



CHAPTER 11

Artisans of Religion at the Moral Frontiers: Finnish Soldiers' Religious Practices, Beliefs, and Attitudes in World War II

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INTRODUCTION

The meaning of religion in people's lives tends to increase in times of crisis. Especially in situations that include a threat of mortal danger and a breaking of moral norms, religious questions concerning the transcendental may become acute and occupy people's minds to a considerable degree. This is the case in wartime, when whole national communities enter a liminal sphere outside normal, everyday life.¹ In my chapter, I will study lived religion in a time of crisis by looking at Finnish soldiers' religious experiences and practices during World War II. In 1939–1945, approximately 800,000 Finnish men out of a total population of 3.7

¹Leed, *No Man's Land*, 15–16, 39 ff.

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million served in the army. The majority of them were in frontline service at some stage of their military duty; the share is probably even higher. Almost 100,000 soldiers died in the war, and about the same number was permanently injured. In a nutshell, the war years were a major crisis for Finnish society, they took a heavy toll on the country's population, and they hit hard especially the youngest age cohorts of Finnish men, several hundreds of thousands of whom spent years in a row in harsh and violent frontline conditions.²

First in the Winter War of 1939–1940 and then in the so-called Continuation War of 1941–1944, Finland was at war with the Soviet Union, in the latter case as a “brother-in-arms” with Nazi Germany.³ In both wars, religion played an important role in Finnish self-understanding and war propaganda. In contrast to the “atheist Bolsheviks,” the Lutheran faith was perceived of as an integral part of Finnish identity and tradition. In the Winter War, Finnish soldiers were described as defending “Western values”—including or synonymous with Christianity—against “Eastern barbarism.” In the heyday of the Finnish-German offensive in 1941, the Finns were depicted as “crusaders” defeating Bolshevism. And still in the desperate battle for survival in the summer of 1944, God's providence was sought, for example, through a collective prayer campaign launched by the Finnish president's wife, Gerda Ryti. Public rhetoric in wartime Finland was heavily influenced by religious motifs and discourse, and Lutheran priests and bishops had a prominent place in Finnish culture.⁴

Public Lutheranism intertwined with people's individual experiences and religion's role in them. Whether in consigning meaning to personal losses, in writing letters to and from home and the front, or in celebrating Christmas, religion was a part of Finnish wartime culture. Much of the religious talk was aimed at soldiers' relatives at home. However, religion was strongly present also on the frontlines: both in the soldiers' subjective experiences and as a cultural and ideological framework that was constructed to give these experiences a nationally cohesive meaning.⁵ Most

² On this general history in English, see Kinnunen & Kivimäki, eds, *Finland in World War II*; Vehviläinen, *Finland in the Second World War*.

³ In the so-called Lapland War in 1944–1945, Finnish army fought the German troops in Northern Finland, yet this conflict was not experienced as such a total and existential struggle as two previous wars—except for the people in Lapland.

⁴ Wunsch, *Punainen ubka*; Luostarinen, *Perivihollinen*; Kempainen, *Isänmaan ubrit*; Tilli, *Suomen pyhä sota*; Soikkanen, “Kirkko ja uskonto.”

⁵ Kivimäki, *Battled Nerves*, 246–52; Kivimäki & Tepora, “Meaningless Death.”

crucially, as Ilona Kemppainen has shown, a soldier's death in wartime Finland was interpreted in thoroughly religious terms as the ultimate sacrifice for the nation. This was a collective interpretation, but it was arguably also a deeply felt personal experience among many soldiers and civilians alike, who had to come to terms with their losses.⁶

Whereas there is a solid research tradition on the public role of religion in wartime Finland and especially on the Lutheran church and the clergy,⁷ the chapter at hand will have an empirical focus on the less-studied grass-roots subject of soldiers' religious beliefs and practices on the frontlines. Like the other chapters of the book, I will look at this topic from the perspective of lived religion, which I understand as a way of using religion—or engaging with religious practices—to make sense of one's experiences in a particular context of personal life events and their circumstances.⁸ As Sari Katajala-Peltomaa and Raisa Toivo state in the introduction to this book, "lived religion is a way to live, interact, and participate in one's community"—and I will thus be looking at the role of religion in the particular community of frontline soldiers. In addition to religious beliefs and thoughts, I think it is important to pay attention to the materiality and the "doing" of religion: how it is practised in rituals and other acts that are not necessarily expressed verbally. When looking at such "doings," it is not always clear whether they are a religious matter in the strict sense of the word. People's engagements with the fundamental moral dilemmas of life and death typically include ritualistic behaviour, existential ponderings, and transcendental references. For a study of lived religion, I consider it fruitful to accept this "messiness" of religious and semi-religious practices and thoughts, instead of focusing solely on the clearly defined "religious sphere" of people's lives.⁹ My approach is connected to the first two levels of experience as defined in the book's introduction: first, the shaping of religious experiences in the everyday encounters with the violent frontline realities and, second, religious experiences as a social process in which the experiences are shared and constructed in the community of soldiers.

⁶ Kemppainen, *Isänmaan uhrit*; see also Kivimäki "Sankariuhri ja kansakunta."

⁷ Please see the footnotes above, as well as Heikkilä, "Uskonto ja hengellisyys sota-aikana"; Muukkonen, "Hengellinen huolto."

⁸ Katajala-Peltomaa & Toivo, *Lived Religion*, 2–5; for a similar application of "lived nation," see Kivimäki, Suodenjoki & Vahtikari, "Lived Nation."

⁹ This is in line with the lived religion research tradition, which has emphasized the intertwinement of religion with other spheres of people's lives, in contrast to focusing on theological dogmas; see the introduction to the current volume.

If religion is studied through people's lived experiences, it inevitably means that religious experiences are seen as contextual and situational. People do not simply renew religious beliefs and traditions in their everyday lives, but they actively re-assess, apply, interpret, and practise religion to suit their changing life events and concerns.¹⁰ In this way, every occasion of lived religion is a unique combination of internal and external factors, starting from a person's earlier life course, existing social relations, cultural influences, and finally the immediate circumstances in which the religious experience gains its meaning and manifestation.¹¹ Nevertheless, being considered contextually and situationally contingent does not only point towards a singular character of each and every experience. Although historical contexts and situations are never identical, there are patterns and structures that arch over time and place. Whether we recognize change or continuity in the appearance of religious experiences is a matter of empirical research—and also a matter of choice in contextualizing the experience either in relation to situational factors or to transtemporal parallels.¹² The two contexts that interest me in this chapter are, first, the “frontline” as the physically immediate and mentally acute circumstance of soldiers' experiences and, second, the Lutheran faith, which served as a cultural resource of meanings and practices to make sense of one's experiences and to deal with them in a “proper” way. As I will demonstrate, the soldiers' experiences of lived religion took form at the intersection of these two contexts. There is, thus, a link to the third level of experience as defined by Katajala-Peltomaa and Toivo in the introduction: experiences as social structures, in this case the role of Lutheran faith as an existing structure for shaping soldiers' religious experiences.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT, RESEARCH QUESTION, AND SOURCES

Before turning to a more precise research question and the sources of my chapter, I want to highlight three further notions on the historical context of Finnish soldiers' religious experiences. First, Finland in the 1930s was a country where the Evangelical Lutheran church had a very strong formal position. In 1940, as much as 96 per cent of Finns were members of the

¹⁰ Katajala-Peltomaa & Toivo, *Lived Religion*, 12–13.

¹¹ For a useful itemization in this regard, see Koselleck, “Der Einfluß der beiden Weltkriege,” 324–32.

¹² Cf. Boddice & Smith, *Emotion, Sense, Experience*, 20–3.

church, while 1.8 per cent belonged to the Orthodox church, and 1.9 per cent were on the civil register, that is did not confess any religion. Thus, Finland was seemingly monocultural in religious matters; yet there were several prominent revivalist movements and sects *inside* the Protestant church, which could have a powerful if not dominant role regionally.¹³ In every case, in the first decades of the twentieth century, both upbringing in the home and education in schools were still closely bound to the Christian faith. Besides the Lutheran clergy, Finnish elementary school teachers had a strong role in combining religious and nationalistic teaching for their pupils.¹⁴ At the same time, though, it is possible to recognize signals of growing secularization in Finnish society. The high share of formal membership in the Lutheran church does not reveal the whole picture; urbanization, the labour movement, the market economy, and other hallmarks of modernity had a profound impact in Finland, too. This may be encapsulated best by saying that although religion remained an important and influential cultural factor, it started to lose its overarching character and began to form a separate (and slowly shrinking) sphere of its own inside society.¹⁵

Secondly, besides church religiosity and the tendencies of secularization, many features of traditional everyday religious practices still lived on especially in rural communities. Finland in the 1930s remained an agrarian country, and the majority of Finns who served as soldiers in 1939–1945 had their roots in the countryside. Even for urban dwellers, their parents and grandparents had mostly led a rural life, which often included the use of spells, chants, beliefs, and small chores that had a spiritual meaning, even if they would be taken only half-seriously. There were geographical differences here, too: the cultural transformation took place first in the urbanized areas of Southern and Western Finland, whereas in the most eastern parts of the country, for instance, there were stronger traces of the old Orthodox influence and also animistic traditions.¹⁶

Third, as was noted above, as a collective crisis the wartime itself accentuated the role of religion in Finnish culture. It is hard to know to what extent exactly this mirrored people's actual experiences. Nevertheless,

¹³ *Suomen Tilastollinen Vuosikirja 1942*, 48; Kakkuri, *Suomalainen herätys*, 156–8.

¹⁴ Tuomaala, *Työntekevistä käsistä*, 204–7.

¹⁵ Kortekangas, *Kirkko ja uskonnollinen elämä*; see also Jalonen, *Summan tarina*, 133.

¹⁶ Cf. Pajari, “Kuolema maalla ja kaupungissa”; for a first-hand account on popular beliefs and rituals in the eastern borderland, see Enckell, *Rajan vartio*.

religion and the clergy were strongly mobilized to support the war effort and this created an atmosphere of religiosity, which could then foster personal expressions of religion more readily than in normal peacetime. Wartimes tend to sharpen national self-images, which are contrasted against the stereotype of the enemy—in the Finnish case, this meant underlining the Christian-Lutheran tradition in defining Finnishness against the Soviet Russians.¹⁷

My research analyses Finnish frontline soldiers' expressions of religion during World War II. I am interested both in "formal" religiosity—that is adhering to religious practices promoted by the Lutheran church—and in the "informal" sphere of religion, which consisted of soldiers' self-fashioned thoughts and acts with a transcendental element. In the first part of the chapter, I will analyse the phenomenon of "frontline fatalism" and how it materialized in various practices of religious "artisanship," as I have called the soldiers' attempts to interact with the transcendental. I will then look at how soldiers constructed "protective identities" to survive mentally in the borderland of life and death—and how this fashioning was closely connected to questions of morality and purity. Here, religion does not appear so explicitly, but as I will claim, the act of balancing between purity and dirt was crucial for the soldiers' moral dealing with death—and thus it was inseparably intertwined with the practices of frontline religiosity.¹⁸ Finally, I will study the meaning of formal Lutheran religion for soldiers on the front and the work of the military chaplains as the representatives of the church among the troops. The key idea of the chapter is to show how the Finnish soldiers' experience of lived religion took shape in the intersection of two cultures: the frontline as an existential, moral borderland and the Lutheran version of Christianity as a system of religious meanings and practices.

My empirical work on soldiers' religious thoughts, beliefs, and practices is based on a large reminiscence collection on everyday life in the trenches during World War II, gathered by the Folklore Archives of the Finnish Literature Society in 1973.¹⁹ The collection's informants were Finnish war veterans, who were invited to send their reminiscences through

¹⁷See, e.g., Heikkilä, "Uskonto ja hengellisyys sota-aikana"; Soikkanen, "Kirkko ja uskonto."

¹⁸The first and the second part of the chapter are largely based on my PhD thesis; Kivimäki, *Battled Nerves*, esp. 246–59.

¹⁹Nowadays called the Finnish Literature Society Archives (FLSA).

advertisements published in newspapers and some relevant magazines. The respondents were encouraged to forget the battle stories and to send instead their memories of “informal” life and experiences in the trenches. This included, for instance, soldiers’ devotional services, the celebration of Christmas and other festivities, supernatural experiences, and pastime activities. The collection received reminiscences from 265 informants, altogether about 12,000 pages of written text.²⁰ It gives a multifaceted and extensive picture of how different forms of religion appeared on the front, although the reminiscences were gathered around 30 years after the war. It seems that the memories of lived religion were relatively stable—or at least the most common features in the reminiscences can also be found in the wartime materials. It is also useful that the reminiscences are plentiful, and so it is possible to have some control regarding how representative or singular each and every reminiscence is. It is nevertheless true that the ex-soldiers’ reminiscences are not best suited for analysing particular events on the front, the detailed memories of which would have easily been transformed and distorted over the years—and thus I am rather reading them to get an overview on the structure and content of lived religion in terms of its general outlines.

MANIFESTATIONS OF FRONTLINE FATALISM

In November 1941, two priests, Rolf Tiivola and Ensio Lehtonen, published a small peculiar book, *Risti-Ritari* (“Crusader”). As the editors of the Finnish military chaplains’ periodical *Koti ja Kasarmi* (“Home and the Garrison”), Tiivola and Lehtonen had a chance to gather a large collection of Finnish soldiers’ religious experiences. Apparently following a call published in the paper or circulated among the fellow military chaplains serving the troops, they had received around a thousand letters, which they now used to compose the book on the “frontline soldiers’ experiences of prayer, of reading the Bible, and of God’s protection,” as was its subtitle.²¹ The book was published in the heyday of Finnish-German “brotherhood-in-arms,” when the Finnish Army had occupied a

²⁰The name of this so-called *Korsuperinne* Collection translates roughly as “Dugout Tradition.” The collection is available for researchers at the Finnish Literature Society Archives in Helsinki and I will refer to it in the following as FLSA, Korsu 1973, followed by the volume number, the respondent’s initials, and the page numbers.

²¹Rolf Tiivola & Ensio Lehtonen, *Risti-Ritari: Rintamamiesten kokemuksia rukouksesta, Raamatun lukemisesta ja Jumalan varjeluksesta* (Porvoo: WSOY, 1941).

large part of Soviet East Karelia and a Soviet defeat seemed imminent. Thus, both the book's title and its content reflected the popular war rhetoric of the time, which depicted the advancing Finnish soldiers as "crusaders" of Lutheran Christianity and the Finnish nation, about to create a Greater Finland and vanquish the Finnish people's "eternal archenemy" in the east for good. Military chaplains in the Finnish Army had a key role in combining religious and nationalistic rhetoric in this vein.²²

Yet despite this ideological tendency, which must have influenced the selection of "representative" stories to be chosen for the book, Tiivola and Lehtonen's call had clearly received a substantial response in the autumn of 1941. The stories were printed with the soldier's name and his unit's field post code as well as the letter's date, so they seem to have been authentic and willing testimonies of religious experiences on the front.²³ Following the book's subtitle, these experiences were divided into three parts. First, there were the stories of prayer, the Finnish soldiers' "secret weapon." The second part consisted of the stories of how the Bible and the "armour" provided by the Word had manifested in the soldiers' life on the front. And third, the book included a collection of stories of "miraculous protection," providence, supernatural omens, and the power of faith. Tiivola and Lehtonen framed these experiences as demonstrating how the Finnish "crusaders" had departed for the holy battle "escorted by the blessing and the strength of the cross."²⁴ Yet the book's religious stories can also be read against a different context: as messages from the borderland of life and death.

When looking at the soldiers' religious practices on the front as they manifest in the Finnish Literature Society's reminiscence collection gathered in 1973, I have recognized three phenomena that stand out as characteristic: a widespread culture of interpreting signs and omens, the seeking of relief through praying and other (semi-)religious practices, and the use of amulets as material objects of protection. These three phenomena are the core of the stories also in Tiivola and Lehtonen's book, albeit with a thick icing of wartime Lutheran rhetoric. Starting with omens and supernatural prophecies, they became visible in the soldiers' habit of interpreting their dreams as well as in observing noteworthy signs while awake.

²² Tilli, *Suomen pyhä sota*.

²³ Most of the letters date to October 1941, so this was a fresh endeavour. Almost all the respondents were rank-and-file soldiers or non-commissioned officers.

²⁴ Tiivola & Lehtonen, *Risti-Ritari*, 10.

Most typically, a soldier had a premonition of his wounding or survival. In the summer of 1944, a young frontline officer was responsible for an important front sector and after a month of heavy fighting and casualties, he felt that he was close to breaking point. Dozing off early in the morning, he suddenly heard the voice of his father just next to him: "My son, not a hair will be cut from your head without me knowing it." The officer woke up immediately:

My father was not to be seen, of course, but those words had changed me. I felt myself at peace and safe. After that I didn't get tired anymore, and I believed that we would survive. [...] My father's appearance while I was asleep gave me the strength I needed.²⁵

This experience resembles passages of Biblical revelations where Christ, an angel, or the voice of God brings an important message. In another dream, recorded in a diary already during the war, a soldier dreamt of being in a brightly lit hall that had a strangely beautiful Christmas tree standing in the middle. The hall was kept by young maidens in white clothes. One of them invited the soldier to play around the tree. He was attracted, but then suddenly felt frightened and snatched away his hand. The maiden looked at him with sorrowful eyes. After the dream the soldier decided to stay in his safe assignment behind the frontlines and not to search for any adventures.²⁶ Here, too, the reference to angels in heaven seems obvious.

Next to the reminiscences of survival, a very common story tells of how a person had learned of his impending death beforehand. Obviously, such persons were no longer around to reminisce about their experiences; the stories were told by their fellow soldiers. Accordingly, having a dream or some other omen of one's imminent death usually resulted in making preparations, such as sharing one's belongings or bidding farewell; behaviour that was considered out of the ordinary.²⁷ Again, announcing one's imminent death and starting to prepare for it brings to mind Christ's last moments with his disciples, as if the soldier was also getting ready for a sacrifice. Usually the other soldiers first refused to take such preparations seriously:

²⁵ FLSA, Korsu 1973, Vol. 17, E.H., 24–5.

²⁶ FLSA, Korsu 1973, Vol. 5, V.M., 9–10.

²⁷ FLSA, Korsu 1973, Vol. 8, E.P., 107.

Right after he [a fellow soldier] woke up in the morning, he said, “Today I will surely die, I dreamt that my dog tag was cut and my mother cried a lot.” We laughed and made fun of him, and we said that he who believes in his dreams is afraid of his shadow. The same evening we carried him wounded to a dressing station. He was conscious and asked for sugar, and told me, do you remember [A.] what I said to you all in the morning. His life ended before we reached the dressing station.²⁸

One respondent tells how he had developed an uncanny instinct for recognizing the next soldiers to die from the signs in their eyes. Shocked and suspecting his own sanity, he started to observe his own face for any such signs, but he could not recognize anything. He perceived also other changes in the behaviour of those about to die: two of them stopped singing or playing cards, another one returned to his childhood memories, one wrote a farewell letter to his wife and daughter, and one went to say his last greetings to the ladies working in a nearby canteen.²⁹ Such changes can be seen as performing a “good death” that corresponded loosely with the Christian ideas of preparing to die in a conscious and calm way.³⁰

The soldiers did not only search for signs of death or survival; they also took an active role in working with their destiny. This became visible in an apparently popular habit of carrying different kinds of amulets and tokens. Some of these could be more or less arbitrary objects that became important for one reason or another, but often the amulets were connected to the significant others in soldiers’ lives. This could mean carrying a lock of hair from one’s girlfriend, a photograph of one’s wife and children, a letter from one’s mother, or some other emotionally charged object from a person who was important to the soldier. In a similar fashion, the amulets could also be religious objects such as small crucifixes, pocket Bibles, or hymn books. Ideally, the personal and the religious would come together, so that the amulet was, for instance, a Bible given by one’s mother:

In our group of soldiers there were men who had mascots [sic]. I don’t know how seriously they believed in them, or whether they believed at all. There was a lucky coin that could include whatever protective powers. One shouldn’t lose that. For many boys the New Testament was a certain protection and a provider of necessary strength, and so one had to carry it always

²⁸ FLSA, Korsu 1973, Vol. 5, A.M., 25.

²⁹ FLSA, Korsu 1973, Vol. 4, E.K., 8–9.

³⁰ Cf. Kempainen, *Isänmaan uhrit*, 55–8.

in one's pocket. One mate even told me as a big secret that he had such a lucky charm that as long as he carries it with himself nothing bad will happen and the devil won't poke him. Well he didn't die in the war and the devil didn't poke him.—The lucky charm was a woman's lace handkerchief, given by his girlfriend who had put such a strong spell on this handkerchief that the man survived in the turmoil of war.³¹

It seems to have been important that as material objects these amulets were tangible and usable; they were a concrete link to those personal emotions and religious beliefs that were important for the soldiers. In a moment of crisis or insecurity, looking at a photograph, touching a lucky charm, or feeling it in one's pocket could alleviate stress and fear. They were thus an important material part of individual practices and rituals. A respondent tells how the men of an infantry company learned about a counterattack that they knew to be very risky: "Many men took from their pockets a soldier's hymn book, a collection of Bible verses, or some other sombre kind of a book and studied them in a way I had never seen before."³² Besides such serious exercises, the rituals could be quite banal, such as organizing one's belongings in a certain order or urinating before a dangerous task. It was also important to avoid things that could cause bad luck.³³

Of all the religious practices, praying was probably the most common one and something that the soldiers had learned at home and in school. "Both in the Winter War and in the Continuation War, whenever it felt that one cannot survive, I prayed silently by myself and this alone gave me a feeling of salvation," a war veteran reminisced.³⁴ Often the prayer that was most readily available was the one learned by heart in one's childhood home, which connected the act to the memory of one's mother or other close relatives.³⁵ It seems that usually praying and other religious rituals were considered a deeply private matter that the soldiers wanted to practise quietly by themselves.³⁶

³¹ FLSA, Korsu 1973, Vol. 5, A.M., 26.

³² FLSA, Korsu 1973, Vol. 9, T.S., 7.

³³ E.g. FLSA, Korsu 1973, Vol. 9, H.R., 20–1.

³⁴ FLSA, Korsu 1973, Vol. 10, E.T., 3.

³⁵ For military chaplains' reminiscences in this regard, see Salminen, "Oli ilo saada palvella," 147; Teräs, "Kuormankantajia kysytään," 166.

³⁶ On praying, see also Kempainen, *Isänmaan ubrit*, 223; Tepora, *Lippu, ubri, kansakunta*, 278–9.

There is no need to contemplate the factual nature of all these phenomena—it is enough to note that they were clearly very important and widespread among the frontline soldiers. As coping strategies, they were attempts to control the uncontrollable. One of the most distinctive features of modern warfare has been its faceless, mechanistic, and massively destructive force, which, for a single combatant, has created an experience of powerlessness and insignificance. A Finnish frontline soldier in the trenches rarely saw the enemy and his individual perspective on the vast battlefield was very restricted.³⁷ By resorting to prayers, tokens, omens, and rituals, the soldiers tried to find some order in the apparently chaotic environment; their death or survival would not be only a random event but a consequence of fate or some greater force, to which the soldier could have a direct personal connection through, for instance, an amulet or prayer. In this way the soldier became an active individual agent and not merely a passive, arbitrary victim of war. Frontline fatalism helped soldiers cope psychologically by easing the anxiety of being responsible for their own survival. If everything was, in the end, determined by some higher power, then one could stop worrying about it and concentrate on the practical tasks at hand. Furthermore, the symbolically charged tokens were also material objects; in them soldiers could store their most valuable emotions and memories and hold onto them.³⁸

In this way, the soldiers tended to return to the roots of religion and became spiritual “artisans.” The practices they employed were not just habitual, routine-like repetitions of formal religion but stemmed from the direct experiences of death, violence, and moral insecurity, which are at the core of religious rituals. The frontline experience created a demand for spiritual practices, which, in turn, gave these experiences shape and meaning—and in this cycle, religion became a lived-through experience.

PROTECTIVE IDENTITIES ON THE MORAL FRONTIERS

Being sent to the front meant that the young men were separated from their everyday human relations, civilian identities, and peacetime norms. They entered, instead, a strange and hostile environment, which was

³⁷ Indeed, much of the Finnish frontline experience in 1941–1944 resembled rather the static trench warfare of World War I than the more mobile operations of 1939–1945.

³⁸ Watson, “Self-deception and Survival,” 251–3, 257–61; for similar observations on frontline fatalism in Finnish soldiers’ letters, see Hagelstam, “I stridens hetta,” 37–8.

characterized by the constant presence of violence. Soldiers witnessed the death and mutilation of their comrades, and they were expected to commit acts of lethal violence themselves. Consequently, the frontline experience meant a full reversal of what had been considered normal or abnormal in one's earlier life. This experience was reflected in the soldiers' language and slang, which was saturated with expressions of irony.³⁹ Having to cope with this reversal was a moral problem, and the front can be seen as a moral frontier where questions of life and death were acutely present. The habits of carrying amulets, praying, or interpreting omens were one important aspect of adapting to these strange conditions by seeking a personal connection to the transcendental. At the same time, soldiers had to change or adjust their identities in order to survive mentally on the front. While this identity transformation was not a straightforwardly religious phenomenon, it was definitely an integral part of the same moral enterprise as the explicitly religious practices of frontline fatalism.

Reading Finnish soldiers' wartime correspondence and drawing on the classic anthropological ideas of rites of passage and liminality, ethnologist Sonja Hagelstam has written that Finnish soldiers during World War II were very conscious of the exceptionality of the "timeless" or "detached" moment they were experiencing on the frontlines compared to normal, civilian peacetime.⁴⁰ They also understood the peculiar circumstances of the front and its transformative potential, hence the frequent references in the war reminiscences in the Finnish Literature Society's collections: "war is war," "you can't understand it if you haven't been there," "this must be incomprehensible for a civilian," and "the war changed everyone who experienced it on the frontlines." The experience of entering the battle was called the "baptism of fire," which gave birth to new men of the frontlines, to "brothers-in-arms." Emphasizing the liminality of the frontline experience, reminiscences often narrate war as a "journey," as a travel outside everyday life. The ex-soldiers constantly referred to their war experiences as a "voyage" (*taival*, *reissu*, or *retki*), "path" (*polku*), "logging site" in the wilderness (*savotta*), and a "stint" or "slog" (*urakka*).⁴¹

The most remarkable thing that separated this "voyage" from any everyday travel was that it was made to a place where a person's life was

³⁹ Kivimäki, *Battled Nerves*, 257–9; for a comprehensive collection of Finnish military slang in wartime, see Hämäläinen, *Suomalainen sotilasslangi*.

⁴⁰ Hagelstam, "Krigets tid."

⁴¹ See also synonyms for "war" (*sota*) in Hämäläinen, *Suomalainen sotilasslangi*, 322.

constantly under threat and the civilian norms had been turned upside down. The mastery of death and violence changed the soldiers' identities, or at least these experiences were made much more tolerable by harnessing protective layers of one kind or another. This "mental insulation" became visible in the soldiers' appearance. It was a common habit to grow a "frontline beard," to customize one's kit, to dress in an emphatically "front-soldierly" fashion, and to carry formal or informal insignia such as the death's skull on one's dress or helmet to mark soldierly status. Collecting war trophies from the dead or captured Soviet soldiers was very popular. The trophies were usually small items like Soviet cockades, badges, coins, and wallets, or things with some practical use such as warm winter boots, fur clothes, weapons, and wristwatches.⁴² Sometimes the trophies were more macabre, such as skulls, bones, or gold teeth.⁴³ Similarly to the lucky charms and amulets discussed in the earlier section, these objects were emotionally and symbolically charged and contained protective powers.

The frontline soldiers were physically dirty; mainly, of course, because of the nature of their tasks and bad hygienic conditions, but this dirtiness was also consciously used to emphasize one's status as "true workmen" of war and to distinguish the men of the frontlines from the tidy "gentlemen" behind the lines. Soldiers in their dugouts also used coarse language, and extremely black humour was a distinctive marker of their status.⁴⁴ All in all, the frontline community tended to surround itself with signs, language, and appearances stressing the special circumstances of the front: the harshness, violence, and dirt. The nature of these conditions was generally understood as strongly masculine, whereas the home front and the service troops in the rear took on feminine or unmanly connotations.⁴⁵

Constructing a status distinction between the "real men" of the frontlines and the despised and ridiculed (but also envied) "home front heroes" was one function of these cultural phenomena. They also helped the soldiers cope psychologically. As Joanna Bourke has written, the trophy-collecting culture highlighted prowess in active combat and, at the same time, in handling the grotesque experience of killing; it provided a

⁴² FLSA, Korsu 1973, Vol. 12, T.V., 18; Vol. 13, A.A./M.T., 170; Vol. 23, P.K., 34–7.

⁴³ FLSA, Korsu 1973, Vol. 8, A.P., 6; Vol. 9, H.R., 16; Vol. 12, O.V., 7.

⁴⁴ FLSA, Korsu 1973, Vol. 1, P.H., 1; Vol. 2, A.H., 23; Vol. 5, E.L., 64, 68.

⁴⁵ Cf. Pipping, *Infantry Company*, 208–9.

carnavalesque demonstration of the inversion of normal civil morals and behaviour.⁴⁶ Bourke also notes a peculiar identification with, even attachment to, the enemy in the trophy collecting. The trophies showed that the enemy “was like us” and made visible the bond between the dead and the living.⁴⁷ Such identification can be seen, for instance, in the Finnish soldiers’ habit of looking through and collecting the photos carried by a dead enemy; they raised discussions on the identity and family of the fallen and pondered the similarity of the young soldiers on both sides of the front.⁴⁸

Furthermore, as the violence on the front reached levels of unreal brutality, the trophies helped to provide physical evidence of this experience. Collecting war trophies and fashioning one’s frontline appearances also had a mentally protective function. Following Anna Freud’s psychoanalytic thesis on defence mechanisms of the self, just as a child afraid of ghosts dresses up as a ghost to counter the alleged threat, the soldiers tried to control their fears by becoming the masters and carriers of what they feared; they identified themselves with the threatening aggression.⁴⁹ This explains the keen interest in the symbols of death, violence, and dirt. The dirtiness of the front was both physical and moral in nature, and it emphasized the liminality of the frontline experience. The soldiers were forced both to conduct and endure acts of normally taboo violence and to live in the midst of this violence. Many accounts of dirtiness and filthiness in the reminiscences seem to reflect the morally threatening nature of the war experience which troubled the soldiers. The dirt symbolized the out-of-order, liminal qualities of the front.⁵⁰

One special and culturally distinctive practice must be noted in regard to the soldiers’ balancing between purity and moral threat. Bathing in saunas takes a prominent place in the soldiers’ war reminiscences, and it seems to have been one of the most warmly remembered aspects of Finnish frontline culture. Whenever the soldiers knew that they would be staying at the same spot for a longer period, they started to build a sauna—they even prioritized sauna-building over constructing their living facilities and making defensive preparations.⁵¹ This prioritization, together with the detailed and focused descriptions of the saunas in the reminiscences, tells

⁴⁶ Bourke, *Intimate History of Killing*, 37–43.

⁴⁷ Ibidem, 40–1, 146–8; see also Leed, *No Man’s Land*, 107–9.

⁴⁸ FLSA, Korsu 1973, Vol. 12, S.V., 9–10.

⁴⁹ Freud, *Das Ich*, 125 ff.

⁵⁰ Cf. the famous thesis of Mary Douglas in her *Purity and Danger*.

⁵¹ FLSA, Korsu 1973, Vol. 2, M.J.H., 11; Vol. 3, J.J., 9; Vol. 3, A.K., 13–4.

of their cultural significance beyond the obvious hygienic one. The sauna stories stress the spiritual element of bathing as an inner purification. Physical washing went hand in hand with moral cleansing.⁵² The sauna was understood as an elementary part of the Finnish way of life, thus marking the Finns' existential difference from the "filthiness" of the Soviet soldiers.⁵³ It is also worth noting that in Finnish culture, saunas were traditionally holy places of healing—also insanities were treated in saunas—and bathing included ritualistic behaviour and rules.⁵⁴ Furthermore, bathing together had an important bonding function.⁵⁵ In Finnish sauna culture, women and children used to bathe separately from men, and for a youngster, being allowed to bathe together with the men was a sign of growing into manliness. Thus, the frontline saunas were also gendered places emphasizing the masculinity of the soldiers.

Growing a beard or going to the sauna were not "religious" practices as such, yet they seem to have had an implicit spiritual element as markers of a specific experience of living in the outskirts of one's parent civilian community. This experience can be conceptualized using anthropologist Victor Turner's idea of *communitas*, which refers to the extraordinary community among initiates during the liminal phase in rites of passage. *Communitas* is more than a strong community in normal social relations as it is marked by those liminal circumstances that give rise to it. These circumstances require that the chosen group of initiates be sent outside the everyday structure of their society, that they go through transformative rituals and experiences, and that they return after a period of time with a new social status. Many experiences in the liminal phase are paralleled with death: the initiates cease to exist in their earlier persona inside their normal society; they are without a clear status and qualities. They are not bound by everyday norms and sanctions but are allowed—even required—to break them for the sake of initiation. The initiates gain "secret knowledge," usually tabooed in everyday life, while formal norms and hierarchies lose their power or are turned upside down. The initiation is at the same time "impure" and "sacred" as the normally fixed dichotomies of the society blend with each other.⁵⁶

⁵² Cf. Zhong & Liljenquist, "Washing Away Your Sins," 1451–2.

⁵³ FLSA, Korsu 1973, Vol. 2, O.H., 17; Vol. 9, S.T.R., 4.

⁵⁴ Hakamies, "Sauna ja kansanomainen terveydenhoito," 275–80.

⁵⁵ FLSA, Korsu 1973, Vol. 12, O.V., 7; Vol. 12, V.V., 4–5.

⁵⁶ Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 94 ff.; cf. van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*.

Seen from this anthropological perspective, drawing a line between the front and the rest of the society—and fashioning one's frontline identities accordingly—was not only a way to construct a distinctive social status; it was also a way to make an existential difference between those who had crossed the border to the moral frontier of life and death and those who had not. Despite some culturally specific practices, such as the sauna bathing, this was by no means a Finnish phenomenon but widely recognized as a characteristic for the transnational culture of frontline soldiers as border crossers.⁵⁷ The same extraordinary, occasionally transcendent qualities repeat themselves in the studies of soldiers' war experiences: the frontline soldiers are separated and estranged from their civilian identities; the frontline community exists outside the normal structures of ordinary life; the landscape of war is perceived as an otherworldly terra incognita; and the front experience transforms the soldiers thoroughly in a change described as a kind of "baptism" or "masculinization."⁵⁸

With their ritualistic practices and expressions of frontline fatalism, Finnish soldiers were a part of this culture of the front, which was characterized by the vicinity of sudden violence, the upheaval of moral norms, underground existence in trenches and dugouts—and, usually, the gendered understanding of the frontline as "manly" and masculinizing.⁵⁹ Consequently, these circumstances shaped the experience of frontline religion and gave it similar expressions in places that were not necessarily otherwise culturally connected.

LUTHERAN SOLDIERS

In the two previous parts of the chapter, I have studied Finnish soldiers as artisans of religion and moral issues at the grassroots of frontline experience. While we can recognize the influence of a Lutheran upbringing, for example in saying one's prayers, in its essence this "artisanship" was not bound to the particularities of Finnish culture but represented the much more general phenomenon of having to cope with the violent conditions on the frontlines. We can find, for instance, very similar religious and

⁵⁷ On the military community as delegates and border crossers, see Marvin & Ingle, *Blood Sacrifice*, 98 ff.; Tepora, *Lippu, ubri, kansakunta*, 46.

⁵⁸ On the classic Anglo-American works in this field, see, e.g., Fussell, *Great War*; Holmes, *Acts of War*; Hynes, *Soldier's Tale*; Bourke, *Intimate History of Killing*.

⁵⁹ For a summary on the vast literature on war's "masculinizing" effects, see Goldstein, *War and Gender*.

ritualistic behaviours among the Soviet soldiers of World War II, although the Red Army was formally atheist and the long Orthodox tradition in Russia was also different from Finnish Lutheranism.⁶⁰

Nevertheless, there was also a distinctively Finnish culture of frontline religiosity. It was based on the general role of the Lutheran faith in Finland as well as on the specific institution of military chaplaincy, which was an integral part of the Finnish Army. During the Continuation War of 1941–1944, there was one military chaplain in every battalion (or an equivalent unit of ca. 500 to 1000 men), plus a number of senior military chaplains on the higher levels of the military hierarchy. Most of the chaplains had also been trained as reserve officers, and they usually belonged to the younger members of the Finnish clergy. At the end of 1941, altogether 500—or one-third—of all Finnish priests were called to serve as military chaplains. Their work was directed and administered by the Ecclesiastical Department of the Finnish Army High Command, led by Field Bishop (*kenttäpiispa*) Johannes Björklund.⁶¹

Military chaplains had the special duty of taking care of the fallen soldiers. This was one of the most sensitive areas of frontline culture. The bodies of fallen comrades troubled the soldiers' minds and required special attention; the soldiers took lots of trouble to ensure that the fallen were evacuated from the front back to their home parishes. Proper handling of the bodies was very important, and the lack of it caused uneasiness and outrage.⁶² It was considered harmful for a soldier's mental endurance to look too closely at the fallen, and the soldiers leaving for furloughs were warned against taking part in military funerals or visiting military hospitals. Despite the generally coarse language common among the frontline soldiers, the fallen were almost always addressed with high respect:

I often wondered how the boys seemed to be somehow horrified to see one of their own, a Finn, lying there dead. They did not say a word and looked away. But at the same time they looked at a Russian soldier's corpse curiously, without horror. They could strip the felt boots from the corpse, and in some lucky cases even a fur coat which they might don themselves straight away. They never took the shoes of their own fallen, although shoes were

⁶⁰ Merridale, *Ivan's War*, 168–9.

⁶¹ Kansanaho, *Papit sodassa*, 160–4; Heikkilä, “Uskonto ja hengellisyys sota-aikana”; Muukkonen, “Hengellinen huolto,” 99–104.

⁶² Pipping, *Infantry Company*, 102–3, 167, 204.

very hard to come by. They even made jokes about Russian corpses and wondered whether they were Mongols or something else.⁶³

The Finnish system of sending the dead to be buried in the “Hero’s Cemeteries” in their home parishes proved a comforting practice for the soldiers, as it showed that the fallen were respected and taken care of. It emphasized the emotional link between the front and the home front and situated the soldiers’ sacrifices at the centre of each locality, both physically and symbolically. Therefore, the formal role of military chaplains in charge of this process was very important and it bound the death of every soldier to the formal religious structure as defined by the Lutheran church. Consequently, the soldiers found consolation in imbuing the experience of their comrades’ deaths with religious meanings of Christian martyrdom and Christ-like sacrifice.⁶⁴

Finnish military chaplains had a dual role: they were responsible for religious worship as well as for the more propagandistic tasks of upholding morale and patriotic spirit in the troops. As has been demonstrated by earlier research, they had internalized their spiritual role in the national war effort and in their rhetoric wove inseparably together the Christian faith and the destiny of the nation.⁶⁵ If the soldiers saw the chaplains as mere megaphones of blunt propaganda, they could react very allergically and ignore the chaplains altogether—just as they usually ignored other patronizing attempts to promote patriotism and sacrifice through explicit indoctrination.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, many of the chaplains were aware of the danger of being seen merely as propaganda tools of the army. Consequently, they saw their primary mission in preaching the traditional Christian gospel.⁶⁷ Most of the military chaplains were relatively young, they had often acted as frontline officers, and as long as they shared the risks and hardships of their men, they were probably highly esteemed among the

⁶³ FLSA, Korsu 1973, Vol. 16, J.K.H., 75.

⁶⁴ Kemppainen, *Isänmaan uhrit*, 65–74; Kivimäki, “Sankariuhri ja kansankunta.” On the analogous phenomenon of consigning death with religious meanings in World War I France, Smith, *The Embattled Self*, 62–75.

⁶⁵ Kemppainen, *Isänmaan uhrit*, 156–60, 170; Tepora, *Lippu, uhri, kansakunta*, 276–80; also Kansanaho, *Papit sodassa*, 197–208.

⁶⁶ Cf. Salminen, *Propaganda rintamajoukoissa*, 50–1.

⁶⁷ Kansanaho, *Papit sodassa*, 58–63, 116, 268–71; see also Honkanen, “Mutta minä sain laupeuden,” 35.

soldiers.⁶⁸ On this everyday level of interaction between the chaplains and soldiers, the matter was about simple religious counselling. Here, the message was hardly as “patriotic” or “propagandistic” as in the most cited public sermons, but the chaplains, nevertheless, tried to assure the soldiers of the collective meaningfulness of their personal sacrifices: their hardships would not be in vain; they happened in the name of Christ and for the survival of the fatherland.

As long as the chaplains stuck to simple religious counselling and the gospel, the frontline community seems to have been a fertile ground for their work. Finnish pioneer sociologist Knut Pipping, who served in a machine-gun company in 1941–1944 and wrote his doctoral dissertation on the soldiers’ informal norms and behaviour, testified to this. The lumberjack soldiers from northern Finland whom he observed were hardly Sunday school pupils; yet they took part readily in holy communion and other field services. When some soldiers appeared on the civil register instead of the church register—that is they were not members of the Finnish Lutheran church—the rest of the men took a mildly disapproving stand towards them and could not understand their motivations.⁶⁹ As a war veteran later reminisced in the collections of the Finnish Literature Society:

At least in those troops where I served on the front, the hours of devotion were willingly attended. Knowing that death was our close companion must have caused this. [...] At least for my part I can say that the hours of devotion were comforting and encouraging, albeit sometimes sad events, as they usually reminded us of the peacetime Sunday schools and church attendance, and of course one’s homefolks. Before a battle, the prayer meeting somehow gave a feeling of security and even courage to go there.⁷⁰

Another soldier mentions that they did not think too highly of their military chaplains, but this did not prevent them from seeking consolation from religion:

They [the soldiers] held a healthy suspicion towards all propaganda. Whereas regarding God, this was not talked about, but I’m sure that in a tough situation every one of them prayed. Priests were not especially esteemed—we

⁶⁸ Kansanaho, *Papit sodassa*, 48, 102–9, 160–1, 173–7, 266, 271–5.

⁶⁹ Pipping, *Infantry Company*, 187; see also Heikura, *Rintamajoukkojen mieliala*, 128–30.

⁷⁰ FLSA, Korsu 1973, Vol. 17, E.H., 8–9; see also Vol. 5, M.M., 17.

preferred direct connections. But sometimes when we were transferred to a place from where there was a continuous stream of fallen and wounded soldiers, we could take communion. The altar was a white trunk of a birch and we kneeled down on another birch trunk. In order to preserve our courage we needed to have settled relations with God and other people.⁷¹

As these examples demonstrate, the Lutheran traditions, rituals, and upbringing served to structure soldiers' religious experiences and offered a set of practices to express them, even if a soldier would not have considered his military chaplain a religious authority. According to wartime surveys, religion had the most prominent role among older reservists and soldiers from the rural areas, whereas younger conscripts and city-dwellers showed somewhat less interest in religious matters. Religious upbringing and traditions in childhood fostered positive attitudes towards religion also in wartime; the influence of soldiers' mothers was especially important hereby.⁷²

Sometimes the soldiers' spontaneous religious activity took an organized form that surpassed the military chaplains. One veteran tells that while there was only one military chaplain in his battalion of 800 soldiers, the men started to gather for Bible-reading on their own. The members of these groups came from different religious confessions and movements but this did not cause any trouble. They started to plan a common room for the meetings, which then materialized in the building of a "Dugout Church" (*Korsu-Kirkko*) with seats for 60 people. The church served as a site for meetings and sermons, organized by the men themselves. The military chaplains were glad to participate in this activity, but they were not the prime movers of the matter. This was rather a manifestation of a kind of ecumenical bottom-up awakening or spiritual longing.⁷³ It is interesting to see how the experience of religious curiosity and thirst took the form of establishing a "congregation" and a "church," thus institutionalizing this experience.

Finally, the most wide-spread and jointly shared form of Lutheran Christianity took place at Christmas. Celebrations on the frontlines—the singing of hymns, a field service in the dugout, letters and parcels from home, and a modest feast—were the events to which many soldiers linked

⁷¹FLSA, Korsu 1973, Vol. 4., E.K., 3.

⁷²Muukkonen, "Hengellinen huolto," 119–20, 124.

⁷³FLSA, Korsu 1973, Vol. 2, A.H., 8.

their religious memories. The Christmas traditions seem to have acted as an emphatic point of contrast to the “atheist Bolshevism” on the other side of the frontline; it marked a strain of war experience understood as specifically “Finnish” in its Christian ethos.⁷⁴ Besides the explicitly religious meanings, Christmas also offered pivotal opportunities for the soldiers to experience a connection. Whereas the characteristic feature of the wartime was the physical and experiential separation of the home from the front, the simultaneous celebration of Christmas in a similar fashion all over the country strengthened, for a moment, the impression of a binding unity and common fate.⁷⁵ The following excerpt from a soldier’s reminiscence may sound overly romantic, but it grasps well the emotional power of Christmas on the frontlines:

One more verse from *Angel in Heaven*. What it felt like in the dugout was that we had been released. [...] Experiencing that Christmas was like feeling the hand of the beloved caress the face from the corner of the eye down to the cheek and touch the back of the hand; the angels danced in a ring around the red-hot heater. Then there was nothing but to sleep into Christmas, on a plank bunk. Others left for their shifts in the dark nest, squeezing the cold stock of the rifle, realizing that Christmases will never end in the hearts of Finland’s people.⁷⁶

While this is an ideal image, and the frontline Christmases could also be depressive and demoralizing experiences that underlined one’s separation from home,⁷⁷ the quotation tells that the Christmas celebrations had a capacity to foster an amalgamation of personal experiences, religious meanings, and national sentiments. In such a symbolically and emotionally charged moment, the soldiers’ lived religion could go hand in hand with formal church Lutheranism. In the bigger picture, Lutheran religion as internalized in upbringing and represented on the front by the military chaplains could give a culturally specific substance to those experiences of violence, mortal danger, and threatened morality that were characteristic to any soldier serving on the front in any army. This was, of course, a complex process with very different outcomes depending on a multitude of factors—and this short presentation has only managed to outline some

⁷⁴ For a similar self-understanding in the German army, see Kühne, *Kameradschaft*, 160–1.

⁷⁵ FLSA, Korsu 1973, Vol. 8 (L.V.N.), 2; Vol. 9 (M.S.), 21–2.

⁷⁶ FLSA, Korsu 1973, Vol. 2, A.H., 28.

⁷⁷ FLSA, Korsu 1973, Vol. 7, A.N., 145–8.

general characteristics of frontline religiosity. However, religion clearly gained special significance on the front. This had to do with the vicinity of death, as is demonstrated, for instance, by the soldiers' increased need for spiritual support during the times of heaviest fighting. Similarly, as the military chaplains noted, many soldiers' religious feelings tended to fade soon after the fatal threat eased.⁷⁸ There was a kind of opportunistic flavour to the lived religion on the frontlines; it was bound to a very specific time and place on the moral frontiers—and as with various superstitious rituals and beliefs, it was also exercised as a kind of life insurance, just in case.

CONCLUSIONS: RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES IN THE FRONTLINE COMMUNITY

Finnish soldiers' lived religion on the frontlines of World War II was based on the combined experience of mortal and moral danger. Trying to survive—both mentally and physically—in an environment where soldiers could face death and mutilation almost at any moment made questions of transcendence very imminent. The soldiers sought to connect with the otherworldly through various acts, rituals, objects, and beliefs that constituted a culture of frontline fatalism. They invested time and energy in these emotionally charged practices to find comfort and protection. However, the frontline experience was not only about suffering and surviving; it was also about committing acts of violence—or at least about living in the midst of violent acts, even if one would not have committed them. The moral reversal of peacetime norms required profound adaptation, and I have argued that this resulted in constructing specific frontline identities and taking part in activities that reflected the experience of living in a morally liminal sphere.

At the beginning of the chapter, I stated that soldiers' lived religion can be understood through two different “contexts”: the frontline and the Lutheran faith. Now at the end, this point of departure requires refinement. I would recognize altogether four overlapping contexts that are necessary for the understanding of this phenomenon in its totality. Focusing on each of them underlines somewhat different features.

First, in the widest sense, the particular manifestation of Finnish soldiers' religiosity can be connected to an almost timeless phenomenon of

⁷⁸ Cf. Muukkonen, “Hengellinen huolto,” 120, 124–6.

soldiering, where chosen members of the community are sent to battle to kill and die. The acts of war have always included ritualistic behaviour to cope with the proximity of death and violence. On this level, it is possible to apply anthropological theories such as Victor Turner's idea of liminal *communitas* and Mary Douglas' analysis of purity and dirt in how people react to moral disorder. Such a perspective will reveal overarching patterns and continuities in the human experience of martial violence and in attempts to use religious beliefs and practices to manage this experience. This can explain the general structure of Finnish soldiers' religious experiences, but it does not say much about their particular content and shape as they appeared in 1939–1945.

Second, there was the transnational culture of the frontline. In a stricter sense than the anthropological model above, we could talk of the European culture of modern warfare roughly in the first half of the twentieth century. It included many features in common, such as mass conscription armies, underground trench warfare, field post service, and the introduction of modern weaponry, which all structured soldiers' experiences in very concrete, material ways. Regarding the experience of lived religion in this (European) context, a very important aspect of this culture was the close intertwinement of nationalism as a civic religion and the Christian ideas of suffering and martyrdom. Young citizen-soldiers' death on the front was culturally constructed as a sacrifice for the nation—and despite the national differences in emphasis and style, this cultural pattern fashioned soldiers' experiences in both world wars.

In the Finnish case, the meaning of religion was probably accentuated, as Finnish nationalism was so closely bound to the rather homogenous Lutheran faith and, consequently, the institution of military chaplaincy had a very prominent role in the wartime army. The third context for the frontline lived religion is the particular Finnish culture of Lutheranism. In practices such as praying, celebrating Christmas, visiting field services, and carrying Bibles or hymn books as protective amulets, Lutheranism gave specific content and meaning to soldiers' experiences. For instance, the system of evacuating the bodies of the fallen to their home parishes was a culture-specific, historically “Finnish” response to the general question of cherishing the sacrifice of soldiers—and it clearly corresponded well with the idea of a “good death” among the Finnish population. As was demonstrated by the case of the “Dugout Church,” the soldiers' spontaneous craving for religion became modelled according to the Lutheran conventions of establishing a congregation and building a church for it. Whereas

the two contexts above are best suited to point to similar structures and parallels, this third context of Finnish Lutheranism pays more attention to the detail and cultural contingency in how the soldiers' religious experiences took shape.

Finally, there is still a fourth context that has to be pointed out, although the present chapter has not managed to use this approach. Within the three above-mentioned contexts, each and every soldier had a personal experience of religion, too, which was an outcome of a multitude of social and biographical factors. With a different set of sources, we could study the individual history of lived religion, with its unique characteristics. Thus, for example, the wartime biography of the future Finnish president Mauno Koivisto (1923–2017) reveals many common features of frontline religiosity, such as praying and reading the Bible to find spiritual security and comfort; and yet also a singular combination of Adventist-style Lutheranism and a working-class background, which were fostered by Koivisto's single-parent carpenter father.⁷⁹

As a historical phenomenon, Finnish soldiers' experiences of lived religion on the frontlines can be understood through each of these four contexts, as happening at their intersection. The choice of context has an effect on whether we recognize a continuity and pattern or a particularity and contingency in our sources. Yet it is also good to note that this itemization is purely analytical, and the experience of religion cannot be conclusively reduced to any of the four contexts. With the concept of "artisanship," I have referred to the soldiers' active performance of the religious experience, which took social, cultural, material, and ideological elements from all the above-mentioned contexts and combined them into practice. This doing was an integral part of the experience, its site in time and place. The moral borderland of the front fostered various forms of religious artisanship, which were meaningful only in these peculiar circumstances, and the soldiers used whatever resources they had at their disposal to make sense of these conditions. In this way, their lived religion usually had a situational and pragmatic stance, despite the military chaplains' best efforts to promote a coherent Lutheran worldview.

⁷⁹ Bergholm, *Kiibkeä Koivisto*, 57–79, 86–8.

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