Religious participation in the local communities of 17th-century Eastern Finland

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In the study of early modern lay religiosity, the importance of tradition and the persistence of beliefs and practices have often been emphasized.[1] However, recent research has put more emphasis on flexibility as well as local varieties and diversity in religious practice. With the approach and methodology of lived religion, faith and religion have become seen as inextricably connected to other spheres of life, and the nature of lived religion as a social process has been emphasized. Researchers have shifted the focus from control and the dichotomy between "popular" and "official" religion to religious experiences and expression. While the communal and shared experiences of religion have been noticed to have great importance in the early modern era, researchers have also considered the more individual aspects and agency within the sphere of religion.[2]

This article focuses on religious participation within the local communities of 17th century Eastern Finland, an integral part of the kingdom of Sweden during the early modern era, and especially in Savo, a rural area near the eastern border of the realm. I will analyse how Eastern Finnish peasants adjusted their religious practice to their individual circumstances and what kind of interaction and influences affected their choices in the sphere of religion. It is an important point of departure that commoners (*allmogen*) even in a certain area did not form a uniform group, but instead there were many variations that also affected how religion was lived out in their everyday lives. First, I will examine different circumstances that restricted one's possibilities of religious participation, and what kinds of options were available in different situations. Second, I will focus on the forms of interaction and influences that affected individual choices regarding the sphere of the sacred. In the 17th century, the state and the church strove towards uniformity in the practice of religion within the realm, and control by the authorities was a central element of social and religious life. However, seeing control here more as a background element, I will focus on the different

[1] This article has been finalized as part of the Academy of Finland project "Women of the clerical estate. Clergymen's wives and widows in Lutheran local communities (1650–1710)" (project number 338706).

[2] Sari Katajala-Peltomaa & Raisa Maria Toivo, *Lived Religion and Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, Abingdon 2021; Anne Dunan-Page, Laurence Lux-Sterritt & Tessa Whitehouse, "Reconstructing early modern religious lives: the exemplary and the mundane", *E-rea* 2020:1, DOI: https://doi.org/10.4000/erea.11202; Nancy T. Ammerman, "Lived Religion as an Emerging Field: An Assessment of its Contours and Frontiers", *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society* 2016:2, DOI: 10.18261/issn.1890-7008-2016-02-01.

ways in which choices around religion were made in everyday life, how they were negotiated within communities, and in what kinds of interaction religious ideas and practices were produced.

In early modern Europe, religion was intertwined in all areas of life. The realm of the sacred or otherworldly could be approached in different ways from within the mundane world.[3] In Eastern Finland, religious ideas and practices taught by the Lutheran clergy intermingled in varying ways with traits from local religious traditions that reflected the needs of the agrarian society and its ways of explaining and ordering the world.[4] Not everybody necessarily believed or practiced religion in the same way, even in the same region or the same social group, and there are practices that seem to have been known only in certain localities. According to sociologist Meredith McGuire, religion-as-lived is not coherent, but "made up of diverse, complex and ever-changing mixtures of beliefs and practices".[5] It has been noticed that this was also the case in early modern society.[6] In this article, I will explore the different kinds of possibilities in participating in the religious practice both at the church and outside the church, within small local communities, with the aim of finding out which practices people could choose from and what factors, influences and interactions affected their choices.

Historians have been interested in religious practices and thought regarding the sacred among the peasantry in different parts of the 17th-century Swedish realm especially since the 1990s, and there is an abundance of information on the variety of religious rituals and practices among the laity from visiting holy wells and offering churches to using rosary beads in healing rituals.[7] However, there is a general agreement that the practices that did not comply with the official norms should not be seen as remains of Catholicism or, in some cases, even pre-Christian religion, but the religious practice of the laity should be studied as a

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[3] Robert W. Scribner, "Cosmic Order and Daily Life: Sacred and Secular in Pre-Industrial German Society", in *Popular Culture and Popular Movements in Reformation Germany*, R. W. Scribner (ed.), London & Ronceverte 1987.

[4] Miia Kuha, *Pyhäpäivien vietto varhaismodernin ajan Savossa (vuoteen 1710)*, Jyväskylä 2016, pp. 37–39.

[5] Meredith McGuire, *Lived Religion. Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*, Oxford 2008, p. 185.

[6] Katajala-Peltomaa & Toivo 2021, p. 3.

[7] Terese Zachrisson, *Mellan fromhet och vidskepelse: Materialitet och religiositet i det efterreformatoriska Sverige*, Göteborg 2017, pp. 189–208; Raisa Maria Toivo, "Religion and emotion. Rosaries as objects and the associated emotions in 17th-century Finland," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 2016. https://doi.org/10.1080/03468755.2016.1179835; Monica Weikert, *I sjukdom och nöd: Offerkyrkoseden i Sverige från 1600-tal till 1800-tal*, Göteborg 2004. Researchers of magic and witchcraft processes have also uncovered different aspects of conceptions regarding the sacred among the laity. See, for example, Linda Oja, *Varken Gud eller Natur. Synen på magi i 1600- och 1700-talets Sverige*, Stockholm & Stehag 1999; Jari Eilola, *Rajapinnoilla. Sallitun ja kielletyn määritteleminen 1600-luvun jälkipuoliskon noituus- ja taikuustapauksissa*, Helsinki 2003.

part of the Lutheran religious culture.[8] The Swedish historian Göran Malmstedt has observed that even though many of the holy days of the Catholic Church, like the feast of St. Olof, were officially abolished after the Reformation, their celebration often continued among the peasantry. This indicates that there were rituals outside the prescribed religious practice that the laity had need for to be able to secure divine protection and the reproduction of nature.[9] The Swedish historian Terese Zachrisson has emphasized that even after the Reformation, it was important for the laity to have physical and material points of access to the sacred. She has suggested that in Sweden, the limits of Lutheranism might have been more flexible because other religious denominations were not present.[10] The Finnish historian Raisa Maria Toivo has emphasized the conservative nature of Lutheranism that made it possible to adapt the teaching of the Lutheran church to the everyday needs of the parishioners.[11] All in all, researchers agree that there were many aspects of religiosity in the lives of the laity that were not in accordance with Lutheran doctrine, but that there was no serious attempt by the church or secular authorities to eliminate these practices even if they could be occasionally prosecuted. Recently, attention has been turning towards analyses of emotions, materiality, corporeality, and communal aspects in the religious experiences of the laity.[12]

As the main source material of this study, I have used court and visitation records that survive from the parishes of the province of Savo (*Savolax*) from the period 1639–1712. The cases analysed in this article are examples from a larger body of court material related to religion mainly from the jurisdictions of Savo, Pien-Savo and Kajaani fiefdom. For my PhD dissertation, I documented all of the lower court record cases that were in some way related to religion, including witchcraft and magic trials, and studied the visitation records that survive from the area. Focusing on the religious practice of the laity that was related to observance of holy days and its control by the state and the church, I noticed that there were contradictions that could only be explained by differences in, for example, the distance from one's household to church, wealth, and other individual

[8] Raisa Maria Toivo, *Faith and Magic in Early Modern Finland*, Basingstoke 2016, p. 102; Göran Malmstedt, "In Defence of Holy Days: The Peasantry's Opposition to the Reduction of Holy Days in Early Modern Sweden," *Cultural History* 2014:2, p. 119, https://dx.doi.org/10.3366/cult.2014.0066; Terese Zachrisson, "The Saint in the Woods. Semi-Domestic Shrines in Rural Sweden, c. 1500-1800," *Religions* 2019:10:6, p. 386. doi:10.3390/rel10060386.

[9] Malmstedt 2014, pp. 103–104, 118–119.

[10] Zachrisson 2019.

[11] Toivo 2016, p. 102.

[12] See, for example, Sari Katajala-Peltomaa & Raisa Maria Toivo, "Introduction: Religion as Historical Experience", in *Histories of Experience in the World of Lived Religion*, Sari Katajala-Peltomaa and Raisa Maria Toivo (eds.), Cham 2022. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92140-8_1.

circumstances.[13] This observation is the starting point to the current study, where I aim to explore this variation with focus on the choices that were made in the sphere of religion and the individual circumstances that affected these choices. A perspective that emphasizes interaction, variation and individual agency makes it possible to arrive at new interpretations based on the material and gain a more nuanced understanding on the religious lives of the laity. However, for an analysis of religion practiced by individuals in their everyday lives, the sources have their restrictions. In parish visitations, deans and bishops who visited the parishes paid attention to deficiencies in proper Christian life and imposed sanctions on those who did not conform to normative behaviour. Misdemeanours were handled briefly and the kind of religious practice that was acceptable did not need to be discussed.[14] In the court, the focus was on the suspected crime, and especially in minor accusations, the scribe wrote down only what was relevant for passing the sentence.[15] However, with a close reading of both series of source material, with sensitivity to agency and individual choice, it is possible to notice variation in religious practice among the peasants.

In my analysis, I use the concept of *lived religion* as a methodological tool. Historians Raisa Maria Toivo and Sari Katajala-Peltomaa have recently developed the approach in the study of the medieval and early modern era. They have emphasized that in the study of pre-modern societies, it is often difficult to separate intentional religiosity from the less conscious or less directly religious because the spheres of the religious and the mundane were deeply intertwined. They see religion "essentially as an element of daily life, a way to live, interact and participate in one's community".[16] Lived religion was not merely spirituality, but it was intrinsically connected to the social and communal life in a parish, village, or household. Understanding religion as "lived" puts the emphasis on doing – what people did in their everyday lives that was connected to their faith.[17] In this context, accusations regarding the use of magic can also be used to gain information on religious beliefs and practices in everyday life.

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[13] Kuha 2016, pp. 26–29, 32, 158. As additional material, I have also used some court cases related to my ongoing research project on clergymen's wives in the late 17th century Swedish realm.

[14] On visitation records, see Pentti Lempiäinen, *Piispan- ja rovastintarkastukset Suomessa ennen isoavihaa*, Helsinki 1967; Olle Larsson, *Biskopen visiterar. Den kyrkliga överhetens möte med lokalsamhället 1650–1760*, Växjö 1999.

[15] The use of lower court records in the study of witchcraft, magic, and more recently, religious beliefs and practices has been widely discussed. See, for example, Eilola 2003, pp. 41–45; Toivo 2016, pp. 16–20. On the use of lower court records in Finnish and Swedish historical research more generally, see Petri Karonen, "Perspektiv och metoder inom domboksforskningen i Sverige och Finland cirka 1990–2005", *Domboken som filologiskt och historiskt forskningsobjekt*, Harry Lönnroth (ed.), Uppsala 2007.

[16] Katajala-Peltomaa & Toivo 2021, p. 3.

[17] Katajala-Peltomaa & Toivo 2021, pp. 2–4.

The Savo area was characterized by forests and lakes, a strong prevalence of slash-and-burn cultivation, and a peripheral position especially in its northern parts. The economic system required a large workforce, and extended families and complex family forms were common.[18] In the southernmost parishes of the area, the first churches had been built already in the late medieval era, but in the northern parts, the first churches were built only after the Reformation in the 16th century, when the area started to gain a permanent settlement. Even in the late 17th century, the journey to the nearest church could be very long from the more remote corners of the parishes.[19] Unlike Southwestern Finland and other more central areas of the Swedish kingdom, people did not live in densely inhabited villages, and settlements consisted mostly of single farm households that were almost entirely self-sufficient and often located at great distances from each other. This sparse settlement pattern gave the household great importance as a unit of social and economic organization.[20] It also significantly shaped the religious lives of the laity.

Varying possibilities for religious participation

Early modern Eastern Finnish peasants shared living conditions that both restricted and enabled different kinds of decisions regarding their religious life. The control by the state and the church was getting stricter in the second half of the 17th century, but the vast distances gave the inhabitants of Savo more freedom than peasants or other people in lower ranks of society had in some other environments. Churchgoing was an important part of the religious life of commoners, even if in the challenging living conditions, such as in Eastern Finland, it was not always possible. The distances were long, roads poor, and weather conditions could make travelling difficult and dangerous.[21] Before leaving the household for the journey that often took several hours and for some, even some days, the farmer had to consider the seasons and tasks of agricultural work. On the other hand, there were punishments that could follow from

[18] Kirsi Sirén, *Suuresta suvusta pieneen perheeseen. Itäsuomalainen perhe 1700-luvulla*, Helsinki 1999; Kauko Pirinen, *Savon historia II: 1. Rajamaakunta asutusliikkeen aikakautena 1534–1617*, Pieksämäki 1982, pp. 319–321.

[19] Kuha 2016, pp. 41–45.

[20] Laura Stark-Arola, *Magic, Body and Social Order. The Construction of Gender through Women's Private Rituals in Traditional Finland*, Helsinki 1998, pp. 74–76.

[21] On churchgoing practices of the laity, see also Miia Kuha, "Popular Religion in the Periphery. Church Attendance in 17th Century Eastern Finland", *Perichoresis* 13:2, 2015, https://doi.org/10.1515/perc-2015-0008; Miia Kuha, "Rörelse i periferin. Kyrkobesöket i 1600-talets Savolax", in *Politiska rum. Kontroll, konflikt och rörelse i det förmoderna Sverige 1300–1850*, Mats Hallenberg & Magnus Linnarsson (eds.), Lund 2014.

neglecting regular attendance at the church, communion, or catechetic teaching.[22] Church attendance was controlled especially rigorously on prayer days that were summoned by the crown and aimed at joint prayer to plead for God's forgiveness.[23] Otherwise, the control of church attendance was not very strict, and especially in remote parishes of Northern Savo, the clergy understood that it would not be reasonable to expect all parishioners to attend church every Sunday.[24]

The possibilities for religious participation at the parish church varied according to individual circumstances, one of which was the distance from one's farm or cottage to the church. In Northern Savo, in the easternmost part of the realm, it was allowed in 1670 that people who had to travel more than 4 *mil*, or about 40 kilometres, to church would not be obliged to attend church services more often than once in every three weeks.[25] For those who lived in the village where the church was situated, or in some of the nearby villages in the radius of about 10–20 kilometres, it was significantly easier to participate in church services compared to those who had to travel over twenty – or even sixty – kilometres one way to reach their parish church.[26] The distance from the church was also relative since the forms of nature, access to roads and especially waterways had an important impact on travelling. Even though waterways made travelling easier, bad weather could hinder the journey altogether.[27] One of the difficult decisions one had to make was when to take a new-born child to be baptized at the parish church. The Church Law of 1686 required that a child was to be baptized within eight

[22] The punishment from absence from the church service varied from a small to a considerable fine that could be modified into a corporal punishment or imprisonment. In case of absence from a prayer day service, the punishment was a fine of 40 marks, that few peasants could afford to pay. On the development of the legislation concerning church attendance, see Kuha 2016, pp. 60–66.

[23] On prayer days, see Anna Maria Forssberg, *Att hålla folket på gott humör. Informationsspridning, krigspropaganda och mobilisering i Sverige 1655–1680*, Stockholm 2005, pp. 80–86, 287–291; Göran Malmstedt, *Helgdagsreduktionen. Övergången från ett medeltida till ett modernt år i Sverige 1500–1800*. Göteborg 1994, pp. 98–100, 170–171.

[24] For example, Visitation record 1683, Leppävirta church archive, II Cd: 1, NAF, Joensuu. The visitation records except for the records of the parish of Leppävirta cited in this article are available online at the Astia service of the National Archives of Finland, https://astia.narc.fi/uusiastia/ (Cited 10/8 2022). The visitation records of the diocese of Vyborg, including all parishes studied here, have been recently published as transcriptions. See Esko Häkli, *Biskops- och prostvisitationsprotokoll från det äldre Wiborgska stiftet. På basis av Albin Simolins samling kompletterade och utgivna av Esko Häkli*, Helsinki 2015.

[25] Visitation record 1670, Kuopio church archive, II Cd: 1, NAF, Joensuu.

[26] Distance from a household to church exceeding 4 *mil* is mentioned, for example, in the district court records (Kihlakunnanoikeuksien renovoidut tuomiokirjat [renoverade domböcker], hereafter DCR) Kuopio 21–22/8 1643, Savo, KO a: 1: 286, The National Archives of Finland (hereafter NAF), Helsinki; DCR Iisalmi 12–14/2 1652, Kajaani fiefdom, KO: a: 1 [no pagination], NAF, Helsinki. The district court records cited in this article are available online at the Astia service of the National Archives of Finland, < https://astia.narc.fi/uusiastia/> (Cited 28/6 2022).

[27] DCR Leppävirta 23–24/10 1706, Pien-Savo, KO a: 17: 181–182, NAF, Helsinki; DCR Rantasalmi 3–4/7 1648, Savo, KO a 2: 773, NAF, Helsinki.

days from birth, but especially in Northern Savo, many baptisms were delayed until the age of a few weeks or for some, even a couple of months.[28]

[PICTURE 1]

In Eastern Finland, churches were often situated by waterways, which made it easier for parishioners to reach them. Roads in this area were few and often in poor condition. This land taxation map from the 1640s shows the location of the Sulkava church and parsonage by the Uitonvirta strait.

Source: National Archives of Finland, Maanmittaushallituksen uudistusarkisto, Maakirjakartat, Lille Saffwolax Heradh Sulkava Sochn, MHA C 1: 205–206. The map is available online at the Astia service of the National Archives of Finland, https://astia.narc.fi/uusiastia/viewer/?fileId=6014621762&aineistoId=2511047834 (Cited 2.9.2022).

Extended families were especially typical in this area, and in large households, there were many adult members to take turns going to the church while others stayed home taking care of the house, animals, and small children who were not taken along every time. For example, farmer Anders Kupiainen from the parish of Kerimäki was absent from the church service on the third prayer day in the summer of 1692. He had stayed home alone tending to the house, cattle, and five small children, the eldest of whom was only seven years old, while nine people from his household had been to the church. His father, three brothers, two male cousins and "three women" had embarked on the journey to the church, about 15 kilometres one-way. Thus, Kupiainen was able to state a legitimate reason for staying home and was saved from punishment.[29] While every member of the household was not even expected to go to church every time, the case interestingly shows that even the master could stay home. If he did, he had to perform tasks that were usually considered women's work, such as taking care of children and cattle. It has been recently shown by Maria Ågren and the Gender and Work project that in rural areas of Sweden, the division of work was flexible and both men and women could

[28] Kuha 2016, pp. 75–76.

[29] DCR Kerimäki 9–10/2 1693, Pien-Savo, KO a: 4: 39, NAF, Helsinki. On extended families in Eastern Finland, see also Elina Waris, *Yksissä leivissä. Ruokolahtelainen perhelaitos ja yhteisöllinen toiminta 1750–1850*, Helsinki 1999.

perform all tasks of the rural household.[30] Even though mothers and other female members of the household usually took care of children, there were different norms for different situations. According to Linda Oja, the gender coding of tasks could vary depending on circumstances.[31] Exceptions could be made so that everyone, women included, would have a chance to participate in religious practice at the church. Prayer days were also important social occasions for meeting others at the church because of the demand of wide participation. Taking communion, that usually happened only a few times a year, was a special occasion. Then, a married couple was advised to go to church together to showcase their harmonious relationship and leave behind someone else from the household.[32]

Wealth and poverty could also affect one's possibilities to participate in religious practice at the church. In the late 17th century, the Swedish realm, and especially Finland experienced many losses of crops and many people struggled to maintain even some kind of livelihood.[33] A group of men explained at court that they had not been able to attend church "because of hunger".[34] It seems that they were forced to work for their living and could not embark on the long journey to the church, at least on this occasion. According to the ordinances against swearing and breach of the sabbath from 1665 and 1687, absence from church could be accepted on the grounds of weakness or illness, or if the defendant lived so far away that travelling caused considerable inconvenience or hazard.[35] Illness and weakness were often reported as reasons for absence from church, but they could also be used as excuses, when the real reason behind the negligence was the need to work, which was strictly prohibited on holy days. In one case a defendant's brother and neighbour witnessed that the man had been burning an area of forest on a prayer day and had not been ill, as he had claimed before the court.[36] Working was reported as a reason for absence also in other cases.[37] The daily agricultural work

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[30] Maria Ågren, "The Complexities of Work. Analyzing Men's and Women's Work in the Early Modern World with the Verb Oriented Method", in *What Is Work? Gender at the Crossroads of Home, Family, and Business from the Early Modern Era to the Present*, Raffaella Sarti et al. (eds.), New York 2018, p. 231.

[31] Linda Oja, "Childcare and Gender in Sweden c. 1600–1800", *Gender & History* 2015:1, pp. 97–98.

[32] Visitation record 1707, Kangasniemi church archive, II Cd: 1, NAF, Mikkeli.

[33] Mirkka Lappalainen, *Jumalan vihan ruoska. Suuri nälänhätä Suomessa 1695–1697*, Helsinki, 6th ed. 2017.

[34] DCR Kuopio 21–22/8 1643, Savo, KO a: 1: 286, NAF, Helsinki.

[35] Johan Schmedeman, *Kongl. stadgar, förordningar, bref och resolutioner ifrån åhr 1528 in til 1701*, Stockholm 1706, pp. 453–463; [Church Law 1686] *Kircko-Laki ja Ordningi 1686. Näköispainos ja uudelleen ladottu laitos vuoden 1686 kirkkolain suomennoksesta*, Lahja-Irene Hellemaa, Anja Jussila & Matti Parvio (eds.), Helsinki 1986, pp. 157–70 ('Sabbatin Ricoxesta').

[36] DCR Kuopio 21–22/8 1643, Savo, KO a: 1: 288v, NAF, Helsinki.

[37] For example, DCR Rantasalmi 25–26/11 1709, Pien-Savo, KO a: 20: 378–379, NAF, Helsinki; DCR Kuopio 6–7/12 1709, Pien-Savo, KO a: 20: 413–414, NAF, Helsinki; DCR Rantasalmi 19–20/7 1709, Pien-Savo, KO a: 20: 252–253, NAF, Helsinki.

was necessary in many ways, but work was also an important value in Lutheran culture. According to Luther, everyone had a calling (*vocatio*) to a task in the society, and he emphasized that even everyday activities were holy in the eyes of God.[38] Thus, also the regular tasks of a farmer were given a religious meaning, at least in the message of the clergy. However, Sundays, prayer days, and other holy days had to be left free of work, especially during the church service. Everyday tasks of preparing food, warming the house, and taking care of children and cattle could be performed, as well as important seasonal tasks such as fishing.[39]

Infirmity could also become a real obstacle of religious participation, and illness could hamper religious participation for a long time.[40] For example, a cavalry soldier explained that he had not been able to attend church services for twelve weeks because of having been bedridden with illness.[41] The fact that this was not disputed by anyone at court indicates that he was probably telling the truth, and in the 17th-century circumstances an illness that temporarily made church-going impossible can be assumed to not have been a rare occasion. A couple who lived far from the church had trouble making their way there because of the wife's poor eyesight.[42] If there were no other adult members in the household, the disability of one spouse made it difficult also for the other one to leave the farm. Old age must also have made going to church more difficult, especially in households where there were no horses and the journey had to be at least partially made on foot. The elderly were given a special position also in catechetic teaching where the clergymen were recommended to not demand as much of them as of younger parishioners. In practice, that meant that the elderly were admitted to communion even if their knowledge of the basics of Catechism was inadequate.[43]

The possibilities and different ways of religious participation were also gendered to a certain extent. At the court, only men were usually accused of neglecting church attendance, because the master of the household was held responsible for the religious practice of his household. However, as widows governing their households, women could also be

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[38] Sirpa Aalto, "Oikonomitraditionen och den lutherska husläran," in *Den problematiska familjen*, Panu Pulma (ed.), Helsinki 1991, p. 141; Raisa Maria Toivo, *Witchcraft and Gender in Early Modern Society. Finland and the Wider European Experience*, Aldershot 2008, pp. 114–115.

[39] Schmedeman 1706, pp. 461–462.

[40] On the need to consider the category of dis/ability in the study of the early modern society, see Riikka Miettinen, "Dis/abiliteetti ja vammaisuus yhteiskunnan ja kokemuksen tutkimuksessa", in *Varhaismodernin yhteiskunnan historia. Lähestymistapoja yksilöihin ja rakenteisiin*, Raisa Maria Toivo & Riikka Miettinen (eds.), Helsinki 2021.

[41] DCR Sääminki 6 and 8–9/6 1693, Pien-Savo, KO a: 4: 321–322, NAF, Helsinki.

[42] DCR Iisalmi 12–14/2 1652, Kajaani fiefdom, KO: a: 1, NAF, Helsinki.

[43] Visitation record 1670, Kuopio church archive, II Cd: 1, NAF, Joensuu.

accused of not attending a church service.[44] Deans and bishops could also impose fines on all members of the household according to their hierarchical position for absence in the visitation.[45] Women were expected to attend church services and catechetic instruction just like men. They also had their own ritual, churching (*kyrktagning*) that incurred after the lying-in period after childbirth. Churching was a ritual that highlighted the position of married mothers and underlined the position of marriage as the backbone of society.[46] In early modern religious life, performing one's social status was deeply intertwined with religious practice. According to Annika Sandén, women used this ritual to their own purposes, to attest their status in the society as wives and mothers.[47] The roles of wife and mother were advocated as ways for Lutheran women to fulfil their vocation, their religious calling in the society.[48]

For those who were not able to travel to their parish church that often, there were other possibilities for religious participation available. In the realm of Sweden, sacred presence could be felt both at the church and at other sites such as the household and the forest. Those who stayed home for different reasons, were hindered by bad weather or lived far from the church, were particularly strongly urged to take care of their home devotion, fall on their knees to thank God and pray, and teach the Catechism both to their children and themselves.[49] In practice, the teaching and learning at home meant reminiscing and reciting the main articles and prayers by rote, since the commoners did not usually have access to books.[50] Because of the nature of the sources, there is no evidence of this kind of prescribed home devotion, except from situations where prayers were used in a way that the authorities saw as superstitious, like reciting Lord's Prayer three times while performing a ritual with the aim of producing some kind of an effect.[51] When accused of celebrating holy days that had been abolished after the

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[44] DCR Leppävirta 20/6 1648, Savo, KO a: 2: 747, NAF, Helsinki.

[45] Visitation record 1671, Kuopio church archive, II Cd: 1, NAF, Joensuu; DCR Rantasalmi 11–14/5 1698, Pien-Savo, KO a: 8: 101v–102, NAF, Helsinki.

[46] Marie Lindstedt Cronberg, *Synd och skam. Ogifta mödrar på svensk landsbygd 1680–1880*, Lund 1997, pp. 262–268.

[47] Annika Sandén, "Kyrkan, kvinnorna och hierarkiernas dynamik," *Historisk Tidskrift* 2006:4.

[48] Jari Eilola, "'Cuckoi päällä curjanakin; cana alla armaisnakin'. Patriarkaalisuus, puolisoiden välinen suhde ja auktoriteettien muodostuminen", in *Arjen valta. Suomalaisen yhteiskunnan patriarkaalisesta järjestyksestä myöhäiskeskiajalta teollistumisen kynnykselle (v. 1450–1860)*, Piia Einonen & Petri Karonen (eds.), Helsinki 2002; Aalto 1991, pp. 141–142.

[49] Visitation record 1670, Kuopio church archive, II Cd: 1, NAF, Joensuu.

[50] It was thought that learning by heart, and reciting the texts several times, would lead to understanding the content. See Charlotte Appel, "Printed in Books, Imprinted on Minds. Catechisms and Religious Reading in Denmark during the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries," in *Religious Reading in the Lutheran North. Studies in Early Modern Scandinavian Book Culture*, Charlotte Appel & Morten Fink-Jensen (eds.), Newcastle upon Tyne 2011.

[51] DCR Hauho, Tuulos & Lammi 19–21/11 1662, Porvoo & Hollola, KO a: 2: 90v–91v, NAF, Helsinki.

Reformation, the peasants also mentioned praying as one of the things they did in these celebrations.[52] Based on these examples, it can be assumed that for many, praying was a part of their religious lives at home, even though the visitation records show that many of the commoners in this area had great trouble remembering the articles of the Catechism and even the most important prayers before the 1690s.[53] There were even some people who had never been to the church.[54] These probably formed only a very small minority, but it is interesting that their religious lives were formed of practices and rituals completely outside the church.

Those who lived far from the church usually chose the greatest holy days of the year as the occasions when they went to the church, and one or two times a year, took communion.[55] In the rural communities of Eastern Finland, there were many unofficial annual holy days that were commonly celebrated in households, among family members, neighbours, and work partners. Even if they were officially condemned by the authorities as superstition and idolatry, their celebration was only rarely prosecuted.[56] In the Savo region in the late 17th and early 18th century, court and visitation records mention the celebration of St. Olof's, St. George's, St. Stephen's and St. Catherine's feast days, "the toast of *Ukko*" in the early summer, and *kekri* at the end of harvest year.[57] Religious practice outside the church was inherently connected to the agricultural year. Usually, the celebration consisted of rituals aiming at the success of different livelihoods and a household feast where neighbours and work partners were invited. Often, a lamb was slaughtered, and beer specially brewed for the occasion, which could also include offerings and other rituals.[58] Both women and men participated in the festivities, but there were some gender-specific rituals and emphases according to the nature of the feast.[59]

Of these celebrations, the feasts of *Ukko* and *kekri* seem to have been specific to Finland, and I have not come across mentions of their celebration in literature focusing on the area of today's Sweden unlike many saints' days that seem to have been celebrated throughout

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[52] Kuha 2022, p. 150. See also Raisa Maria Toivo, "Prayer and the Body in Lay Religious Experience in Early Modern Finland", in Katajala-Peltomaa & Toivo 2022, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92140-8_5.

[53] For example, Visitation records 1670, 1671, 1673, and 1678, Kuopio church archive, II Cd: 1, NAF, Joensuu.

[54] Visitation record 1670, Kuopio church archive, II Cd: 1, NAF, Joensuu.

[55] Visitation record 1670, Kuopio church archive, II Cd: 1, NAF, Joensuu.

[56] Kuha 2016, pp. 134–138; Toivo 2016, pp. 102–103. See also Malmstedt 2014.

[57] Kuha 2016, pp. 133–152. The toast of Ukko (*Ukon vakat*) was translated into Swedish by the scribe as "*thordhns gildhe*" in a commoners' petition to the crown in the 16th century. A. I. Arwidsson, *Handlingar till upplysning af Finlands häfder VI*, Stockholm 1853, p. 309.

[58] Kuha 2016, pp. 139–146; Toivo 2016, p. 92; Kati Kallio et al., *Laulut ja kirjoitukset. Suullinen ja kirjallinen kulttuuri uuden ajan alun Suomessa*, Helsinki 2017, p. 135.

[59] See Miia Kuha, "Extended Families as Communities of Religious Experience in Late Seventeenth-Century Eastern Finland", in Katajala-Peltomaa & Toivo 2022, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92140-8_6.

the realm, albeit with local variations.[60] These feasts have been studied earlier within the fields of folklore and religious studies, and their meaning in the 17th century society has only recently been of interest to historians. The feast of Ukko at the sowing time in late May or early June included drinking a toast in a ritual manner and praying for rain so that the crop would succeed. Kekri, on the other hand, was connected to All Saints' Day and included rituals for ending the harvest year. There is only little information on these feasts in 17th-century source material, but when combined to later folklore, the mentions indicate that in certain areas, they have been widely known and celebrated.[61] In a case from the mid-17th century, a man who had participated as a guest in the feast of Ukko expressed the nature of the feast in the following words, when a dispute over unpaid wages emerged at the table: "I have not come here to claim any money, but to give thanks to God and eat served food".[62] Thus, to him, a household feast organised by a neighbour was a part of his religious life and taking care of his relationship with the divine. Harmony in the social gathering seems to have also been crucial.

Religious rituals outside the church were probably especially important in the lives of people living at great distances from the nearest church. However, Raisa Maria Toivo has pointed out that the celebration of saints' days, for example, was common also in areas that cannot be considered peripheral, and within wealthy households that had a good standing in the community.[63] It is even mentioned in the sources that Lutheran clergymen participated in some of these annual celebrations of local communities in the mid-17th century.[64] With influences from the church, Christian hymns and prayers gradually became a part of the celebrations outside the church.[65] In addition, laypeople who travelled long distances in their daily tasks related to burn-beating and fishing, for example, also created small devotional sites in the woods or crossroads, often marked by a wooden cross. Terese Zachrisson has used the concept of "semi-domestic devotion" of these practices that took place somewhere between the household and the church.[66] There were also specially built small shrines within the farmland properties, and offering trees was also used as private spaces of worship close to the

[60] For example, Göran Malmstedt mentions the celebration of St Olof's, St George's and St Lawrence's feast days, the Rogation Days (*gångdagarna*) and the observance of Saturdays in honour of Virgin Mary. See Malmstedt 2014.
[61] See Martti Haavio, *Suomalainen mytologia*, Porvoo 1967, 148–178; Anna-Leena Siikala, *Itämerensuomalaisten mytologia*, Helsinki, 4th edition 2016 (2012), pp. 395–402, 410–411; Kuha 2016, pp. 146–152; Toivo 2016, pp. 131–135.
[62] "Jagh är intet hijt kommen att fordra någon gield, uthan att tacka gudh och fremmande maat äta". DCR Visulahti 15/7 1648, KO a: 2: 788v–791v, NAF, Helsinki.
[63] Toivo 2016, pp. 106–108.
[64] Visitation record 1670, Kuopio church archive II Cd: 1, JoMA.
[65] Kuha 2016, p. 135; Toivo 2016, p. 93.
[66] Zachrisson 2019.

household.[67] The variety of these kinds of devotional spaces reflects different kinds of religious needs: a farmer working in his forest fields could visit a cross in the woods, whereas a devotional site that was situated close to the household especially served women, the old and the infirm. For example, in the parish of Kangasniemi, a peasant widow had "a small house" in the middle of her yard. The house was probably meant for making offerings since the visiting dean ordered the parish clerk to burn the house down.[68]

Household mistresses, like masters, had their obligations in the religious rituals that were performed especially on saints' days and other annual holy days in local communities.[69] The court records that survive from the Savo region reveal that women, for example, made offerings both at the church and in domestic settings, and participated in the rituals of the feasts. Even so, women's opportunities for celebrating holy days were somewhat more limited than those of men especially because it was mostly work usually performed by women that was considered necessary and thus allowed on holy days.[70] Men seem to have been often able to continue spending their holy day after the church service, socializing with each other and drinking in taverns or households that sold beer, while women took responsibility for the household, doing the kind of work that was allowed, such as cooking and tending to children and animals.[71] This kind of work probably also made it possible to spend the day in devotion if one so wished, reciting prayers, and singing hymns while doing household chores.

Interaction, negotiation, and individual choice in the sphere of religion

The most profound influences on religious life undoubtedly came from the church and the clergy in the late 17th century. Everyone was supposed to take part in catechetical teaching and learning the basics of the Catechism was obligatory if one wished to take communion or marry. Thus, being able to recite the most important articles of the Catechism became an important prerequisite of social life. The parish clergy regularly examined all parishioners, but they paid special attention to the education of the youth.[72] The pastor (*kyrkoherde*) and the curate (*kaplan*) or curates had a position of authority in the parish, but they and their families also

[67] Visitation record 1670, Kuopio church archive II Cd: 1; Siikala 2016, pp. 84–86.
[68] Visitation record 1661, Kangasniemi church archive, II Ce: 1, NAF, Mikkeli.
[69] Toivo 2016, p. 56.
[70] Schmedeman 1706, pp. 461–462.
[71] Kuha 2016, p. 164.
[72] For example, Visitation record 1670, Kuopio church archive, II Cd: 1, NAF, Joensuu; Esko M. Laine & Tuija Laine, "Kirkollinen kansanopetus", in *Huoneentaulun maailma. Kasvatus ja koulutus Suomessa keskiajalta 1860-luvulle*, Jussi Hanska & Kirsi Vainio-Korhonen (eds.), Helsinki 2010, pp. 259–261. On the practical advancement of the church service and the peasants' participation, see Göran Malmstedt, *Bondetro och kyrkoro. Religiös mentalitet i stormaktstidens Sverige*, Lund 2002.

interacted with parishioners in their everyday lives. In the Protestant areas of Europe, clerical families were expected to provide an example on the Christian way of life to their parishioners.[73] Ideally, the requirement of setting an example put the pastor's wife in the position of a role model for the women in the parish. Due to their position, clergymen's wives were present at the church in most services and ceremonies, where the parishioners were able to observe their behaviour. They participated in baptisms, weddings, and funerals, and served as godmothers.[74] The church historian Hilding Pleijel has even referred to the pastor's wife as the "mother of the parish".[75]

It is not possible to tell from the existing source material if the women in the parish thought of the pastor's wife as a role model in everyday piety. However, in a few cases that survive from the Savo area, women seem to have taken a role of implementing a proper Christian way of life among their family and neighbourhood through controlling normative religious behaviour. For example, in the court records from the parish of Sulkava, there is a case with a lengthy examination of a suspected blasphemy. On St Stephen's day, a feast was held in a wealthy farmer's household, with drunken men performing a parody of the communion service over the evening.[76] One of the men who participated in the celebration as a guest told the court that the mistress of the household had only allowed the young man acting as the clergyman to sing Christian hymns and say things he had heard from the clergy.[77] This indicates that the men had started singing or saying something that might appear blasphemous or superstitious. Since the laity were urged to pray, recite the Catechism, and sing hymns in their home devotion, the mistress did not seem to think there would be anything wrong with that if it happened in a correct manner. In another case, the mistress of the neighbouring household urged her neighbour to go to church on the following prayer day. She and her

[73] Susan C. Karant-Nunn, "The Emergence of the Pastoral Family in the German Reformation. The Parsonage as a Site of Socio-Religious Change", in *The Protestant Clergy in Early Modern Europe*, C. Scott Dixon & Luise Schorn-Schütte (eds.), Basingstoke 2003.
[74] Solveig Widén, "Prästfruns ställning och roll i församlingarna i det svenska riket på 1700-talet", *Kyrkohistorisk årsskrift* 1994. See also Malin Lennartsson, "Att föregå med ett gott exempel. Våld och misshandel i den tidigmoderna prästfamiljen," in *Våldets mening. Makt, minne, myt*, Eva Österberg & Marie Lindstedt Cronberg (eds.), Lund 2004, pp. 63–64.
[75] Hilding Pleijel, *Från hustavlans tid. Kyrkohistoriska folklivsstudier*, Stockholm 1951, pp. 57, 62–64. See also Lennartsson 2004, p. 64.
[76] For further information on the case, see Miia Kuha, "A Parody of the Church Service in Seventeenth-Century Finland. Reconstructing Popular Religion on the Basis of Court Records", *Frühneuzeit-Info* 23:1-2, 2012.
[77] "huus modher allenast lät Sunj siunga för sigh gudelige Psalmer och seija hwadh han aff Presten hördt hadhe". DCR Sulkava, 6–7/5 1668, Pien-Savo, KO a: 1: 117, NAF, Helsinki.

husband embarked on the long journey to the church while the neighbour ended up being accused of negligence.[78]

The parsonage had a rather public nature as a household, and thus, even within the boundaries of the household, clergymen's wives came to contact with many of the members of the community.[79] In some localities, parishioners went to the parsonage after the church service and were served or sold beverages there. According to the Finnish historian Kustaa H. J. Vilkuna, it was common that the clergy kept taverns in the countryside. It was often a practical solution since rural inns (*gästgivare*) were often of poor quality and people with higher social standing preferred to stay at the parsonage instead.[80] Drinking at the parsonage is also mentioned in Jenni Lares' study on the meanings of the consumption of alcohol in 17th-century Finland. The legislation concerning the selling and consumption of alcohol was getting stricter in the late 17th century, and the selling of ale and spirits by clergymen was forbidden in the Church Law of 1686.[81] However, parsonages kept serving travellers in the countryside, and there are also mentions of ordinary parishioners enjoying hospitality in the parsonage. In the parish of Puumala, when the pastor's wife faced charges for poisoning a neighbour based on a false accusation in 1691, the parishioners testified that they had often been served both beer and spirits in the parsonage and no harm had ever been caused.[82] In 1700, the pastor in Leppävirta complained that the parishioners would troop in the parsonage every holy day to his harm and hindrance.[83] This indicates to that the parishioners were used to enjoying hospitality in the parsonage on particular occasions and in their idea it would be convenient to gather there more often than the clerical family found suitable. On the other hand, it was the duty of the parishioners to build and maintain the parsonage, and they probably saw it even more as a public building than the clerical family did. The historian Beat Kümin has shown that in certain areas in Central Europe, clergymen running taverns could make considerable proceeds from selling wine or beer, with examples dating from the 15th to the 18th century.[84] Thus, this practice was by no means exclusive to the area of today's Finland. It must also be

[78] DCR Iisalmi 12–14/2 1652, Kajaani fiefdom, KO: a: 1 [no pagination], NAF, Helsinki.
[79] For example, DCR Puumala 18–19/11 1691, Pien-Savo, KO a: 4: 252–263, NAF, Helsinki.
[80] Kustaa H. J. Vilkuna, *Juomareiden valtakunta. Suomalaisten känni ja kulttuuri 1500–1850*, Helsinki 2015, pp. 131–132.
[81] Jenni Lares, *Alkoholinkäytön sosiaaliset merkitykset länsisuomalaisessa maalaisyhteisössä*, Tampere 2020, pp. 102, 177.
[82] "betygande att dhe åffta druckit der både ööl och brenwijn, men aldrig fått någon ohelsa der af", DCR Puumala 18–19/11 1691, Pien-Savo, KO a: 4: 262, NAF, Helsinki.
[83] Visitation record 1700, Leppävirta church archive, II Cd: 1, NAF, Joensuu.
[84] Beat Kümin, "Sacred church and worldly tavern: reassessing an early modern divide", in *Sacred Space in Early Modern Europe*, Will Coster & Andrew Spicer (eds.), New York 2005, pp. 22-23.

noted that Luther did not denounce drinking altogether, but he emphasized the need for moderation. Participation in local sociability also gave the clergy a chance to control the behaviour of the laity.[85]

Influences that affected both thought and practice regarding religion came also from other directions in addition to the church and the clerical family. Children were socialized to the religious practices of their families and communities.[86] These practices varied from learning to recite the Catechism to everyday protective magic and participation in saints' day rituals. In addition to the church and the household, religion was lived in everyday encounters with neighbours and acquaintances. With these encounters, religious practice also took new forms and was in constant change with new influences. For example, in the parish of Kuopio, a farmer was worried about his horses, because he had experienced bad luck with his former short-lived ones. Apparently, he talked about the situation with others, and a "Russian", a Karelian orthodox man going around in the area informed him on a ritual that he could perform to turn his luck around. The man suggested that the farmer would go to the church on a great holy day, light a candle above his horse's neck and then take the candle to the church altar. The farmer followed the advice, but the publicity of the deed led him to being caught. The case shows that it was possible to experiment in the sphere of religion, and that social encounters brought new influences especially when they were in accordance with how appropriate action within the sacred space of the church and churchyard was perceived. The case also shows how the annexation of Kexholm and Ingria brought Russian Orthodox influences to Savo.[87] In another case from a few decades earlier, a "Russian" man was paid in different households for performing folk healing, counter-magic and rituals for improving success of crops.[88]

Turning to divine help was often something that people did in critical life situations. Offerings were brought to the altars of churches in hope of a safe delivery, relief from illness or the return from a dangerous journey.[89] In the province of Savo, the church of Kuopio was known as a sacrificial church where brought offerings were also related to improving the success of livelihoods.[90] According to Johannes Daun and Terese Zachrisson, similar information survives also from Gotland, where people brought offerings to church

[85] Kümin 2005, pp. 25, 33.
[86] Sari Katajala-Peltomaa & Ville Vuolanto, "Lapsi ja uskonto. Kaksi näkökulmaa sosialisaatioon myöhäisantiikissa ja sydänkeskiajalla," *Kasvatus & Aika* 2009:3.
[87] See also Kimmo Katajala, *Suurvallan rajalla. Ihmisiä Ruotsin ajan Karjalassa*, Helsinki 2005; Toivo 2016, pp. 112–114.
[88] DCR Pellosniemi, Carl Hastfer's fief 17–18/7 1645, Savo, KO a: 2: 359v–364, NAF, Helsinki.
[89] Weikert 2004, pp. 109–110, 146–149.
[90] DCR Kuopio 26–30/6 1693, Pien-Savo, KO a: 4: 440–443, NAF, Helsinki.

hoping for better luck with lambs.[91] In critical situations, it was also common to turn to different kinds of experts on folk healing or other means that would qualify as superstitious in the eyes of the authorities. For example, Påfwel Mackoinen from the parish of Iisalmi, the northernmost parish in the Savo area, travelled north with two companions to find "Lapps" who he believed could help him get back his "luck with children" (*barnlyckan*) that he had lost. His new-born children, especially sons, had died soon after birth. However, he did not find the helpers he was looking for and was forced to turn back home.[92] Even if the discussions behind the choices are not described in any more detail, the seeking of the "Lapps" was clearly a result of interaction. Mackoinen had probably discussed the situation with his family and neighbours to come to the interpretation that he had lost his luck regarding children. Through discussions with others, he was also able to gain information about the "Lapps" who would supposedly be able to help. He was accompanied on his trip with two other men. When Mackoinen reached the locality where he was supposed to find the experts in question, he received the information that these experts had travelled somewhere else, or perhaps they did not want to share or reveal their skills to a stranger. Turning to the realm of otherworldly was a relevant option when faced with different kinds of critical problems of everyday life and seeking experts could have been just as relevant as going to church and praying for help, or bringing offerings to the altar, especially in cases where the interpretation of stolen or lost luck had been made and an expert was needed to restore it. Luck meant a general good fortune in life, the health and reproduction of humans and animals, and the success of crops and different kinds of tasks. To preserve one's luck, it was crucial to follow certain practices that were often transmitted from one generation to the next.[93]

[PICTURE 2]

Slash-and-burn farming was the main livelihood of Eastern Finnish peasants in the 17th century. In Northern Savo, it was still occasionally practiced in the early 20th century, like in this picture from Karttula. Slash-and-burn farming required a large group of workers, and women and children could be involved. Photograph: E. Mäkinen 1937, Ethnographic Picture Collection, Finnish Heritage Agency.

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[91] Johannes Daun & Terese Zachrisson, "Kvarhängande helgon och offerkyrkor. Folkfromhet med förreformatoriska drag på det tidigmoderna Gotland," GUSEM 2012:3, p. 81.

[92] DCR Iisalmi 16–18/6 1652, Kajaani fiefdom, KO a: 1: f. 77v, NAF, Helsinki.

[93] On the concept of luck among the early modern peasantry, see Eilola 2003, pp. 64, 68; Anna Nilsson, *Lyckans betydelse. Sekularisering, sensibilisering och individualisering i svenska skillingtryck 1750–1850*, Höör 2012, pp. 49–50.

In another case from the end of the research period, almost sixty years later, discussions over life's misfortunes revolved around God instead of lost luck. Farmer Sigfred Heiskain's crops had suffered from cold weather. His neighbours claimed that he had spoken about God on some occasions in a defamatory manner, implying that God had caused his adversities arbitrarily.[94] If proved true, this would count as a severe crime of blasphemy.[95] The farmer seems to have been desperate to support his family, wife and small children, in the difficult years of the early 18th century. The parish pastor told the court that Heiskain was a man who attended church and took communion regularly, knew his Catechism and was even able to read from a book, referring to that he had exceeded the basic demands of knowing the main articles and their explanations by rote. Both the pastor and the jury confirmed that Heiskain had always lived quietly and peacefully, and thus the farmer was sentenced to release himself with an oath of purification, swearing on God and the holy Gospel that he had not spoken the blasphemous words, after which he was discharged.[96] However, it seems quite likely that the neighbours testifying against Heiskain would not have just invented the words that they said to have heard from him – one of them even immediately went to the pastor after hearing them. However, it seems that Heiskain had proved himself a good Christian who lived harmoniously with his community, and a few occasions of unguarded words in a burst of emotion could be overlooked. The case reflects a change towards a more subjective understanding of a man's relationship to God in the 18th century compared to the earlier period, with the idea of God's retribution falling on one individual instead of the whole community.[97]

Conclusions

In this article, I have discussed different kinds of religious practices and solutions that co-existed simultaneously and probably as different kinds of combinations in the lives of different people in Eastern Finland. In interaction with others – the clergy, family members, neighbours, and ritual or folk healing experts – the laity reached different interpretations that

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[94] DCR Leppävirta 1/10 1708, Pien-Savo, KO a: 19: 174–175, NAF, Helsinki; DCR Leppävirta 15–16/2 1709, KO a: 20: 157–159, NAF, Helsinki.

[95] Soili-Maria Olli, *Visioner av världen. Hädelse och djävulspakt i justitierevisionen 1680–1780*, Umeå 2007, pp. 1–2.

[96] DCR Leppävirta 1/10 1708, Pien-Savo, KO a: 19: 174–175, NAF, Helsinki; DCR Leppävirta 28/5 1709, Pien-Savo, KO a: 20: 231–235, NAF, Helsinki; DCR Leppävirta 10–11/12 1709, Pien-Savo, KO a: 20: 453–455, NAF, Helsinki.

[97] See Kustaa H. J. Vilkuna, "Jumala elä rankase minua. Yksilöllisen subjektin synty". In *Siperiasta siirtoväkeen. Murrosaikoja ja käännekohtia Suomen historiassa*, Heikki Roiko-Jokela (ed.), Jyväskylä 1996.

demanded different kinds of actions towards the sacred or divine. In Eastern Finland, religious thought and practice were shaped by what happened at the church, what an individual had learned from his or her parents, what were the norms of acceptable religious practice, and what kinds of incentives and ideas were brought by social interaction. People created possibilities for religious participation also for themselves, and there was a lot of initiative in the sphere of religion. There were also traditions, rituals, and values that were passed on from the previous generation to the next.

Based on the study of early modern religious practice in different parts of the Swedish realm – just like in any part of Europe – we can see that there was a multitude of rituals, actions, and practices to choose from. We cannot assume that everybody did everything, but people had their own and personal ways of taking care of their relationship with the sacred or divine.[98] This goes for men as well as women. Maybe for someone the most important thing was to organise a feast, whereas someone else focused on learning the Catechism or seeing to that their family members and neighbours lived in a proper Lutheran manner. Individual traits can also be seen in offering practices, where different material items were brought as gifts to the church altar or a special granary for religious practice was built inside the yard in the household. Despite the control of the authorities, the laity had room for individual agency in the sphere of religion.

When religion is seen as lived in the context of social relations, it is also easier to see its constant fluctuation. People came to contact with other people and their ideas, and it is clear from the sources that they were open to experimenting and trying different things in relation to the divine or sacred. Of course, there were also traditions and patterns of thought that can be dated back for centuries, that people especially in peripheral regions passed on to their children. Bringing up children and their socialization into religious practices should perhaps be given more thought as a way of explaining differences in religious practice in different areas of the Swedish realm. Some of the religious practices that we know from the sources seem to have been quite closely tied to a certain locality or a restricted area, where the practices continued for several generations. Thus, we can assume that parents passed on these practices and their meanings to their children, who thought them important enough to keep them as part of their lives and teach them to the next generation.

The importance and intertwining of work, family, and religion comes across both in the source material and in earlier research concerning the 17th century. Although

[98] See also Katajala-Peltomaa & Toivo 2021, p. 3.

going to church was a central part of the religious lives of early modern people, a considerable part of the religious lives of men and women was lived at home and in other spatial settings like the forest. For lay people living in the Eastern Finnish countryside with long distances between households, villages and churches, the journey to attend the Sunday or holy day service at the nearest church could take place once in three weeks, or even more rarely. In the meantime, religion was lived in social interactions, devotion at home, during annual religious celebrations, and rituals performed individually or communally.

Summary

During recent years, the perspective of lived religion has drawn attention toward the everyday religious practice of the laity. In early modern Europe, the realm of the sacred could be approached in different ways from within the mundane world, and religious practice was tightly intertwined with social life. In local communities, religious ideas and practices taught by the church intermingled in varying ways with traits from local religious traditions. This article examines the different kinds of possibilities of religious participation that were available to the rural inhabitants of the late 17th century Eastern Finland, a part of the kingdom of Sweden during the early modern era. Applying the concept and approach of lived religion, the article analyses how Eastern Finnish peasants adjusted their religious practice to their individual circumstances. The article also examines different kinds of interaction and influences that affected the choices of the laity in the sphere of religion. The article is based on court and visitation records that survive from the province of Savo, a rural area where distances between households were often large and many people had to travel a long way to reach their nearest church. It is emphasized in the article that while physical distances and other factors, like infirmity, could restrict one's possibilities for religious participation at the parish church, the laity had different kinds of practices to choose from and they even created possibilities of religious participation for themselves. Religious practices could include participation in household feasts on holy days or bringing offerings to a devotional site near the household or in the forest. It is argued that while there were many traditional elements in the sphere of religion that were passed on to following generations, people also adopted and adapted new ideas in their everyday religious lives.

Keywords: Lived religion, 17th century, peasantry, Lutheran Church, Finland