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# The Idea of Mission in Finnish Clerical Lutheranism during the Continuation War 1941–1944

Jouni Tilli

*ABSTRACT. On 25 June 1941 Finland embarked on a war against the Soviet Union, as part of Germany's Operation Barbarossa. The war that was about to begin could be considered acceptable and even advantageous politically. However, theologically this was not necessarily the case. The topic of the article is how the war between the states of Finland and the Soviet Union could be justified publicly in relation to a religion whose core message is not to kill, to turn the other cheek to – and even love – the enemy. Due to the close and long-lasting relationship between the state, the army and the established church, Lutheran priests had a significant role in the war effort. The analysis shows that the answer provided by Finnish Lutheran priests to the question drew significantly upon two versions of missionary thought, the national mission and the world-historical one. The empirical material consists of articles, speeches, sermons and statements.*

**KEYWORDS:** religion, Lutheranism, clergy, mission, Finland, Second World War

## Introduction

The Winter War of 1939–40 cast the limelight on Finland. The world saw how a small nation was able to withstand an offensive by its gigantic neighbour, the Soviet Union. However, if the Winter War had been widely considered as “a defensive miracle” against a totalitarian dictatorship, the situation was more complicated when the so-called Continuation War broke out in June 1941. On 25 June 1941 Finland embarked on a war against the Soviet Union, as part of Germany's Operation Barbarossa. The war that was about to begin could be considered acceptable and even advantageous politically. It was hoped to rectify the 1940 Moscow Peace Treaty, which had concluded the Winter War and was seen in Finland as a disgrace. In addition, the war seemed to fulfill the nationalistic vision of Finland's “natural living space”. The question I want to consider here is how an offensive war in alliance with Nazi Germany could be justified in religious terms. For this purpose, I shall concentrate on clerical speeches, sermons and newspaper articles, in which the war and Finland's role in it was explicated in terms of biblical and religious analogies. Due to the close and long-lasting relationship between the state, the army and the established church, and the fact that 96 per

cent of Finns belonged to the Lutheran Church, Lutheran priests had a significant role in the war effort.

To begin with, in order to put the topic in perspective, I will examine briefly the biblical origins of missionary thinking. Second, I will discuss the relation between religion and nationalism, both in general and in relation to Finland. After presenting a brief background to the war, I analyse the application of missionary ideas in legitimization of warfare by representatives of the Finnish clergy during the Continuation War 1941–1944. As will be shown, the clergy drew on two versions of missionary thought, the national mission and the world-historical one. Together, the two forms illustrate how a mixture of religion and nationalism was used to dress Finland's war aims in rhetoric that emphasized the obligation to carry out a divine plan, in a way that is highly exceptional in democratic countries.

### On the Biblical Roots of Missionary Thought

According to Anthony D. Smith, there are four sacred sources underpinning modern nationalism. Firstly, conviction of being chosen by the deity, secondly, emotional, permanent attachment to terrains regarded sacred, thirdly, desire to recover the ethos of the heroic past, and fourthly, belief in the regenerative power of sacrifice for a glorious destiny. (Smith 2003: 30–32, 255–256.) Although taking into consideration the convergence of the four sources, the article focuses on the idea of chosenness and its repercussions in relation to missionary thinking. Following Smith (1992; 1999; 2003), I shall distinguish two main forms of thought present in the idea of divine election, namely covenantal and missionary. Both have their origins in the Bible.

To begin with, being God's instrument and the closely-related divine mission are derived from the Old Testament idea of divine election. As the text in Genesis (esp. chapters 9, 12 and 17) and

Exodus (chapter 19) narrates, God chooses a community (or certain individuals, like Moses) to fulfil His designs for the world.<sup>1</sup> It is God who chooses and the people respond. God's choice is expressed by a promise to the elected people, usually in the form of land, prosperity and power. Of course, the special and exalted role of the people depends on how well they follow divine precepts: a significant part of the covenant is to be adherents of "the true faith" and to observe certain moral, ritual and legal codes. Obedience to the sacred law then results in God revealing himself through signs and miracles witnessed by the community as a whole. Disobedience, in contrast, will lead to curses and abandonment. (Smith 1992: 441; 2003: 48–54.) As it will be shown, the idea of being God's chosen people was an integral part of clerical war rhetoric in Finland (see also Tilli 2013).

Second, in addition to the covenantal type, there is a more aggressive form of the divine election. In this version, the people (and their leaders) are entrusted with a task or a mission on behalf of the deity. As instruments of God, the people are seen to be executing His will and in this way hastening on the day of salvation. Very often the aims in this scenario are related to more universal purposes than that of one particular people. That is, the chosen people brings about universal salvation by carrying out its divine mission, and thus the salvation of all hinges on the conduct of the chosen few. (Smith 2003: 49, 51; Cauthen 2004: 20–3.) This means that trying to be holy is not enough. Rather, the community is obliged to follow a certain line of action in order to fulfil the divine will. Also missionary ideas were circulated in Finland during the war.

Third, combining elements from the earlier two, Christian universalization and spiritualization resulted in widening the redemption of the chosen people into a doctrine of proselytization. In Christianity the Judaic idea of the elected people waiting for their future messiah is transformed into a belief in Jesus as the Messiah. The idea is embodied in the Great Commission given by Christ to his disciples:

Then Jesus came to them and said, “all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:18–20, see also Mark 13:10.)

The Commission makes obedience to the true faith into expansive action. Firstly, preaching the Gospel is a divine mission of a rhetorical character; and secondly, since “all authority in heaven and on earth” belongs to Christ, missionary action takes precedence over all earthly demands or orders. Although controversy and tribulation are bound to follow, the Commission is not to be taken lightly, for the baptized will be saved and unbelievers will be condemned (Mark 16:16). According to the Finnish clerical adaptation of the idea, the population of Karelia needed to be Lutheranized. As will be shown, carrying out such a policy was not without consequences.

The roots of modern nationalist thought stem from the provision of biblical model for the nation. Very often the Bible was used as the mirror through which a nation was imagined and maintained (Smith 1999a). Divine predilection for a particular people was relatively swiftly applied by modern (Protestant) nations, in which especially Israelite parallels were a crucial model for the political community. (Hastings 1997: 187–205.) Also, the idea of a universal Christian regime has often been combined with missionary election (Smith 2003: 95–130; 1999a; Hutchison & Lehmann 1994; Stanley 2003). For example, in Russia the communion of the Orthodox Church and the tsarist empire led to a strong sense of divinely ordained mission to preserve the pure Christian faith. Similarly, France was considered as the eldest daughter of the universal Church and its king as *rex Christianissimus*. In England, in turn, the Puritan myth of missionary election became deeply incorporated in subsequent English nationalism to support expansionist and imperial endeavors. In this way in missionary thought particularism and universalism converged, giving birth to a powerful political ideology.

Nation thus became a sacred communion: an ethnic or linguistic community is seen as a holy congregation, and features pertaining to it become sacred. (Smith 1998: 23, 97–8; 2003: 33; Smart 1985: 18–26.) Consequently, numerous nationalist leaders have proclaimed their task to be to transform the world on the basis of their own true faith and the sacred task that has been entrusted to them. The result is not only a heightened sense of national identity but an unyielding conviction that the world needs change, to be brought about by persuasion or force – or both (Smith 2003: 95). Whether missionary or covenantal, belief in chosenness has been one of the main resources also for a modern sense of national identity (Smith 2003: 125). Accordingly, ‘nation’ is here seen as a construct forged from such pre-existing building-blocks as, for example, group-sentiments and religious traditions. Nationalism, in turn, is a project for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity of an actual or potential ‘nation’. (Smith 1991: 14–5, 72–4.)

In the next section I shall discuss the Finnish case, in which the role of traditional religion in the general development of nationalist thought has been particularly important. After that I will move on to analyze how Finnish Lutheran priests legitimated Finland’s offensive against the Soviet Union using missionary ideas.

## Religion and Nationalist Thought in Finland

The use of biblical ideas in Finnish nation-building can be traced to Lutheranism and the era of Swedish Empire. Sweden had a consciously-built, uniform national identity, in whose construction the Lutheran clergy contributed significantly. The Lutheran church as the state-church since the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century was of vital importance to the promulgation of national thinking. The clergy was closely supervised by the crown, and usually their sermons represented the official view. In state sermons ‘national political values’ were defined in terms understood by everyone. And also

secular announcements were published in churches. Priests as educated persons were influential opinion-leaders, especially among the uneducated majority, and through the lower clergy the monarch and the leading clergy men were able to control the teaching of the national values. (Ihalainen 2003: 38–9; 2005a.)

The strong union of Lutheranism, king and fatherland allowed the clergy to contribute to the construction of a national-state identity – love towards the fatherland, fellow-subjects and state was conceptualized and taught via biblical analogies. Thus in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century Sweden Israelite metaphors served as models for the political community. Political and spiritual identities became intertwined as national and religious identities were inseparable. The Swedish model of confessional uniformity as a ‘national church’ was understood to be the best way to construct the political identity as well. (Ihalainen 2005b: 583–8.) A result was that citizens were seen as indebted to the fatherland in a similar way as they previously had been urged to be grateful to God. It was a religious duty to love the fatherland, and true Lutheranism and patriotic love were presented as synonymous concepts. (Ihalainen 2005b: 592; 2005a: 190; 2003.)

Finns were understood as subjects being part of the kingdom, but, due to their different ethnic-cultural background, language and geopolitical location, as a separate people. (See Nordin 2000.) However, Swedish texts were immediately made available in Finnish in order to reach as many as possible. Hence also Finnish patriotic thought and later nationalism developed out of a Lutheran understanding of nationhood. As a matter of fact, the autonomous Finland as a part of Russian empire (1809–1917) sustained quite many elements of the national self-understanding constructed during the Gustavian period as an argument for autonomy and distinctive identity. (Ihalainen 2005c: 82–90; 2007: 43.)

During the era of autonomy, the Russian tsar(s) believed that the ministers of the Lutheran Church would provide the best means to uphold civility in the grand duchy of Finland. As a result, the Church retained its influential position, non-regarding the fact that the Russian tsar was Orthodox. It was responsible also for the national education system. Although the church act of 1869 defined the church and the state as separate entities, the Lutheran Church did not lose its socio-political position since its autonomy was still protected by the public law, and only the church had the right to propose changes to the legislature pertaining to it.

The impact of the Lutheran tradition was permanent to the Finnish society. It was relatively easy for the Finnish nationalist movement to build on the foundation laid by church's teachings of collective consciousness. Accordingly, 19<sup>th</sup>-century Finnish nationalism relied on religious conceptions (for example via Israelite metaphors) of the political community. Thus in modern Finnish nationalism Lutheran identity and national identity were seen as convergent. The 19<sup>th</sup> century ideological nationalism elevated the people as the source of sovereignty of the nation, but in Finland the religious concept of nation was not modernized in the same pace as in Britain, for example. (Ihalainen 2007; Kurunmäki 2000).

After the Civil War of 1918<sup>ii</sup> the church and the new state (despite being officially non-confessional) were still intimately connected, as for instance confessional teaching remained an important part of the developing public school system. The Law of Religious Liberty enacted in 1923 allowed citizens to establish also non-Christian denominations and not to belong to a religious community or church. However, they still were under strict statutes. All in all, Finnish nationalism derived lots of its concepts and formulas from the Lutheran tradition. Lutheran priests, in turn, proclaimed both the gospel and national belonging.



In wartime the role of priests and religious forms of nationalism were accentuated both at the frontline and home front. In WWII approximately half of the clergy served in the army as chaplains or education and propaganda officers, the other half was responsible for, for example, organizing funerals, delivering official information and providing much-needed support during hardships. At the highpoint, there were approximately 480 Lutheran chaplains in the Finnish army, of which 280 were positioned among the fighting troops. The military chaplainry was led by Field Bishop Johannes Björklund. The number of priests on the home front was twice the number of chaplains, i.e. approximately 1 000. (Salminen 1976: 56; Ojalehto 1979: 157; Kansanaho 1991: 165–173, 263.)

Next I shall discuss the two missions that Finland as divine instrument was claimed to have been fulfilling during the so-called Continuation War 1941–1944. Before that, however, a brief outline of Finland in the Second World War is necessary.

### Finland in the Second World War – a three-act play

World War II in the Finnish context is divided into three parts: the defensive Winter War (1939–40), the offensive Continuation War (1941–44) fought in alliance with Germany, and, after the Moscow Armistice, the Lapland War (1944–45), fought to drive the German troops out of Finland. The Winter War lasted 105 days, ending with the Moscow Peace Treaty on 12 March 1940. Finland had to cede the entire Karelian Isthmus as well as a large swathe of land north of Lake Ladoga. In total Finland lost over ten per cent of its territory and 30 per cent of the economic assets of pre-war Finland. Also importantly, twelve percent of Finland's population, over 400 000 Karelians, were evacuated from the ceded territory. Finland also lost parts of territory near the northeastern border, and four islands in the Gulf of Finland. In addition, the Hanko Peninsula had to be leased to the

Soviet Union as a military base for a period of 30 years. The region of Petsamo, captured by the Red Army during the war, was returned to Finland under the terms of the treaty. In Finland, the treaty was considered unfair, and it stirred up a revanchist mentality, not only among militarists or rightists. (Turtola 2006: 843–854.) On the other hand, the fact that Finland had not been invaded, the so-called miracle of the Winter War, was often seen as support for the conviction that Finland indeed was the chosen people of the North.

The 15 months between the Winter War and the Continuation War are known in Finnish historiography as the interim peace; it was widely believed that the treaty would be revised – one way or another. After the war Finland attempted to build binding treaties rather than relying on goodwill and national friendship, which had left Finland – despite international sympathy – to stand alone against the Soviet Union, the mistake of idealists in the world of real politics. Many obstacles were now put in Finland's way, due mainly to Moscow's fear that Finland would slide out of the sphere of Soviet influence. Consequently, the interim peace was characterized by intense tension between Finland and the Soviet Union. (Häikiö 2005: 13–21; Browning 2008: 158–161.)

However, mainly because of changes in Hitler's plans, Germany responded to Finland's call. By August 1940 Finno-German cooperation had progressed enough for Finland to allow Germany to maintain contact with its troops posted in northern Norway via Finland. Consequently, from late summer 1940 onwards, although Finnish politicians did their best to avoid arousing Soviet suspicions, high-ranking military officers visited Germany regularly and exchanged plans with their German colleagues about *Aufbau Ost*, which Hitler had started to plan in July 1940. Although this was not officially announced until spring 1941, in practice this meant that now Finland was an important part of Nazi Germany's planned invasion of the Soviet Union, Operation Barbarossa. (Häikiö 2005: 20–4.)

If the Winter War had been clearly a defensive one, the situation was more complicated when the Continuation War broke out in June 1941. Finland had been relatively unprepared to fight the Winter War and had had only poor quality equipment, but the Continuation War testified to the improved capability of the Finnish Army: the Finno-German offensive advanced rapidly on all fronts, and before winter began Ladoga Karelia, the Karelian Isthmus and Eastern Karelia had been (re)conquered. However, offensive warfare demanded much greater justification than defence. As we shall next observe, the idea of divine mission was of utmost importance in this task.

## The Continuation War 1941–44 as a World-historical Mission: Saving Christian Civilization

For quite many Finnish Lutheran priests the Continuation War was a historical mission given by God. For example Dean E. W. Pakkala proclaimed that “we Finns have the possibility of being the instrument of the Lord Sabaoth and the Lord of history” (Pakkala 1941: 4). The focus was on missionary thinking according to which the community believes itself to be divinely anointed to preserve and promote not only the true faith, but with cultural and political aims (that of the Finnish state) that are identified with a religious aim (see Cauthen 2004: 22). Drawing on the so-called bulwark myth, the argument was that Finland had been elected as the northern guard of Christian civilization (cf. Kolstø 2005).<sup>iii</sup>

Finland’s mission was to stand as the guardian of Western civilization and Christian tradition “against the destructive ideologies of the east in a defining battle not only for Finland, but for the future of the whole of Europe” (Kinos 1941: 1; Loimaranta Y. 1941: 1; Puhakainen 1942: 3). For example, Chaplain Eino Kalpa foresaw that the day was dawning and the night was going away,

and great tasks awaited Finland in the land that had been given to her due to her role as the “Northern protector of the Western Christian way of life and its juridical order”. (Kalpa 1941a: 2; see also Kaila 1941: 1.) Similarly, Professor of Church History Ilmari Salomies (1941a: 8) emphasized that throughout its history Finland had occupied the northern guard post in the “eternal battle of west against east” because Finns had always known so profoundly about “the threat of the east”. Fulfilling this task also guaranteed that Finland would receive her prize: “a glorious position” among the nations of the world. (Päivänsalo 1942: 4; Alanen 1941a: 4–5.)

Bishop Aleksi Lehtonen, in turn, proclaimed that “the praying and bleeding people of Finland” had been called to the battle from above. The crucial thing for the war was that Europe and the western nations would stand or fall depending on whether or not they opened their doors to Christ and whether or not the Gospel would be shut out of the new Europe that was about to emerge. Finland’s world-historical mission was connected to this threat: Finland was the bulwark that guaranteed that the former option would prevail. (Lehtonen 1942a.) Thus, as another bishop stressed, God’s mission to the Christian people of Finland was to pave the way for a better future for all Christendom (Mannermaa 1942a: 2).

Bishop Lehtonen emphasized that Finland’s war was unique in the history of the world, and this made one’s “heart pound with excitement”. It was only by accomplishing such historic tasks that peoples achieved a position and a future in the long development of mankind. Hence Lehtonen exhorted Finns to rejoice that the nation did not have to merely stand by in the great, decisive battle of the time. He also criticized “certain circles” that had not yet realized the true scope of the battle. It was certain that “facts will speak for themselves in time, and Finland’s battle will be seen in its historical significance”. (Lehtonen 1941a: 12; 1941b: 2; 1942b.)

The whole eastern front was seen to constitute a single scene of the same mission. For example, Major Kalervo Kurkiala, the chaplain of the *SS Freiwilligen-Bataillon Nordost*, i.e. a battalion of Finnish volunteers in *Waffen SS* fighting in Ukraine, declared that the Finnish SS Battalion was serving a “twofold patriotic mission” in the German army. He considered the volunteers to be part of the same divine mission that the Finnish Army was carrying out in East Karelia. Hence, according to him, it was acceptable to wage war as a part of the *Wehrmacht* because the eastern front was part of the same holy war against Bolshevism, being fought in order to create “a new order for Europe”. (Kurkiala 1942: 1–2.)

Taking a more far-reaching historical view, Professor Salomies compared Finland with other small nations that had allegedly been in a similar position. Finland was not merely an outpost of Western civilization; with her “eternal heroic battle” she had done a deed for the west that could be equalled only by the acts of the Hellenes of Ancient Greece (Salomies 1941a: 10). Interestingly, Finland was in this way connected to what was claimed to be a line of small nations fighting for the whole world, as stated by *Kotimaa*, the unofficial mouthpiece of the Lutheran Church:

It seems that at different times during history a nation – a small nation – is given the task of fighting for what is right and true. In the old times this was a task given to the Greeks, in the Middle Ages to the people of Switzerland, at the beginning of modernity to the Dutch people and now this calling has been given to the Finns. (Kotimaa 1944.)

Finland was another torchbearer in a long line of special nations or peoples that will bring about universal salvation. According to the argument, this was because of Finland’s intimate knowledge of her eastern neighbour as well as the well-known high Christian morality of the people. Thus, according to Bishop Juho Mannermaa (1942c: 38–9), when the people of Finland were living their finest hour, it was encouraging to see how looking back to the past one could see how coherently

divine providence had bound together disparate and even contradictory events. God had designed a historical path for Finland that no statesmanship could ever have designed (Antila 1944a: 4), and the trajectory of this history had now reached its high point:

Finnish soldiers have the privilege to be God's weapons in the world-historical battle in which Bolshevism will meet its doom and in which God will deliver justice to those who have suffered. [...] God speaks to us. Let us all listen to His speech. A new morning shall dawn and the day of victory approaches. Amen. (Kalpa 1943a.)

Accordingly, the history of Finland was seen as preparation for the divine mission. Put there by God, Finland was a border zone between east and west, and Finland's hardships during its national history were seen as training for the task at hand (Lehto, V. 1941: 2–3; Mannermaa 1942a: 2). Chaplain Armas Antila (1944b: 1) saw that Finland's history had been filled with “magnificent signs of grace as a story about a people developing and ripening the task appointed for it”. According to him, all historiography had to recognize that Finland had been carried by God's righteousness and grace like a people that had been selected. Not only Finland's political and national history, but first and foremost the history of the Kingdom of God among Finns was “like a great sermon about a chosen people”. Thus Antila could claim that during its many hardships Finland had developed into a heroic people, and it was rarely that people had been used as God's instruments as many times as had fallen to the lot of the Finns.

Finland's Civil War of 1918 and the Winter War were interpreted as preludes to this final showdown. First, as a chaplain declared, it was God's obvious providence that “the first war of independence” ensured that Finland survived and maintained her independence despite the internal strife. Next, in the Winter War, which was declared to be “the second phase of our war of independence”, Finland had experienced the same miracle again. The difference was, however, that

in the Winter War the threat was solely from outside: God again wonderfully saved the nation from “being crushed by the stones of the giant”, the result being a united nation. Finally, the same divine help was aiding Finland “in the third phase of the war of independence”, but now it was time for Finland to complete her earlier training by embarking on the mission to rescue European Christian civilization. (Paunu 1942: 1; Aarnio 1942: 2; Pyy 1942a.)

It was thus emphasized that the present war was not just another instance in which God wanted to use “men of Finland” as His instruments: as history was at a turning point, this time Finnish “soldiers of faith from all times” were fighting beside today’s Finns in the enormous historic struggle that the nation had been called to. (Kalpa 1943a; Pyy 1942b.) So it was not mistaken national pride to listen to what God expected from His people, for the undeniable fact was that “the voice of God declared that Finland had been given one more mission”: the historic mission of liberation. Conversely, Finland’s defeat would mean the defeat not only of small nations, but of righteousness in the world. (Kalpa 1942: 3; Puhakainen 1942: 3.)

In this way Finland was demarcated from the surrounding nations with a task that transcended one particular nation: she was to defend the Christian order of Europe against Bolshevism. The scope of the mission was historical because Finland was seen as the gate to Europe – if Finland would fall, then the invasion of Bolshevism and the barbarous east would inevitably take place.

### The National Mission: Greater Finland

Analogously to the Old Testament idea of a territory given by divine grant, the nation is interpreted to need a sacred space serving as a point of orientation, a spatial locus for collective sentiments (Smith 2003: 134). Karelia began to gain interest during the 19<sup>th</sup> century during the wake of

Fennoman<sup>iv</sup> movement. Karelia was seen as a natural part of the developing idea of a separate Finnish nation. And accordingly, for Karelianism the territory was a mythical origin of true ‘Finnishness’. The Kinship Wars 1918–1922<sup>v</sup> had left East Karelia to the Soviet Union, but the Continuation War awakened the Karelia enthusiasm again.

The argument was that moving the borders of Finland to their “natural” place was not only right but necessary – from the perspective of both religion and the fatherland (Björklund 1942, 15). To put it simply, identifying the divine will with the aims of nationalist politics was the way to travel along the road of God: “to realize what our forefathers had dreamt about, a unified nation” (Hyvönen 1941: 4). Accordingly, God was asked to move the border between East and West ‘to where it belonged’, namely somewhere beyond East Karelia (Lähtenmäki 1942: 117).

The theme was present also in official instructions issued about preaching. Although the Finnish soldier loved peace, he knew innately what “his eternal enemy was”. However, the most significant defect in the Finnish soldier was a certain lack of patriotic perspective. This shortcoming was due to the historical fact that Finland had not been able to develop its own national characteristics under the yoke of foreign powers. As a result, home and family were the primary fields of action for the Finnish soldier, and so, it was claimed, the Finnish soldier could not always understand what protecting the fatherland demanded in terms of “tribal connection” and “living space of the people”. Chaplains were expected to explain to the soldiers that after the enemy had attacked the fatherland, also “long and tenuous offensive operations were acts of defensive warfare”. (Muukkonen 1943: 7–10.)

The guidelines for chaplains then proposed two rhetorical steps that could be used to achieve the desired ends. Firstly, with historical examples it was asserted that from the moment that he attacked



the enemy who had invaded the fatherland, the Finnish soldier was God's weapon and a bearer of God-given authority (Muukkonen 1943: 7, 74–6). Secondly, since the Finnish soldier expected truthfulness also from sermons, both in terms of theology and patriotism, it would be ineffective to preach with “melodramatic descriptions of Finland's battle as holy war” , because the definition would appeal to only very few men. Rather, it was more truthful to explain carefully that God was also using Finnish soldiers as His instruments in this world, and in this sense the war was a sacred war to protect both faith and freedom of conscience (ibid. 29).

The national divine mission referred to the ideology of Greater Finland. Greater Finland was a nationalist idea born after 1917. Drawing on earlier European models of one homogenous ethno-linguistic nation within one state, it referred to an area in which all Finnic peoples (including the Finns proper, Karelians and Ingrians) would create a so-called natural living space (and a political unit) by incorporating the Kola Peninsula, East Karelia and possibly even northern Ingria, the area between Narva and St. Petersburg, into contemporary Finland. One particular group that embraced the Greater Finland ideology was the Academic Karelia Society. The AKS bore a close resemblance to all-European post-WWI right-wing radicalism, with fascist overtones that criticized democracy for neglecting national advantage. The AKS considered itself a harbinger of Greater Finland and a defender of the cause of the Finnic tribe and the Finnish language. East Karelia in particular was seen as a region that belonged to Finland.<sup>vi</sup> (Eskelinen 2004: 48–67; see also Nygård 1978). The other aspect of the organisation was fierce “Russky hatred”, according to which Russians were both of lower racial status than Finns and Finland's sworn enemy (Karemaa 1998).

As a significant number of its members were priests, the nationalistic AKS ideology was permeated with Lutheranism. Consequently, the idea of Greater Finland was raised to an object of semi-religious devotion.<sup>vii</sup> Although the heyday of the idea had been in the 1910s and 1920s, the idea

experienced a revival during the Continuation War. Explicitly expressed or implicitly used Greater Finland ideology legitimated the “natural defence borderline” that it was alleged would resolve Finland’s “question of the east”, which had been left unresolved in the aftermath of Finland’s independence in 1917. This formulation was subsequently used in military orders, presidential speeches and other official and unofficial statements about the geopolitical aims of the war. The most outstanding example of Greater Finland propaganda was Professor Jalmari Jaakkola’s *Die Ostfrage Finnlands* (1941), written at President Risto Ryti’s request and published in German, Finnish and English. A similar example of academic propaganda was *Finnlands Lebensraum: das geographische und geschichtliche Finnland* (1941) by famous Finnish scholars Eino Jutikkala, Väinö Auer and Kustaa Vilkuna. Although Greater Finland was certainly not touted (or accepted) by all priests or chaplains, let alone ordinary soldiers, those who propagated it were often the loudest ones.

In clerical rhetoric the creation of Greater Finland was presented as the perfection of the Finnish nation. Greater Finland was the enormous national mission that the Finnish soldier had been called to accomplish as the will of God. Greater Finland symbolized “the dream about great, undivided Finland” coming true. It was the resurrection of Karelia and the new dawn for the whole, complete Finland, in which the Finnic tribes would be united into one nation state. As chaplain Eino Kalpa proclaimed, Finland had experienced a national Good Friday: the Continuation War signified the coming back to life of a nation that was deemed to be sliced and lifeless. Karelia was thus the place in which the Finnish tribe would fulfil its historical calling. Naturally, Greater Finland had to be cherished and passed on to future generations. Those “living in the luckiest era of our history” had to teach their children to understand the price paid for redeeming the fatherland and the significance of faith and trust in Providence and in the future of Greater Finland. (Kalpa 1941b: 3; Ahtinen 1941: 2; Anttila 1941: 176.) Thus the mission demanded the ultimate sacrifice, that of life itself. Ennobled

by suffering, through self-sacrifice for Greater Finland one could conquer death and guarantee immortality for both the individual and the community (see Smith 2003: 230–5).

Greater Finland was the dream of centuries that was coming true now, at the high point of Finnish history (Kurvinen 1941: 3). It was God’s gift to His obedient people (Alanen 1941b: 4). For example, this is how Senior Chaplain Rolf Tiivola proved that “perfect Finland” was now being realized:

The tribe of Karelia will be liberated and connected to Finland, and most importantly, Finland will receive a new, natural eastern border, a border that is militarily and politically vital to us. The army of Finland is God’s instrument in carrying out God’s will and creating this “perfect Finland”, Greater Finland, which is the greatest act of Finnish history. (Tiivola 1941: 1.)

The eastern border was claimed to be “the border of centuries” to which Finnish destiny was bound. It was now being moved to places that only “insane fantasies” had thus far dared to imagine (Ervamaa 1942, 5–6). Eino Kalpa preached at an evening prayer hour that it was divine providence that the Gospel was resounding on the shores of Svir, in the forests of Karelia and in the villages of “severely tortured” Ingria. According to Kalpa, the resurrection of these areas was the way God did His deeds in history. (Kalpa 1943a.) Similarly, chaplain Jussi Kuoppala saw it that the God of history was carrying out His judgments in an understandable way. According to Kuoppala, even those who a couple of months ago were working for Greater Finland supported only by stubborn faith were now amazed: God had stepped out of His hiding place to guide the cause of the Finnish nation. Greater Finland and dreams of uniting the Finnic tribes to Finland were coming true. (Kuoppala 1941: 165–166; 1942: 6–7; Erkamo 1942: 2–3.)

The biblical passage in which the Lord sets the boundaries and appointed times for each people was

often used as a justification for the Greater Finland idea.<sup>viii</sup> For example, in the autumn of 1941 Professor Ilmari Salomies (1941: 4) exulted that Finns were about to step into “a new, wonderful land that God had decreed to us already at the beginning of time”. That is, the new border of Greater Finland was what God had marked out for Finland already in Creation:

The Holy Book clearly proclaims that God has marked out the appointed times in history and the boundaries of the lands of each nation. Thus it is God’s will that a people that has not achieved the boundaries and rights it deserves shall attempt to reach this goal set by God himself. (Tiivola 1941: 1.)

Finland’s appointed time had come, and now she could create “the borders she deserved” and thus follow God’s will (Kortelainen 1941: 2; Kinos 1941: 1). It was also claimed that moving the borders God had decreed had been a great offence to him, so the new border established by the Finnish army merely restored the proper situation (Alitalo 1943). In the words of Topi Vapalahti (1941: 2–3), the prophecy that God would “take you out of the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land” (Ezekiel 36:24) had truly been fulfilled. In this way the Karelian land had the character of sacred national terrain: it was an ancient territory given by divine grant.

Passages from the Book of Joshua were considered by many chaplains to be suitable for describing the situation – the book is, after all, essentially the story of Israel’s conquest of the Promised Land. Chaplain Eino Kalpa pointed out that the Lord had driven out great and powerful nations before Finland in order to fulfil His promise and drive away “the snares and traps” from the land decreed by him (Joshua 23: 9–13) (Kalpa 1943a). It was emphasized that the Lord would give the land only through battle. Thus Finns had to have endurance and courage. They must remember the Lord’s words to Joshua: “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9). There was

no reason to be afraid, for God would guide Finland. (Haapasalo 1941: 2–3.)

The parable of the workers in the vineyard in the Gospel according to St Matthew was used to compare East Karelia to the Kingdom of God. The gist of the parable is that, with the vineyard representing the Kingdom of Heaven, anyone who accepts the invitation to work in the vineyard no matter how late in the day will receive an equal reward with those who have been faithful for the longest period of time. Accordingly, it was proclaimed that God had expanded Finland's area in His vineyard. Karelia was opening to Finns and to Christianity. Thus every Finn needed to accept the invitation to work in this vineyard, for as the biblical parable stated, God would reward every worker plentifully. (Saarilahti K. A. 1941: 229.)

As the parable of the vineyards suggested, Greater Finland also included a spiritual dimension. The people of Karelia must be able to feel the national connection with the united Finnic tribe. The military-religious *esprit de corps* that had prevailed among Finnish troops was to be taken as the spiritual foundation for the new post-war nation. Finland should be careful not to ally with any of the survivors of God's wrath, for then divine providence would be withdrawn and the nation would perish. The new Finland was to be defined not only by nationally, geographically, economically and militarily more appropriate borders, but also by a spiritual rebirth. (Laiho 1941: 2–3; Kalpa 1943b; Pyy 1942a.)

In practice this meant that, drawing implicitly on Christ's Commission order, the Lutheranization of the Karelian population was a significant element in Finnish clerical missionary thinking. It was stated that the Lutheran Church of Finland was responsible for exporting "the Evangelical-Lutheran spirit" to Karelia. (Pakkala 1941b: 5; Mannermaa 1941b.) Accordingly, when the Finnish army advanced into East Karelia, Lutheran chaplains began to hold ecclesiastical services for civilians in

the invaded territories. Hence proselytizing was an important aspect of Finland's national mission. Bishop Lehtonen could thus rejoice that "Karelia was free, the cross had replaced the red sign of the beast, and prayer and thankfulness have been heard again from many desecrated churches" (Lehtonen 1942a).

The role Lutheranism played was not, however, uncomplicated. There were two approaches to the question. First, since force could not be applied in matters of faith, the Lutheran Church and the Greek Orthodox Church of Finland<sup>ix</sup> needed to work together in East Karelia, because especially those people in the area who had grown up before Bolshevism were mostly Greek Orthodox. This was understood and supported by most of the high theologians, including Archbishop Erkki Kaila, Field Bishop Johannes Björklund and the Bishop of Kuopio, Erkki Sormunen. The other approach had to do with Lutheran religious nationalism: the Greek Orthodox Church could not "redeem" the Karelian population in the same way as the Lutheran church could since it lacked not only the resources but most importantly the proper national fervor.<sup>x</sup> Thus this viewpoint merged Lutheranism and Finnishness into a form of theologico-political orthodoxy and claimed that Lutheran priests and chaplains needed to be given a free hand among the population of East Karelia because Finland's historical situation demanded this. This point of view was supported by for example Kalervo Kurkiala, an army chaplain and an MP, and Professor Paavo Virkkunen.<sup>xi</sup> (Murtorinne 2002: 201–203; Vuori 2011: 212–223.)

It was also claimed that victories, dangerously, could easily create "a feeling of false self-confidence that results in trusting only in our power and denying the role of God". When God was granting an expanded living space to Finland at the same time as a part of the Finnic tribe was being connected to the national body politic, there was reason to rejoice. But it was pointed out that precisely for this reason it was easy not to see the hand of the God of History in all this. Exactly for

this reason Greater Finland had to have proper moral and religious principles. In this new national situation one need not be afraid of the enemy. Rather, the gravest threat was a godless Greater Finland. (Kotimaa 1942; Alanen 1941b: 4–5; 1942a: 2; 1942b: 2; 1942c: 2; Alaja 1943, 5.)

The hopeful atmosphere of national fulfillment as well as the spiritual demands such a fulfillment entailed were captured in a chaplain's sermon at an Independence Day parade in the town of Svir in East Karelia:

Today we can see with our own eyes that we have not been disappointed by the Lord. Our prayers have been heard, they have been fulfilled. Is it not more than we hoped for that the flag of our fatherland that recently was shattered is now guarding also this town? Finland's lion is approaching all those places to which it belongs. Is it not fulfillment that the land saturated by suffering and blood and the land that has drunk our blood is finally ours? It is fulfillment that we have had the possibility of bringing freedom to the enslaved people of Karelia. But we are all responsible that we shall have not only Greater Finland, but Greater Finland that is not Godless, for it would bring upon herself God's wrath and doom. (Närhi 1941.)

## Conclusion

The fundamental questions in Christianity pertaining to warfare are, firstly, whether violence is acceptable, and secondly, whether war is just or unjust, divinely ordained or temporal skirmishing between human beings. And as the analysis shows, an answer provided by Finnish Lutheran priests to these questions drew significantly upon two versions of missionary thought. Missionary ideas made it possible to conceal the political, e.g. purposeful, character of Finland's war aims behind rhetoric of election that emphasized the obligation to carry out a divine plan. Consequently, a central ethical message of Christianity was abandoned. Concern for peace and love for the enemy

were rejected in favour of prioritizing the national destiny which, it was assumed, was guided by God. More than that, the Finnish army was perceived as the historical force that would bring about universal salvation. Hence killing the enemy was in fact a necessary act without which Finland's divine missions could not be fulfilled.

The Finnish Lutheran clergy was virtually unanimous in its support to the military effort. Finland did not have a church struggle similar to Germany's *Kirchenkampf* – the state did not attempt to saturate the Lutheran church with certain ideological principles. The close historical bond between the church and the state and the threat of atheist Bolshevism were enough to gain support for the war from the clerical circles. Whereas for example Anglican priests were more careful in their theological justification for war, many of their Finnish colleagues used religion to justify forcible acquisition of *Lebensraum* in the east. Finnish clergy thus relied on themes propagated by Nazi Germany, especially by priests and chaplains close to the German Christian movement (see Bergen 2012).<sup>xii</sup> As regards Protestantism, the Finnish alliance between the state and the church was not exceptional, but the vivid use to which biblical ideas and the spiritual power of the church were put in order to legitimate an offensive war certainly is unparalleled, at least in democratic countries.

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## Endnotes

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- i For example Exodus 19:5 “Now therefore, if you will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then you shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people”.
- ii Finland gained independence in 1917 in the aftermath of the Bolshevik revolution. Finland was, however, socio-politically divided, and due to radicalization a civil war resulted. The Whites, the land-owning bourgeoisie and farmers, were blatantly against Communism, whereas the Reds, industrial and rural workers, were energized by their poor conditions and a socialist vision of a more equal Finland. The Reds received weapons from Russia, and the Whites, who won the war, were supported by Imperial Germany. The Lutheran Church of Finland aligned herself on the White side, which has subsequently caused a significant amount of resentment.
- iii The idea of bulwark of Christianity originates from the 16<sup>th</sup> century when Pope Leo X stated that Croatia was the *Antemurale Christianitatis* in wars against the Ottoman Empire.
- iv The Fennoman movement attempted to raise the Finnish language and culture from peasant status to the position of a national language and a national culture.
- v In 1918–22 thousands of Finnish volunteers took part in military expeditions in Karelia in order to assist other Finnic peoples to separate themselves from ‘non-Finnic rule’.
- vi For Greater Finland in terms of ideology and practice see Manninen 1980 and Laine 1982. For discussion in English see Browning 2008: 131–6.
- vii It is worth emphasizing that the AKS was by far the most influential movement in inter-war Finland. Several of its members also mentioned in this article were at the time or later became part of the country’s cultural and political elite, such as Eino Kalpa, Armas Antila, Olavi Lähteenmäki, and Jussi Kuoppala.
- viii Acts 17:26 states “From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.” (See Exodus 23:31; Numbers 34:2; Deuteronomy 32:8.)
- ix The Greek Orthodox Church of Finland had (and still has) a position recognized by law. The Greek Orthodox diocese was established in 1892, when Finland was a part of Russia. Since the independence of Finland in 1917, although autonomous and a part of the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of Constantinople, it has been acknowledged as the other state church (nowadays the “people’s church”) of Finland.
- x Major and Chaplain Hannes Anttila stated in an infamous, unofficial clerical meeting at Svir in August 1941 that the work of the Greek Catholic Church would never join the East Karelian population to the Finnish people and nation, and thus the Lutheran Church needed to be actively involved in the task. (Virkkunen 1941.) Consequently, the meeting caused the military lead to curb clerical enthusiasm at occupied territories.

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- <sup>xi</sup> Paavo Virkkunen (1874–1959), a professor of theology, MP, former minister and chairman of parliament, was a conservative right wing politician who more often than not merged theological and political viewpoints. Virkkunen’s activities during the Continuation War included cooperation with Nazi Germany’s Luther Academy and enthusiastic attempts to further the Lutherization of East Karelia. (See Murtorinne 2002: 199–204.)
- <sup>xii</sup> On the other hand, the Orthodox Church of Russia was temporarily rehabilitated for similar purposes: it served as an instrument of power politics, helping the USSR consolidate gains made against Germany after the victory at Stalingrad as well as creating a more favourable opinion towards the USSR among its allies (see Merritt Miner 2003).