sup>

In 2009 77% of Finns described themselves are Lutherans – but only 45% claimed actually to have Christian faith. From this it's easy to see that being Lutheran is part of the national identity in Finland. On the other hand, Finnish people are tolerant for other Christian churches. There are minorities of members of the Catholic Church (10 500 members in Finland) and Orthodox Church (the second national church with 63 000 members) as well. The Pen-

---

<sup>2</sup> P a l m u 2010, 25-33.

tecostal Church exists, so do the Jehova witnesses. There are fast-growing Muslim communities in Finland, mainly in Helsinki and other big cities. They are also small movements of Buddhism and Hinduism. The religious field can be compared to any West-European country, especially in Helsinki<sup>3</sup>.

Only 13% of Finns were not members of any religious community in 2003<sup>4</sup>. This number has grown massively during the recent years. There seems to be two currents in resigning from the church. The first group to resign is the active Christians with a theological emphasis that differs radically from the lines drawn by the bishops and church council – the official organs of the church. Those are the loud, demanding members who simply want to change something in the church. They are the ones to resign and join some other group, most often a minority movement that's somewhat separated from the church due to theological reasons. The second group of people leaving the church is the average, normal Finnish people who perceive the church merely as an institution instead of having a personally committed devotion. They are the ones who react to the current debate and decide not to be a name in the list of members for the institution they don't have any personal relationship to<sup>5</sup>.

It should be noticed that the so-called „new atheism” is barely known in Finland; only 3% described themselves as atheists in 2003<sup>6</sup>. From this we can see that resigning from the Lutheran church doesn't mean signing into some other religious community. Neither does it necessarily mean losing all faith and converting into atheism. It merely means not wanting to be a member of the church anymore<sup>7</sup>.

65% of Finnish people say they are religious<sup>8</sup>. That means they find and cherish some kind of (Christian) spirituality in themselves. 74% say they believe in God – but only 31% say they believe in what the church is teaching about God as a whole<sup>9</sup>. It is obvious that people recognize a Christian dimension in them but don't associate it with the church. It's also interesting

---

<sup>3</sup> Hytönen et al. 2002, 31-32; Komulainen 2009, 15-21; Salonen 2001, 16-17.

<sup>4</sup> Kääriäinen et al. 2003, 125.

<sup>5</sup> Kääriäinen et al. 2003, 136-139.

<sup>6</sup> Kääriäinen et al. 2003, 122.

<sup>7</sup> Palmu 2010, 43-45.

<sup>8</sup> Kääriäinen et al. 2003, 122.

<sup>9</sup> Kääriäinen et al. 2003, 152-153.

that 50% of Finnish people believe in angels, whereas only 33% believe in the existence of Satan, a true personal evil<sup>10</sup>.

Finnish people are known to be lazy when it comes to waking up on a Sunday morning and heading for a mass usually starting at 10 a.m. Only 14% attend some kind of religious event at least once a month – and not even necessarily a mass. Men seem to be less eager to enter a church than women: according to statistics, half of men under 35 years are completely passive in religion. In comparison, more than 90% of women older than 64 years believe in the existence of God. Experience shows that it's always the same people who go to church; members practising their faith actively do it regularly. It's also easy to see that there are more women than men sitting in the church on a Sunday morning<sup>11</sup>.

The members of the church can be divided into three groups. The first group is the minority, the active believers who actually practice their religion in public events such as the mass. They attend services and consciously use their time for religious activity. This group usually consists of elderly people, adults pass their middle-age, and on the other hand the most active youth<sup>12</sup>.

The second group is the people who don't attend almost any services or events organized by the church. They are members usually due to tradition, national identity or common useful purposes (e.g. supporting the charity work) – but not because of personal devotion. They don't find the church to have anything for them. They just stay as members since they've always done so. This is also the group to react to public debates and arguments. In times of tension, they tend to „wake up” and leave the church that seems to have little meaning for them, anyway<sup>13</sup>.

The third group is the one covering most of the Finnish Lutheran people. It's a group consisting of members who go to church when there's a reason to (be it personal or cultural) and claim to have a Christian identity and belief-system, even if not actively shown. This group is the basis of the still large membership of the church; in many ways, they are the foundation of the church. From this group, many great descriptions arise. They are called the members of the broad, stable church who „belong but don't attend”. In their own, quiet Christian spirituality their acts can be described as „being

---

<sup>10</sup> K ä ä r i ä i n e n at al. 2003, 162.

<sup>11</sup> K ä ä r i ä i n e n et al. 2003, 165-167; 194.

<sup>12</sup> K ä ä r i ä i n e n et al. 2003, 212-215.

<sup>13</sup> K ä ä r i ä i n e n et al. 2003, 216-218.

without practising”. In the eyes of the church they are also part of risk group when it comes to leaving the church. In the growth of this group we can also see the effect of secularization in this broad audience. They might practice religion only occasionally and due to cultural reasons – this makes them vulnerable when it comes to choosing whether to stay or to go<sup>14</sup>.

47% of Finns pray at least once in a month. It’s common to say that you talk to God when there’s something to tell – that’s the mentality in Finland in general. Praying seems to be a way to express a specific concern, thought, question or hope to God – it’s definitely not small-talking. Remembering this it makes sense that only 23% pray every day. Every fourth Finnish person prays when entering an airplane. Praying is the special way to practice religion in private – something very typical of Finnish spirituality<sup>15</sup>.

So what can we say about this? Being Finnish somewhat means being Lutheran. The Lutheran church has a long and important history in Finland – that makes it a part of the national identity. This is also where the Lutheran church becomes credible in the eyes of Finns: the long tradition doesn’t guarantee success in the modern days, but at least the voice of the church is heard at the questions concerning the church and her place in the society. It can be said that the church has earned justification for her place in the social life by staying as stable element in the Finnish history<sup>16</sup>.

Finnish Christianity and religiosity have a very private nature. Practising spirituality in privacy, through contemplation, praying and solitude, is more popular than expressing one’s spirituality in public by attending mass or other kinds of religious events<sup>17</sup>.

The culture of expressing personal spirituality could be changing, however. Whereas the older generations prefer prayers and Bible studies, the young generation (16-35 years) wishes to develop new ways of worship and start a new culture of spirituality within the church. For example masses with pop/rock/heavy metal tunes have gained big popularity in the recent years. The most adventurous are organising a mass with Latin rhythms and salsa dancing. Some of them even indulge in liturgical dancing. As always in the Finnish church, a small but strong minority is opposing all of this and requi-

---

<sup>14</sup> K ä ä r i ä i n e n et al. 2003, 133-147; 215-216.

<sup>15</sup> K ä ä r i ä i n e n et al. 2003, 174-179.

<sup>16</sup> H y t ö n e n 2002, 33-36; K ä ä r i ä i n e n et al. 2003, 108-116; 147; P a l m u 2010, 27-28.

<sup>17</sup> K ä ä r i ä i n e n et al. 2003, 174.

ring that the spiritual life should return back to its origins: learning to know the Bible and concentrating on private contemplation<sup>18</sup>.

There is a saying: „Finnish people want three things from the church: water, rice and sand”. This illustrates the meaning of church in the most important moments of human life: birth, partnership and death. 88% of infants born in Finland (to Finnish parents) are baptised as members of the Lutheran church. Infant baptism is a vital cultural element, it’s popular due to tradition and the lack of competing alternatives<sup>19</sup>.

The one thing church has a good reputation in is the work done with teenagers<sup>20</sup>: 91% of 15-year-olds go to the confirmation school and receive their first Eucharist<sup>21</sup>. This is where the two sacraments of the church, baptism and Eucharist, come together. The infants baptised into Christianity and the membership of the church are invited to attend the confirmation school during the year of their 15<sup>th</sup> birthday. The confirmation school means applying the teaching of faith and catechism when the teenagers have already been baptised as infants; it means explaining why the teenagers are members of the church and what having Christian faith actually means. The school consists of six months of meetings, teaching and attending church events. It ends with a week-long camp that offers a unique opportunity to take the time and stop at the questions of human existence, faith and spirituality. People usually cherish the memories of the camp as positive, a genuine experience of spirituality and faith. The confirmation school is usually perceived as a foundation for growing towards Christian identity in the years to come, even in hindsight. The confirmation school ends with receiving the first Eucharist and being confirmed into the faith that was promised to them at the moment of baptism<sup>22</sup>.

The question of Christian matrimony has been on the board in the recent years. In 2001, 69% of marriages were performed in the church, not as civil marriages<sup>23</sup>. The popularity of civil marriages performed by the state magistrate is growing as the debate fuels on. Lately the question of gender-neutral marriage has been on the board both on the political field and in church. Should homosexuals be given the Christian matrimony? Should all matrimo-

---

<sup>18</sup> H y t ö n e n 2002, 64-68, 75-80; Palmu 2010, 204-206.

<sup>19</sup> K ä ä r i ä i n e n et al. 2003, 181; S a l o n e n et al. 2001, 37-38.

<sup>20</sup> S a l o n e n et al. 2003, 40.

<sup>21</sup> K ä ä r i ä i n e n et al. 2003, 182-183.

<sup>22</sup> H y t ö n e n et al. 2002, 64-69, 167-171; S a l o n e n et al. 2001, 40-42.

<sup>23</sup> K ä ä r i ä i n e n et al. 2003, 180.

nies be converted into civil marriages – should the church only have a role in giving a blessing, not the matrimony itself?<sup>24</sup>

When it comes to the last years of human life, the meaning of church obviously grows bigger. 89% of people want to have a Christian funeral. Here it's also a question of not having popular other alternatives; Christian funeral is simply the one way people are used to perceive the end of life<sup>25</sup>.

Baptism, confirmation and matrimony are still clearly constructions that are essentially Christian parts of the Finnish society. According to several surveys, they are also the main reasons for remaining a member of church. It's interesting that these strongly culture- and life span-related rites are even more important reasons for membership than actual spiritual reasons and perceiving church as a community of faith<sup>26</sup>.

In conclusion we can say that the church can touch the everyday life only of a minority of Finnish people. At the most important moments of human life, however, the church is strongly present. This is due to both religious and cultural reasons. There are always members with a personal devotion and spirituality, just as there are members with a loose spirituality and members with no spirituality but membership nonetheless<sup>27</sup>.

Most of the members of the church people believe in Christian God, the Holy Trinity – but they don't believe everything the church teaches. God is an abstract construction that's easy to believe. It seems to be less easy to believe what the church is teaching about God, life, moral and transcendent. Perhaps this is also why Finnish people practise religion in privacy – church is the place you only go to when you have to or you specifically want to<sup>28</sup>.

Finnish people respect the church for the work it's doing in the society, though. Church is considered to be the one institution taking care of the weak, tired, sick and poor ones. Church is heard as the voice of the forgotten people in a Scandinavian welfare state<sup>29</sup>. The critics say church is an old institution that uses difficult, strange language and speaks about topics not

---

<sup>24</sup> P a l m u 2010, 91-100; S a l o n e n 2001, 38.

<sup>25</sup> K ä ä r i ä i n e n et al. 2003, 183; S a l o n e n et al. 2001, 38.

<sup>26</sup> K ä ä r i ä i n e n et al. 2003, 183-184.

<sup>27</sup> K ä ä r i ä i n e n et al. 2003, 185-186; S a l o n e n et al. 2001, 17-20, 32-39.

<sup>28</sup> K ä ä r i ä i n e n et al. 2003, 255-257; P a l m u 2010, 29; S a l o n e n 2001, 17-19.

<sup>29</sup> K ä ä r i ä i n e n et al. 2003, 183.

familiar with everyday life. On the other hand church is the institution drawing people in for answers – if they first come up with the question<sup>30</sup>.

Some people argue that Finnish Christianity in the Lutheran Church is tasteless, boring and grey. That might be true – but it's the form of Christianity people obviously want to have in Finland. It's obvious there are two levels of Christianity: the level of the church and the level of personal spirituality. Although membership to the church is popular, it is not a proof of personal devotion or even an active commitment to the church. Despite of all this, it wouldn't be fair to say Finnish people were less religious – they are just religious in their own way, which usually consists of individual, passive spirituality instead of active, public practicing of faith. God exists in the hearts and souls, but for feeling that you don't necessarily have to hike up to the church<sup>31</sup>.

## II. THE RECENT CONTROVERSY IN THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN FINLAND

It all started in 1986, when the ordination for priesthood was opened for women. Following that, a furious debate took place in the church – and it still does, even today<sup>32</sup>. The next big thing was the speculations about when there would be a female bishop in the church. After that it was time to face the secularization of Europe, changing economics and politics in Finland (especially after the economically devastating low-season in the 90's), and the new religious field with people leaving the church and other religions entering the country on a growing speed<sup>33</sup>. The latest blow came in October 2010, when the already noticed question of homosexuals as Christians and members of the church was broadcasted into the sight of everyone living in Finland<sup>34</sup>. This chapter will illustrate some of the questions and trails of debate that characterize the Evangelical Lutheran Church of today. Sources of this chapter consist of articles, comments and public letters in the Finnish media during the past few years as well as research on the contemporary topics.

---

<sup>30</sup> K ä ä r i ä i n e n et al. 2003, 253-255, 256-257; S a l o n e n et al. 2001, 20.

<sup>31</sup> H y t ö n e n et al. 2002, 22–26; P a l m u 2010, 31; *Salonen* et al. 2001, 20-24.

<sup>32</sup> P a l m u 2010, 79-80.

<sup>33</sup> S a l o n e n et al. 2001, 10-14.

<sup>34</sup> P a l m u 2010, 91-93.

### 1. *The Interpretation of the Bible tearing the Church apart*

The first questions we have to think about regard the essence of the church and the tradition of understanding the Bible as a source of revelation and guidance for Christianity. Who are the church? The bishops, the councils, the priests or the lay people? At times of debate people are wondering how the concept of a church should be understood. In Finland it's rather typical to see the church as an institution rather than a community of believers. This is why the concept of church is often used as a synonym for bishops, priests, other employees of the church – or the actual institution running the bureaucracy of the church. When the church is dealing with questions concerning secular life, it's sometimes hard to see either a distinction or a connection between secular and sacred within the same church<sup>35</sup>.

The church has 10 bishops; each equal with each other. When there's a public debate, the equality gives the media a big power to choose who to quote. The church can be presented in a very different light depending on which bishop is interviewed; some of them are more liberal, some of them more conservative. The voice of the church varies from day to day<sup>36</sup>. When there's no one clear authority minding the issues of debate in the church, the result is not only an appearance of obscurity. The church trembles also from within. As already mentioned, various movements are striving to get their own policy through since there is no clear policy in the church as a whole. Bishops and the Church Council are the highest decisive organs of the church – but even they disagree on some specific matters (most recently the so-called homosexuality debate). Sometimes even the employees of the church are confused: who should they listen to, to which line is everyone free to make their own decisions, when is it right to go solo – when is it wrong? What is the true voice of the church coming through all these obstacles – and who has it?<sup>37</sup>. Is there just one truth that everyone should obey to?<sup>38</sup>

In times of debate, theologians and Christians turn to seek for the answers in the Holy Revelation. The advice given in the Evangelical Lutheran Catechism is to read the Bible through the history of salvation – to see the saving effort of God and his Son in everything written in the Book. This leaves

---

<sup>35</sup> Niemelä, 3.4.2003; Hytönen 2003, 40, 297; Palmu 2010, 74, 160-165, 186-187.

<sup>36</sup> Hytönen et al. 2001, 181-183; Hytönen 2003, 40-50.

<sup>37</sup> Kotimaa 21.3.2011; Huovinen 2007, 113-115; Hytönen et al. 2002, 126-130; Hytönen 2003, 40-50, 297; Palmu 2010, 65, 186-187.

<sup>38</sup> Kauppinen 2008, 167-169.

a lot of questions open. It doesn't make any statements about just how strictly one should read the Bible. Should everything be taken literally, also regarding the Old Testament, or should the message of grace cross all the rules, regulations and statements also about social and public life<sup>39</sup>.

Different Finnish Lutheran communities read and interpret the Bible differently. When there's a debate, it *always* comes down to asking, „Who knows the right way to read the Bible?“ – who is right about interpretations, who knows the true will of God expressed in the Bible, who owns the true voice and thus the true authority in the church?<sup>40</sup>

## 2. *Revivalist movements disagreeing with the Church*

The question about interpreting the Bible is especially essential when it comes down to minority movements inside the Evangelical Lutheran Church. There are five revivalist movements inside the Finnish church. In 2004, 11% of members of the Evangelical Lutheran church claimed to be members of a revivalist movement<sup>41</sup>.

The revivalist movements are small communities, each with their own doctrinal and moral emphases<sup>42</sup>. They can be a huge positive element of the church; for many the movements offer a safe community that's practising faith in a more intense way than the broad church seems to do. They are especially known for organising gigantic summer festivals with more than 100 000 people gathering to worship, pray and meet each other. They lay special emphasis on different theological aspects, such as sin, contemplation, thankfulness and grace<sup>43</sup>. How are the minority movements facing the current position of the church?

In recent years some of the movements have gained attention in the media through their relationship with their mother church. Some of the issues that are dividing the opinions of the movements include the questions of priesthood, homosexuality and the so-called gender-related marriage. The most famous example is the movement called Evangelicalism. They are known for emphasizing the joy in faith, freedom from sins and sorrow and thankfulness in everyday life. Their association, SLEY (The Evangelical Society of The

---

<sup>39</sup> H u o v i n e n 2007, 113-115; K o i v i s t o 2007, 28-36.

<sup>40</sup> P a l m u 2010, 65-66.

<sup>41</sup> Kirkon tutkimuskeskus 2008: 103, 239.

<sup>42</sup> S a l o n e n et al., 2001, 71.

<sup>43</sup> K ä ä r i ä i n e n et al. 2001, 70-73; Niemelä 4.11.2004; Kirkon tutkimuskeskus 2008: 103, 239-240; S a l o n e n et al. 2001, 71-72.

Finnish Lutheran Church, freely translated), is also known for rejecting female priests. They are also organizing their own masses with only male celebrants<sup>44</sup>.

Another example of the inner division of the church is Luther Foundation, a group of rather conservative Lutherans forming a group under the Mission Province of Sweden. In 2010 the foundation elected a bishop on their own, illegally according to the church law. This bishop is to give ordination to men only. Referring to the question of how to read the Bible, the foundation naturally says that they are right to read St. Paul literally<sup>45</sup>.

As already mentioned, the question about priesthood is still slightly open. Priesthood was opened for women more than 20 years ago. Nowadays there are 2300 priest working in parishes all over Finland. 38 % of them are women and the number is growing. For the everyday life and lay people the gender of the priest is no longer a matter of arguments. On the field of theology and more radical ideas, the issue is still burning. There are still (male) priests refusing to co-operate with female priest; the latest debate has been revolving around a parish in Helsinki that has decided occasionally to celebrate the mass with male priests only. For some of the revivalist movements the question of women as priests was the first reason to take a distance to the broad church; these movements still don't acknowledge any other Lutheran priests than men<sup>46</sup>.

The next question concerns the above-mentioned issue of homosexuality in the church. Why has it become such a turning-point for the church? October 2010 meant difficult times for the church. After a public debate between people for and against gay marriage on the national television, more than 80 000 people left the church in the following three months. The reality check was hard: in one night it became obvious that church had been avoiding this question just a little too long. The topic had been in the air for years but it had always been pushed a bit further into the future. In the last months of 2010 the members voted with their feet. Most of them claimed to leave the church because it didn't feel important to be a member of an institution that's not living in the current society but in the Middle-Ages. Some

---

<sup>44</sup> Niemelä 4.11.2004; P a l m u 2010, 31-32.

<sup>45</sup> Kotimaa 18.3.2011.

<sup>46</sup> Niemelä, 3.4.2003; K a u p p i n e n 2008, 167-170; P a l m u 2010, 31-32, 79-84.

of the people leaving stated to have resigned exactly because of the intolerance towards minorities<sup>47</sup>.

The big question is should the marriage between people of same sex be equal to Christian marriage of a man and a woman. Can homosexual partnership be equal in the terms of having a Christian marriage and a relationship in the eyes of the church? Should there be a specific ceremony for giving matrimony to homosexual couples?<sup>48</sup>

So far the church is saying no. Marriage is a special Christian concept that's to be between a man and a woman. Yet 25% of priests very hoping for a Christian marriage for homosexuals in 2002. At the moment a homosexual couple can have a moment of prayer with a priest who finds it's appropriate. Not every priest feels that way – the choice of having a prayer is left for one's conscience to decide. Marriage with the Christian ceremony is, at least at this moment, out of question. The conservative members of the church –especially the evangelical movement– are satisfied, the more liberal believers confused. The most conservative Lutherans are saying we've gone too far; the most liberal are demanding more and faster. Once again, time will show what's to come out of this<sup>49</sup>.

After asking all these questions it has to be admitted that the church is not united. There are many radically differing opinions and moral estimations. So far the church has been able to keep the opinions, theological lines and voices of conscious under the same roof. But if the opinions keep on growing into opposite directions, the future might seem unstable and unpredictable<sup>50</sup>.

### III. THE FUTURE IS STILL UNCLEAR AS THE CONTROVERSY AND DEBATE ARE GROWING INSIDE THE CHURCH

With all the different voices within the same church, at some point the bishops, priests and believers have to stop and ask, „How much can you disagree?“ The church rejoices with the ideal of uniting all the different theological aspects and thoughts under the same Lutheran confession. The

---

<sup>47</sup> H y t ö n e n 2003, 229-238; P a l m u 2010, 91-97.

<sup>48</sup> H y t ö n e n 2003, 238-244; P a l m u 2010, 100-102; R a u n i o 2007, 93-94; S a l o n e n 2003.

<sup>49</sup> H y t ö n e n 2003, 238-244; P a l m u 2010; 91-96, 99-102, 206; R a u n i o 2007, 113; S a l o n e n, 2003.

<sup>50</sup> Niemelä 4.11.2004; P a l m u 2010, 137.

strength of the Lutheran church in Finland has always been her tolerance. There is a saying, „The Finnish church has a high ceiling, wide walls and a low doorstep”. It’s the treasure of the church, it’s what gives the church her characteristics. The church is just as multicoloured as are the members in their essence and practice<sup>51</sup>.

The policy of tolerance has allowed several strong theological lines to develop inside the church. Where is the borderline from which on the church can no longer be united if all movements are going their own way? How long will the church be able to maintain the policy of patience, dialogue and tolerance among all these groups? If a division is meant to happen, who will initiate it – the church as a broad concept or the marginal groups themselves? Will the church announce a limit that the marginal groups can’t cross or will they break away from mother church themselves? Would everyone be happier if the most radical movements divided from the church? And where do normal Finnish people stand in this?<sup>52</sup>

The Evangelical Lutheran Church is still respected in many areas of social life, for example in charity<sup>53</sup>. The debate of the recent years, on the other hand, has shown that people still care about the church: they have opinions and they want to know, what the church is doing and where it’s going. Even if people don’t actually go to the church, they follow the debate on their own living room and form opinions about the church – after all, they are members themselves<sup>54</sup>.

There is no easy answer to the current situation. The big question is, will the church stay together or will it be separated in some in the future – for example, will the most radical revivalist movements announce a break to independency. What’s the meaning of the history and tradition? Who will stay in the church, what decisions will the church make? Can the church stay credible in the eyes of the Finnish people? What will Finnish Christianity look like in the future?<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup> H y t ö n e n et al. 2002, 59-63; H y t ö n e n 2003, 40-50; K a u p p i n e n 2008, 167-170; K ä ä r i ä i n e n et al. 2001, 20; P a l m u 2010, 145-147.

<sup>52</sup> K a u p p i n e n 2008, 167; K ä ä r i ä i n e n et al. 2001, 77-80; M i k k o l a et al. 2007, 134-135.

<sup>53</sup> K o m u l a i n e n 2009, 15-17; S a l o n e n et al. 2001, 20-21.

<sup>54</sup> M i k k o l a et al. 2007, 134-138.

<sup>55</sup> H y t ö n e n et al. 2002, 11; P a l m u 2010, 147.

It's true that the pressure on the church is coming from outside for some parts: from the society, from the politics<sup>56</sup>. But there's no way to see the members of the church –the believers– as pressure coming from outside, too. It can't be ignored that the people striving for changes are part the church: they are the believers and also some of the employees. No matter how much the state and public media are pressing the church, the church has to critically view her own acts. The church has simply spent a long time avoiding the difficult questions and not giving clear answers<sup>57</sup>.

The church might seem stable and long-standing in the tradition and Finnish society<sup>58</sup>. The church is, however, possibly more divided from within than ever before in her history. This is the first time in centuries the church is standing on the edge of something new. There's no going back to the old. There are voices among the workers of the church saying it's about time to make decisions and draw lines; even employees are tired of not knowing what is the official policy and to which limit it has to be respected. There are radical movements outside the church, eager to point a finger and criticize. There are people who don't know what to think about all of this. And then there are people for whom the church is still meaningful, still vital, still alive<sup>59</sup>.

No one knows yet what will happen in the years to come. The ones with a view over the decades of the church are pessimistic about any change; it's possible that the church will keep up her life with all the same discussions, debates and conflicts like before. Perhaps that's the core feature of Finnish spirituality: always to doubt, always to live among conflicts. It sure isn't as boring as one might assume. The most comforting voice is the one coming through all the buzzing of the arguments: the eternal task of the church, the gospel, can't be overshadowed by timely questions. There are still people knocking on the doors of the church, and as long as there are believers –no matter how quiet and shy– there's still work to be done<sup>60</sup>.

---

<sup>56</sup> Niemelä, 3.4.2003; H y t ö n e n 2003, 297.

<sup>57</sup> H y t ö n e n 2003, 297-300; M i k k o l a et al. 2007, 134-138.

<sup>58</sup> S a l o n e n et al. 2001, 7-14.

<sup>59</sup> H y t ö n e n et al. 2002, 19-20; K o m u l a i n e n 2009, 15; P a l m u 2010, 149-150; 206-209; 212-213.

<sup>60</sup> H y t ö n e n et al. 2001, 198-199, 204-205; P a l m u 2010, 208-209.

## SOURCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

## Sources

- Kotimaa „Matti Väisänen on piispani ja meitä on 18.3.2011 monta”. Kotimaa 18.3.2011.  
 Kotimaa Lehti ja herätysliikejärjestöt käynnistivät 21.3.2011 eheytyiskampanjan. Kotimaa 21.3.2011.  
 Niemelä, Kati Vastustajista tuli kirkolle ongelma. 2003 Aamulehden torstaivieras 3.4.2003.  
 Niemelä, Kati Kirkon sisällä on kansanliikkeitä. 2004 Aamulehden torstaivieras 4.11.2004.  
 S a l o n e n K.: Neljäsosa papeista puoltaa homoparien 2002 siunaamista. Crux 3/2002.

## Bibliography

- Kirkon tutkimuskeskus Monikasvoinen kirkko. Suomen evankelis – 2008 luterilainen kirkko vuosina 2004-2007. Publications of the Church Research Institute, 103.  
 H u o v i n e n E.: Raamattua Raamatulla. – Kirkko 2007 Raamatun tulkkina. Suomen eksegeettisen seuran julkaisuja 94.  
 H y t ö n e n M.: Kirkko ja nykyajan eettiset kysymykset. 2003 Publications of the Church Research Institute 2003:80.  
 H y t ö n e n M., P ö y h ö n e n V.: Mihin menet Suomen kirkko? 2002 Kirjapaja Oy, Helsinki.  
 K a u p p i n e n J.: Takaisin kirkkoon. Tutkimus aikuisena 2008 kirkkoon liittyneistä Tampereella 1996-2006. Publications of the Church Research Institute, 2008:104.  
 K o i v i s t o J.: Oikea tapa tulkita Raamattua. – Kirkko 2007 Raamatun tulkkina. Suomen eksegeettisen seuran julkaisuja 2007:94.  
 K o m u l a i n e n J.: Monien uskontojen Suomi. – Luterilaisen 2009 Suomen loppu? Edita, Helsinki.  
 K ä r i ä i n e n K., N i e m e l ä K., K e t o l a K.: Moderni kirkkokansa. Suomalaisten 2003 uskonnollisuus uudella vuosituhanella. Publications of the Church Research Institute, 2003:82.  
 M i k k o l a T., N i e m e l ä K., P e t t e r s o n J.: The Questioning Mind. Faith and Values of 2007 New Generation. Publications of the Church Research Institute, 2007:58.  
 P a l m u H.: Suomen kirkon tulevaisuus? Kipukohtia, 2010 ongelmia ja mahdollisuuksia. Kustannusosakeyhtiö Sammakko, Helsinki.  
 S a l o n e n K., K ä r i ä i n e n K., N i e m e l ä K.: The Church at the Turn of the Millennium. 2001 Publications of the Church Research Institute 2001:51.  
 R a u n i o A.: Rekisteröity parisuhde luterilaisen teologian 2007 ja etiikan näkökulmasta. – Homoseksuaalisuus Raamatussa ja kirkon opetuksessa. Publications of the Church Research Institute 2007:101.

 PRZEMIANY W EWANGELICKIM KOŚCIELE LUTERAŃSKIM W FINLANDII  
 W ŚWIETLE AKTUALNYCH DEBAT

## S t r e s z c z e n i e

Petra Kuivala, studentka teologii na Uniwersytecie w Helsinkach, nakreśla kilka charakterystycznych rysów Kościoła luterńskiego w Finlandii. Jak sama zaznacza, w tekście znajduje się więcej pytań niż odpowiedzi wobec współczesnych wyzwań Kościoła, którego jest aktyw-

nym członkiem. Całość została podzielona na trzy zasadnicze części. Pierwsza dotyczy analizy bieżącej sytuacji w oparciu o dane statystyczne, druga jest poszukiwaniem odpowiedzi na pytania, które stawia współczesność, trzecia – zakończeniem. W cel pracy wpisuje się również badanie wiarygodności Kościoła.

Pierwszy rozdział (*Przynależność kościelna i duchowość Finów w świetle badań statystycznych*) stanowi próbę charakterystyki fińskiego sposobu przeżywania wiary. Według statystyk obecnie 78,2% ludności Finlandii należy do Kościoła luteranckiego, co daje 4.2 mln wyznawców. W 2010 r. jednak ponad 83 000 wiernych opuściło Kościół, o połowę więcej niż w roku 2009. Z drugiej strony w 2010 do Kościoła wstąpiło ok. 13 000 osób, co nie jest perspektywą pociesającą. Z 77% Finów, deklarujących się jako luteranie w 2009 r., tylko 45% utrzymuje, że aktualnie wierzy na sposób chrześcijański. Stąd łatwo dostrzec, że bycie luteraninem jest w Finlandii częścią tożsamości narodowej. Z drugiej podkreśla się tolerancję wobec innych wyznań. Główne Kościoły tam obecne to: Kościół katolicki, prawosławny, zielonoświątkowcy, Świadkowie Jehowy, małe grupy buddystów i hinduistów oraz szybko rosnąca wspólnota muzułmanów. Tylko 13% Finów nie należy do żadnej grupy religijnej. Przyczyny rezygnacji z aktywności w Kościele są dwie: inna wizja teologiczna Kościoła niż ta prezentowana przez oficjalne organy kościelne (biskupów i sobór) oraz postrzeganie Kościoła przez większość wyłącznie jako instytucji. Warto zauważyć, że tylko 4% ludzi określa siebie jako ateistów. Jeśli chodzi o religijność, to 61% osób twierdzi, że są religijni. To znaczy w ich mniemaniu, że odnajdują w sobie jakiś rodzaj duchowości chrześcijańskiej. 74% mówi, że wierzy w Boga, ale tylko 47% wierzy w to, co Kościół naucza o Bogu. Warto dodać, że 50% Finów wierzy w anioły, podczas gdy tylko 33% uznaje istnienie szatana jako osobowego zła.

Następnie omówiona jest aktywność religijna w Finlandii. Tylko 14% osób raz w miesiącu uczestniczy w jakimś nabożeństwie, przy czym niekoniecznie jest to msza święta [oczywiście inaczej rozumiana niż w Kościele katolickim czy prawosławnym – przyp. red.]. Członków Kościoła można podzielić na trzy grupy. Pierwsza, mniejszościowa, to wierni aktywni, którzy poświęcają czas na działalność religijną, zwykle są to ludzie starsi, dorośli po wieku średnim oraz aktywna młodzież. Druga grupa to ci, którzy prawie wcale nie uczestniczą w nabożeństwach czy wydarzeniach religijnych. Należą do Kościoła ze względów tradycyjnych, tożsamości narodowej czy profitów materialnych (otrzymywanie pomocy od organizacji charytatywnych). Są w nim, ponieważ zawsze w nim byli. To jest również grupa, która najmocniej reaguje na debaty publiczne. Trzecia grupa, do której należy najwięcej członków Kościoła luteranckiego to ci, którzy utrzymują, że posiadają tożsamość chrześcijańską i system wierzeń, nawet jeśli aktualnie tego nie pokazują. Często określa się ich jako członkowie ogólni, Kościół stabilny, wierzący niepraktykujący. 47% Finów modli się przynajmniej raz w miesiącu. Powyższe dane zostały zinterpretowane jako przejaw duchowości prywatnej nastawionej raczej na indywidualne przeżywanie wiary niż wyrażanie jej publicznie. Wraz z młodszym pokoleniem w Kościele powstaje nowa kultura duchowości. Zawiera ona elementy pochodzące z kultur młodzieżowych, czyli muzyki rockowej lub metalowej w czasie liturgii, a nawet rytmy latyno-amerykańskie. Dobrze ocenia się przygotowanie w ramach tzw. szkoły bierzmowania do przyjęcia Pierwszej Komunii. Na taki półroczny kurs zakończony tygodniowym obozem uczęszcza 91% 15-latków. Jako ilustracja powyższych danych może służyć powiedzenie, że Finowie oczekują od Kościoła trzech rzeczy: wody, ryżu i piasku. Są to symbole trzech najważniejszych momentów w życiu: urodzin, małżeństwa oraz śmierci, których Finowie nie wyobrażają sobie bez religijnych ceremonii mocno wrośniętych w ich kulturę. Generalnie Kościół w niewielkim stopniu oddziałuje na życie codzienne swoich członków, chociaż w chwilach ważnych jest obecny. Ponadto ludzie doceniają zaangażowanie społeczne Kościoła. W opinii publicznej na temat Kościoła przeważa jednak głos krytyki jego instytucjonalności, hermetyczności języka oraz rozmijaniania się podejmowanych tematów z życiem codziennym.

Druga część artykułu (*Współczesne kontrowersje w fińskim Kościele luteranckim*) dotyczy aktualnych wyzwań i trudności. Pierwszą z nich jest ordynacja kobiet, możliwa od roku 1986. Następnie problem stanowi brak jedności w reprezentowaniu Kościoła na zewnątrz. Na jego czele stoi 10 biskupów, z których wszyscy są sobie równi. Z racji różnicy zdań między nimi co do spornych kwestii, obraz Kościoła, zwłaszcza przedstawiany w mediach, różni się w zależności od tego, który z biskupów się wypowiada. Nie ma jasnego autorytatywnego przedstawiania rozwiązań w debacie o Kościele, skutkiem czego wydaje się on pękać od środka.

Kolejną kwestią sporną jest sposób czytania i interpretowania Biblii. Katechizm Ewangelików Luteranckich zaleca czytać Pismo Święte w kluczu historii zbawienia, jednak nie podaje już, na ile ściśle należy to czynić. W związku z tym różne wspólnoty różnie interpretują słowo Boże. Ciekawym zagadnieniem jest różnorodność ruchów wewnątrz tego Kościoła. Odnajdujemy w nim pięć mniejszościowych ruchów, z których każdy ma swoje teologiczne i moralne akcenty. W działalności ruchów można zauważyć wiele pozytywów, m.in. praktykowanie wiary w bardziej intensywny sposób oraz gromadzenie podczas letnich festiwali więcej niż 100 000 ludzi na modlitwie. Z drugiej strony stosunek ruchów do Kościoła macierzystego jest często zachwiany, co naświetlają media. Najbardziej znany to ruch ewangeliczny. Podkreśla się w nim radość z wiary, wolność od grzechu i smutku oraz dziękczynienie za codzienne życie. Odrzuca się święcenia kobiet. Msze organizowane przez ten ruch są celebrowane wyłącznie przez mężczyzn. Innym przykładem jest Fundacja Luterancka, grupa która również nie święci kobiet oraz uznaje jedynie literalną interpretację listów św. Pawła. Warto dodać, że jeśli chodzi o księżki-kobiety, to stanowią one 38% ogółu duchownych, liczących 2300 osób.

Ważną kwestią dyskutowaną powszechnie jest stosunek Kościoła do homoseksualizmu. O randze tego problemu może świadczyć fakt, iż po publicznej debacie z października 2010 r. na ten temat w ciągu trzech miesięcy odeszło z Kościoła 80 000 osób. Przyczynę upatruje się w unikaniu tego problemu przez Kościół zbyt długo. W sprawie małżeństw homoseksualnych na razie Kościół luterancki wypowiada się negatywnie, choć dopuszcza asystencję i modlitwę księdza przy takim akcie. To rodzi kolejne napięcia między poszczególnymi frakcjami w Kościele, gdzie liberałowie chcą iść dalej aż do pełnej zgody, a konserwatyści chcą utrzymać *status quo*. W związku z tym zostaje postawione pytanie o stopień zgody, do jakiego można się jeszcze posunąć w ramach tolerancji. Tolerancja była zawsze siłą Kościoła w Finlandii, który jawił się jako różnorodny w praktyce i wierze. Jednak gdzie znajdują się ramy, poza którymi nie można już będzie mówić o jedności?

Artykuł wieńczy stwierdzenie o daleko posuniętej segmentaryzacji Kościoła luteranckiego w Finlandii. Co więcej, pomimo znacznego wpływu, jaki posiada Kościół na życie społeczne i kulturalne, trzeba szybko nakreślić linie rozwoju i podjąć decyzje w oficjalnej polityce, które muszą być respektowane. Pocieszającym może być fakt, iż ludzie wciąż pukają do drzwi Kościoła i dlatego tak długo, jak będą wierni, tak długo Kościół ma zadanie do wypełnienia.

*Streścił ks. Rafał Pokrywiński*

**Key words:** The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, membership, spirituality, religious activity, secularism, recent controversies and debate, future development.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Ewangelicki Kościół Luterancki w Finlandii, członkostwo (w Kościele), duchowość, aktywność religijna, sekularyzacja, aktualne spory i debaty, przyszły rozwój.