



On the Legacy of Lutheranism in Finland

Societal Perspectives

Edited by

Kaius Sinnemäki, Anneli Portman, Jouni Tilli and Robert H. Nelson

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Preface

This volume is a collection of chapters written by members of the research network Protestant Roots of Finnish National Identities (or ProFini2017 for short). The network consisted of roughly 50 scholars from many different disciplines within the social sciences and humanities, who were interested in gauging the societal effects of the Reformation on Finnish society as a way of honouring in 2017 the first centennial of Finland's independence and the fifth centennial since the beginning of the Reformation. Most of the chapters in the volume have been presented at the network's meetings and events since August 2014, most notably the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies symposium 'Legacy of the Reformation: Law, Economy, Education' in February 2016. The network's main work period was 2014–2017, but some aspects, such as the completion of this volume, have continued until 2019.

The idea for ProFini2017 was born in the spring of 2014 in discussions between Kaius Sinnemäki and Anneli Portman, when we realized that 2017 marks 500 years since the beginning of the Reformation and 100 years since the independence of Finland. Robert H. Nelson joined this core group at an early stage and Jouni Tilli later that year. At the time, Sinnemäki and Nelson were fellows at the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies. The support for the project by the director of the Collegium, Professor Sami Pihlström, was crucial at the initial stages. Encouragement from Professors Henrik Meinander, Pirjo Markkola, and Risto Saarinen was also very important at this point. The first meeting of the network, where we presented our initial plans, was organized in August. We organized several seminars and symposia during 2014–2017 in collaboration with the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, the Department of History and Ethnology at the University of Jyväskylä, the Finnish Institute in Rome, the Church Research Institute of Finland, Think Corner at the University of Helsinki, Turku Centre for Medieval and Early Modern Studies, Reformation 500, Finland 100, the Westernmarck Society, the Finnish Psychological Society, the Finnish Society of Church History, and the CoPassion and CoCare projects of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Helsinki. We are grateful for the collaboration at various levels, the discussions and comments from the participants of the meetings we arranged, and the encouragement and criticism given along the way from too many persons for us to thank separately. For financial

and institutional support, we would like to thank the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, the Department of Languages at the University of Helsinki, the Department of History and Ethnology at the University of Jyväskylä, the Church Research Institute of Finland, the Federation of Finnish Learned Societies, and the CoPassion and CoCare projects of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Helsinki.

This book has been in the making for almost five years. We are grateful to the authors for their contributions, persistent and smooth work, and collaboration along the way. Anonymous referees provided constructive criticism, which helped to improve the manuscript considerably. We would also like to thank the roughly two dozen colleagues who acted as referees for individual chapters during the editing process. Special thanks also to Alina Laine for help in editing the bibliographies.

We would also like to mention two more technical issues. First, since this volume brings together authors from many different disciplines, we have allowed some already established terminological diversity to remain. As an example, the terms ‘priest’ and ‘pastor’ are used as synonyms in this volume. The term ‘priest’ is often used in some countries, such as Finland and Sweden, while elsewhere the normal term is ‘pastor.’ Because of such already existing diversity we have not aimed at unifying this terminology here. Second, we have given the authors freedom to use different versions of the Bible in their chapters. To the best of our knowledge, two versions of the Bible are referred to, namely, the King James Version and the New Revised Standard Version. The version referred to is specified upon quotation.

We received the sad news on December 15, 2018 that one of the editors, Robert H. Nelson, had passed away. Bob, as everyone called him, was on one of many research visits made to the University of Helsinki over the past five years. Tragically he passed away on his last day of his visit, a day after many of us met to celebrate the work we had done and to officially wrap up the network. We were fortunate to have Bob collaborate with us over the years and to know him not only as a colleague but also as a friend. His contribution in this book is obvious in the articles he authored but also in the editing he did for many of the chapters. His friendship and humour will be sorely missed.

Helsinki September 18, 2019
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The Legacy of Lutheranism in a Secular Nordic Society: An Introduction

The religious turn in the social sciences and the humanities

THE ENLIGHTENMENT AND ITS LEGACY

The history of human societies is a complex web of continuations, radical changes, and aborted paths. Societies at any moment of time are to some extent reflections of their historical legacies, sometimes with surprisingly deep historical dependencies as culture and values are passed on from one generation to the next.¹ In the West, Christianity was the dominant religious influence on civilization for almost 1,500 years, from Constantine to the Enlightenment. The traditional and self-understanding scientific narrative has stressed that the Enlightenment is the crucial juncture in the development of modern societies, as societies abandoned overtly religious beliefs and traditions. But while such junctures point to future paths of change, they may exhibit greater continuities than scholars tend to realize.

Since the Enlightenment the influence of Christianity has thus been widely contested by new systems of thinking, such as rationalism and individualism, which have often regarded Christianity as the legacy of an ignorant past. Instead, for increasing numbers since the 18th century, the Enlightenment meant the dawn of a new era grounded in the truths of Science. By the 20th century, such views were triumphant over much of the Western world, including Finland and other Nordic countries. Unlike some nations where traditional religion was condemned outright, the Nordic countries, however, never abolished their historic Lutheran inheritance altogether. Large majority of the populations of these countries continued as members of the Lutheran church up to the present time as Lutheranism found ways to adapt to numerous societal changes.² Lutheranism has retained its importance as a national historical and cultural symbol of the

1 Norris & Inglehart (2011).

2 See especially the chapters by Huttunen; Ihalaainen (this volume).

origins of the Nordic nations, even as it was not considered a practical guide to most major private and public decisions and actions.

In matters of private cultural practice and public governance, the Nordic nations instead looked to economics, psychology, sociology, and other social sciences for their new forms of guidance and direction. Such developments in the Nordic countries and elsewhere since the Enlightenment were commonly described as expressing a growing secularization of Western society that went hand in hand with increasing modernization. Central changes leading to modern societies, such as civil society, equality, mass education, and freedom of religion, were explained via economic development, urbanization, industrialization, the formation of non-governmental organizations, or secular rationalism. But not religion, which has generally remained outside the mainstream of academic research. Yet the separation of religious and secular domains in modern societies does not entail that they become irreligious; quite the contrary: as argued by the historian Pasi Ihalainen, such societies ‘may still remain deeply religious in character.’³

At the heart of the Enlightenment vision had been a transcendent vision of the assured rapid scientific and economic progress of the modern world. The Nordic countries themselves in the 20th century became leading world symbols of the remarkable social transformations that were occurring as a result of the applications of modern science and economics. Rising from a poverty-stricken Nordic past as recently as the 19th century, the Nordic countries in the 20th century achieved some of the highest standards of living in the world. Partly for this reason, the Enlightenment vision of transcendent human social and economic progress had probably a greater influence in the Nordic countries than in any other nations of the world.

But a turning point in this process began to take place beginning in the 1960s. The supposed triumph of secularism began to seem less assured and indeed many people would turn away from it in the following decades. It was probably the result in part of an increasing recognition that modern science and economics was a double-edged sword; it could lead towards heaven on earth by way of decreasing poverty and evils that go with it, but it could conceivably also lead to hell on earth: the wars, mass killings, and many terrible things that happened in the first half of the 20th century were a profound shock to progressive belief. It was difficult at best to reconcile progressive optimism with an event such as the holocaust – the mass extermination using ‘modern’ scientific and economic methods of many millions of Jews and Romani and other minorities. Indeed, secular rationality could not begin to comprehend how such a thing as the holocaust had occurred in a historically leading Western nation in the 20th century. In the ensuing discussion the idea of ‘original sin’ in its Christian statements was not revived but it was impossible to ignore the fact that human beings had seemed to include, besides a large capacity for doing good in the world, also surprisingly strong tendencies towards mass depravity within themselves.

3 Ihalainen (this volume).

Twentieth century secularism was also challenged on other fronts. The social sciences proved less scientific than had been expected in the positivist tradition.⁴ Apparently there were no clear discoverable scientific laws of economics, for instance, that could be capable of guiding national economies on a continuously rising rapid upward path of growth – an awkward doubt reemphasized by the major and largely unpredicted sharp economic downturn of 2008 and 2009. One reflection of a growing challenge to this progressive confidence in science and economics was the more recent displacement of the social democratic parties – the leading Nordic spokesmen for Nordic progressive modern values – from a position of almost complete political dominance that they had held from the end of World War II into the 1970s. Since then the Nordic welfare state has been in successive crises and welfare services have been increasingly provided by the private sector and civil society.⁵

At the height of secular ascendancy, it was assumed that religion was a relic of the past that would fade and indeed disappear altogether in the not so distant future. It has not. Although church attendance has steadily decreased in general, religion is obviously back on the agenda. In public discussion religion has entered the scene more visibly especially after 2001 both in Finland and elsewhere.⁶ Fundamentalist religion has also been on the rise in many parts of the world further jarring secular progressive optimism. For instance, in the United States attendance at the mainline progressive Protestant churches has declined precipitously from the 1960s but attendance at evangelical and fundamentalist churches has surged. The spread of terrorism motivated by fundamentalist Islam has been a particularly stark reminder that religion does not seem to be going away.

The recent influx of asylum seekers also to Nordic countries has further accelerated the need to understand religion. However, in Finland the discussion has still focused mostly on the religiosity of the others, the newcomers, and how to address it in a secular society. There has been much less discussion on the continuing religiosity of our own societies. The media occasionally raises issues related to Lutheranism and its role in Finnish national identity,⁷ but generally it has not reflected or problematized what Lutheranism means and what its societal influences are. Some new reflections on these issues, however, have begun to emerge in 2017 as a response to the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.⁸

4 Nelson (2001).

5 See Grönlund (this volume). It is true, as one reviewer points out, that other factors are also involved in the crisis of the welfare state, such as the development of the medical sciences and the ensuing huge increase in the cost of medication for welfare services. Our aim here is not to evaluate the relative strengths of the different factors involved in the crisis of welfare, but to argue that secularism and the progressive confidence in economics have been challenged on multiple fronts – the crisis in welfare services is just one reflection of those challenges.

6 See e.g., Fish (2005); Habermas (2006); Helander & Räsänen (2007); de Hart, Dekker & Halman (2013); Huttunen (2015).

7 E.g., *Helsingin Sanomat*, September 13, 2015.

8 E.g., *Helsingin Sanomat*, October 29, 2017, its main editorial October 31, 2017, and the *Helsingin Sanomat* Theme magazine 2/2017.

When the societal influences of religion have been researched in social sciences, they have tended to be framed critically. For instance, Michel Foucault argued that modern biopolitics, that is, the political power over life, has been developed on the basis of Christianity and rooted in pastoral power.⁹ This idea has been used to show how, for example, Lutheran theology (e.g., Table of Duties) was an integral part of the Danish colonialization of Greenland and the ensuing transformation of the identity of the indigenous Inuit population.¹⁰ Yet while there is much social injustice to blame for Christianity, not all evils – and not all good societal things for that matter – can be attributed to it. For one, the roots of modern biopolitics, as recently demonstrated by the political scientist Mika Ojakangas, are in ancient Greece and Christians have mostly objected to it in any form. Lutheranism, on the other hand, removed some of the obstacles to it when subjugated by the state, although it also mostly continued to object to biopolitics.¹¹

The loss since the 1960s of full progressive confidence in the future has left an intellectual vacuum also in Finnish life. It is no longer clear that faith in science and economics will be capable of providing the value foundations that the Nordic countries will depend upon for a sustainable and happy future. On the contrary, populism has been on the rise across Europe and including the Nordic countries. Faith in scientific expertise is decreasing, and recently Nordic governments have also tended to cut funding of science – more so in Finland than in the other Nordic countries, possibly because of the neoliberal policies driven by the current Finnish government. New intellectual responses and directions are thus being explored across the Nordic academic world and in other places, if showing few signs of any emerging consensus in these countries.

ACADEMIC REVIVAL OF INTEREST IN RELIGION

One sign of the new directions is a revival of interest in the role of religion in the historical development of the Nordic countries, including Finland. For much of the 20th century, this role was largely overlooked in social sciences and humanities research in Finland,¹² much more so than for instance in Britain, the Netherlands, and recently in Sweden. Research on the possible societal effects of religion has been mostly limited to writers in the area of theology, while other disciplines have not typically dealt with this issue in their working paradigms.

In theology the religious dimensions of society have naturally been addressed, such as religious education, values, civil society, and social work done by the church. Especially since the recession of the 1990s in Finland, theologians and the leadership of the Church have argued for the Lutheran value basis of a welfare society (e.g., the 1999 statement by the bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland)¹³. However, there has not been

9 Foucault (2007).

10 Petterson (2014).

11 See Ojakangas (2015, 2016). See also Hagman (this volume).

12 See e.g., Hjelm (2008); Poulter (2013).

13 Suomen evankelis-luterilaisen kirkon piispat (1999).

any systematic scholarly research on the wider impact of Lutheranism on Finnish society, although isolated contributions do exist.¹⁴

As a result, Nordic scholars in general do not have a clear understanding of what role religion has played in the formation of modern Nordic societies. Religion has been epistemologically a blind spot, as claimed by the comparatist Daniel Weidner about religion in humanities research.¹⁵ As for Finland, an educated Finn might readily affirm that of course Lutheranism has had an influence on Finnish society. When pressed and asked how so and in what ways, the first – and typically the only answer – may refer to the historically prominent role of the church and the traditionally close bond between the church and the state. But deeper influences on contemporary society are not usually recognized.

As a sign of changing times, however, over the past 15 years there has been a growing scholarly attention to the Lutheran past itself and to the direct historic role of the Lutheran Church in earlier centuries in shaping private and public practices that often continue in Finland today. Even more recently, there has been a new recognition that Lutheranism may have continued to strongly influence – implicitly more often than explicitly – the basic thinking and institutional forms of modern Finland and other Nordic countries.

This new trend in Nordic research is part of a wider ongoing change in social sciences and humanities research across the world. The American literary theorist Stanley Fish commented in a famous 2005 piece that in academia it is now religion ‘where the action is.’¹⁶ This growing recognition has accelerated since then. For instance, leading European philosophers, such as Jürgen Habermas, have acknowledged the positive role of religion in society.¹⁷ Recent historical and social science research has increasingly argued in particular that the Reformation and its legacy have influenced modern democratic societies more than they have thus far realized – especially areas such as the welfare state, systems of law, mass education, and gender equality in the Nordic countries as well as other parts of the world.¹⁸ These large influences are quite unexpected from the point of view of the previously dominant secularization thesis and, therefore, require more detailed attention.

Research on religion has actually become one of the most current themes across different disciplines, such as political philosophy¹⁹ and human rights.²⁰ This shift in research agenda concerning society and culture has

14 Hallamaa (1999); Saarinen (2005); Kirkon tutkimuskeskus (2015); Markkola & Naumann (2014).

15 Weidner (2012).

16 Fish (2005).

17 Habermas (2006).

18 E.g., Van Kersbergen & Manow (2009); Norris & Inglehart (2011); Tröhler (2011); Nelson (2012); Woodberry (2012); Arneson & Wittrock, eds, (2012); Christoffersen et al. (2010); Ojakangas (2015).

19 Taylor (2007).

20 Banchoff & Wuthnow (2011).

been branded a ‘theological turn,’ ‘sociotheological turn,’ or ‘religious turn,’²¹ and it has given birth to new and interesting research paradigms, such as economic theology.²² There are, of course, differences in the developments in different disciplines and countries but despite these differences there seems to be a general trend of bringing religion in a new way from the periphery to the core of humanities and social sciences research.²³

In Finland and other Nordic countries there is also an increasing number of publications that focus on the social impact of some aspect of religion – and much of this research is done by non-theologians. Some of these publications include the discussions on the welfare state and Lutheranism by Pirjo Markkola and her colleagues,²⁴ the evaluation of values in the speeches of Finland’s rulers by Anneli Portman,²⁵ the critical evaluation of the Lutheran clergymen’s role in the Continuation War by Jouni Tilli,²⁶ the application of the Weberian thesis to contemporary national differences in Europe by Robert Nelson,²⁷ and the recent Nordic discussion on the secularity of law.²⁸ However, this renewed focus on the history of religion in Finland and the Nordic countries is still relatively meagre compared to other Western countries, such as the Netherlands and Great Britain, and there is thus much room for advancing this discussion.²⁹

This book is an outgrowth of these recent trends. It explores in various specific areas, such as contemporary education, law, and national values, the continuing powerful influence – both direct and indirect – of the Lutheran heritage of Finland. Some of the most important ways in which Lutheranism continues to influence events in Finland today are no longer communicated explicitly through the historic Lutheran messages and institutions. The most powerful form of Lutheranism, as one might say, is an unconscious Lutheranism. This could be regarded religiously in one of two ways; 1. as the birth of a brand new secular religion out of the old Lutheranism or 2. as a transformation within mainstream Lutheranism itself from a ‘traditional Lutheranism’ to a new form of ‘secular Lutheranism’ with similar societal outcomes.

Our assumption is that for researching societal effects of religion, the most productive starting point is to approach religion as a sociocultural institution. Typically, religion has been understood as traditional organized religion that is marked by participation in religious activities and by the usage of overtly religious linguistic tags, such as Creator, sin, congregation, etc. Such understanding of religion, however, may mask beliefs, behaviour, and principles that are equally religious but that cannot be so easily recognized

21 E.g., Gane (2008); Juergensmeyer (2013); Weidner (2012).

22 E.g., Dean (2019).

23 Nelson (2017a).

24 E.g., Markkola (2002); Markkola & Naumann (2014).

25 Portman (2014).

26 Tilli (2012, 2014).

27 Nelson (2012).

28 Christoffersen et al. (2010).

29 E.g., Woodhead & Catto (2012).

using easy catch-words or surface-level analysis of people's behaviour.³⁰ The religion scholar Sophie Gilliat-Ray's observation captures this idea well: 'some of the richest insights into contemporary religious life are to be found outside formal congregations, away from religious buildings, and in perhaps the most "unlikely" secular institutions.'³¹ Our approach to religion reflects this line of thinking and is thus reminiscent of anthropological research, which has criticized more traditional definitions of religion.³²

Two Protestant ethics?

WEBER'S FOCUS ON CALVINISM

In 1904 and 1905 Max Weber published a two-part article in the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* that would become the seminal book *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.³³ That book continues to influence contemporary economics and social science.³⁴ Recent trends towards a greater interest in the role of religion in forming modern Nordic societies can be seen as turning back – at least for inspiration – to Weber's original efforts in this area. The great influence of *The Protestant Ethic* has been a source of confusion in one important respect, however: Weber was not actually writing about a general 'Protestant ethic.' Rather, the great majority of Weber's analyses and case examples were taken from the history of Calvinism and other Reformed denominations. The American theologian Max Stackhouse wrote that in *The Protestant Ethic* Weber focused on the social and economic impact of 'Puritan attitudes as well as the later (Baptist and Methodist) traditions influenced by them.'³⁵ To Lutheranism he paid little attention.

Despite many similarities Luther's writings were less supportive than Calvin's for the development of capitalism. Indeed, Luther was often fiercely critical of a market economy driven by the self-interested drive for profit.³⁶ Luther in his own time, moreover, instructed the Lutheran faithful that they must be completely obedient to the German Princes – and later Lutherans would be similarly obedient to other state authorities.³⁷ A devout Lutheran might validly raise objections by the written and spoken word but must not rebel violently against his Prince. In those countries where Lutheranism later

30 Cf. Tröhler (2011: 3–4).

31 Gilliat-Ray (2005: 368).

32 See e.g., Geertz (1973); Asad (1983, 1993); Smith (1998); Beyer (2003); Cavanaugh (2011).

33 This section is largely based on Nelson (2017: 15–21, 33–42).

34 E.g., Gane (2012).

35 Stackhouse (2014).

36 Note, however, that Luther professed some ideas of self-regulated market order (Schwarzkopf 2016). But the general tone in his writings is very negative against the self-interested pursuit of profit. Although Luther was a complex figure, his distaste of the self-interested pursuit of profit is well in line with his sharply negative criticism of the sale of indulgences.

37 See Huttunen (this volume).

became the dominant religion (such as Finland, then part of Sweden), a state religion existed in which a Prince, King, or other state authority typically combined both the role of head of the church and head of the state.³⁸ Calvinists, by contrast, typically aimed to maintain a separation from state power – in matters of religion in particular.

The greater attention to the consequences of Calvinism partly reflected that the people living in nations significantly influenced by Calvinism (and its Reformed denominational followers), such as England and the United States, were much higher in total numbers than the populations of countries where Lutheranism had the greatest historical influence, such as the Nordic countries, Germany, and Estonia. Another explanation for the relative international neglect of Lutheranism is the less prominent place of the Nordic countries geographically and economically in Europe until recently. Before the late 19th and early 20th century, the Nordic countries were economically backward, leading large parts of their populations to emigrate elsewhere, principally to the United States. The economic outcomes in the Nordic world thus were long a side show as compared with the remarkable economic developments taking place in England, Germany, the Netherlands, France, and other parts of continental Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries that would transform the world.

But in the 20th century the Nordic countries themselves would come to be seen as leading the advance of modern trends. Recently, in the 2019 *World Happiness Report* covering the period 2016 to 2018, and prepared under the auspices of the United Nations, the Nordic countries held the four highest positions and five of the top ten positions for overall national happiness, including Finland (1st), Denmark (2nd), Norway (3rd), Iceland (4th), Sweden (7th).³⁹ This suggests that perhaps we should be searching for new Max Webers of our time to address a different and more contemporary concern: Is the historic presence of Lutheranism somehow responsible for making people happier today, does it somehow work to spread a powerful ‘Spirit of National Happiness?’

As the Nordic countries in the 20th century became the objects of much greater world attention, leading scholars in and outside of these countries, nevertheless, still devoted little study to religion. If they did say anything about religion, they were more likely to argue that 20th century Nordic modernization resulted from the abandonment of the antiquated Lutheran religious heritage. Throughout the 20th century, leading historians, economists, and other scholars instead characteristically interpreted past events in the light of a strict economic determinism.

But one cannot really escape the fact that the Lutheran religion is one of the big factors still shared by all Nordic countries and potentially influencing their similarities. All five, for example, have almost the same national flags that differ by colours but otherwise embed the cross in a solid

38 See more in Knuutila (this volume).

39 Helliwell et al. (2019). Interestingly, all the other top ten countries were historically Protestant – Netherlands (5th), Switzerland (6th), New Zealand (8th), Canada (9th), and Austria (10th).

This volume analyses the societal legacy of Lutheranism in Finland by drawing on a multidisciplinary perspective from the social sciences and humanities. Involving researchers from a wide range of such fields has made it possible to provide fresh and fascinating perspectives on the relationship between Lutheranism and Finnish society. Overall the book argues that Lutheranism and secular Finnish society are deeply intertwined. This volume addresses different societal areas which have been significantly influenced by Lutheranism, but also demonstrate how Lutheranism and its institutions have themselves adapted to society. As part of an ongoing religious turn in humanities and social sciences research in Finland and other countries, this book argues that it is necessary to take religion into greater account to more fully understand current societies and cultures, as well as their futures.

The collection is edited by Kaius Sinnemäki, PhD, Associate Professor, University of Helsinki, Anneli Portman, PhD, a specialist, city of Helsinki, Jouni Tilli, PhD, researcher, University of Jyväskylä and Robert H. Nelson (1944–2018), PhD, Professor of Environmental Policy, University of Maryland.



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