Raisa Maria Toivo:

Gender performance in early modern religious life[1]

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ABSTRACT:

Gender performance in early modern religious life by Raisa Maria Toivo will explore the bodily interplay of religion and gender early modern Europe using Finland as a case study. Drawing on theories of the emotional, the bodily and the self, it discusses the ambiguous and paradoxical position of gender in early modern and late medieval Christianity, the performances of gender and status in the religious sphere of life, and focuses on the use of the production of the religious and gendered experience through the body.

Keywords: emotion, body, self, performativity, experience, early modern Finland

For historians of the early modern, gender and religion are inseparably intertwined. The early modern religions in Europe – Christianity, Judaism, and Islam – have all been used to serve patriarchal social hierarchies, with men at all the highest (or all) levels of clergy, and all of them can be read as including “strong streaks of misogyny”[2]. Claims to religious authority – always mediated and interpreted by theological and cultural traditions – are often highly gendered, and within religious traditions that delimit the proper exercise of women’s authority, it is always precarious for women to transcend traditional gender roles to seek to publicly exercise spiritual power. Religion was used to uphold patriarchy. While medieval nuns and saints were respected and could hold considerable authority, they were nevertheless subject to male superiors. Lay women, except for a few noblewomen or queens, had no say in the financial or political affairs of the institutional church even on the local level, since the formal agencies of parish or magistrate government and poor relief were all in the hands of men. Women were left with informal acts of charity and ad hoc measures

[1] This work has been conducted as part of the Academy of Finland Project *Catholic Reformation in Lutheran Finland*.

[2] Merry E. Wiesner, Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2005), 214.

for survival in dire circumstances, which, because they were informal, conveyed little legitimate or stable power. The Reformations are often seen as a double-edged sword: whereas they lifted up some models for women (and men), they were often either depressingly unattainable, such as the Virgin Queen of Heaven, or equally depressingly limiting, such as the devoted housewife called upon to serve God in her duties towards her husband and children.[3]

Many historians of the premodern religions, such as Caroline Walker Bynum, Susan Karant-Nunn, and Bridget Heal,[4] have found it useful to look at religion and gender through the body and through shared or private bodily experiences rather than through social hierarchies. Nevertheless, the gendering of bodies is not a self-evident and unchanging factor, but differed greatly in the early modern period from now. Paraphrasing medievalist Sarah McNamer[5], "recognizing that gender performance became an enduring, core mechanism for the production of --" religion is crucial the understanding either gender or religion in the early modern period. This article will explore the bodily interplay of religion and gender early modern Europe using Finland as a case study. I will first discuss the general ambiguous and paradoxical position of gender in religion, then move on the performances of gender and status in the religious sphere of life, finally focusing on the use of the production of the religious and gendered experience through the body.

This article will use sample cases from the secular court records in Finnish Rural District Courts from the seventeenth century. Religious crime was prosecuted in both secular and church courts as superstition, blasphemy, negligence, insubordination and public disorderliness, but also as witchcraft and crimes against chastity. The sample cases have been collected in a larger survey through the seventeenth-century secular and church court records all over Finland. The cases can be seen as representative, although religious crimes generally were of diverse nature and similar cases are rare. The lay religious voice can be heard sometimes more and sometimes less authentically in

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[3] Wiesner, Women and Gender, 220, 224-226-237; Joan W. Scott, 'Secularism and Gender Equality'. In Religion, the Secular and the Politics of Sexual Difference, ed. Cade Linell and Trave Fessenden (New York: Columbia University Press 2013), 25-46.

[4] Carolyn Walker Bynum, Holy Feast and Holy Fast. The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women (Oakland: University of California Press 1988); Susan Karant Nunn, The Reformation of Feeling. Shaping the Religious Emotions in Early Modern Germany (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2010), 183-5; Bridget Heal, The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Early Modern Germany. Protestant and Catholic Piety 1500-1648 (Cambridge: CUP 2007).

[5] Sarah McNamer, Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion (Michigan: University of Pennsylvania Press 2010), 7, see also 12, 119–148.

Church and secular court records. They were translated both from Finnish into Swedish language and from an oral and pragmatic into a learned written and legal culture. In this process, the oral narratives of the parishioners where redited to fit the legal discourse of the court, nevertheless, the actors kept introducing their own instead of the legal agenda. The court record narrative can show this in recurring themes and issues, small things that keep popping up in the text even though they are not always necessary for the legal discourse. The material from the secular courts was produced in trials against religious offences. These had in practice been conducted in the secular courts at least since Gustav I's (1523 – 1560) time when a secular punishment was in someone's interest, although religious crime was generally thought of as *casus mixti fori* – cases that could be dealt with both in Church and in secular courts, depending on where they first were taken up and how simple legal matters they were. Since the Church had lost the ability to inflict fines and corporal punishment following Gustav I's orders, it became common for the clergy to demand punishments for religious offenders in the secular courts if they thought that church penance was insufficient. By the beginning of the seventeenth century, various stipulations encouraged the clergy to inform the secular court of serious offences, and in 1686 Church law made it compulsory for all offences. The secular court material thus includes a vast amount of minor religious offences, too.[6]

Early modern Finland was a peripheral area in the north-eastern corner of Europe. During the early modern period, it was a part of Sweden, a Lutheran heartland and an aspiring great power. At the same time, Finland was also a borderland between western and eastern cultures, both politically and religiously. Whereas the internal policies of the time demanded religious orthodoxy and uniformity, foreign policies and annexations required a certain amount of religious toleration.

Finland presents an inherently rural picture of both gender and religion, where the experience and practice of religion is adapted to not only agricultural life – of seasonal and daily cycles, field work, and cattle rearing – but also to long distances, self-sufficiency, material scarcity, and a constant awareness of the fluctuations in life's fortunes. Circumstances also varied within Finland. It was simultaneously a peripheral and an integral part of the Swedish realm. There were relatively densely built areas in the south and south-western parts of Finland, where control by the church and the crown as well as by neighbours was constant and educated clergy abounded. In the more northern and north-eastern areas, settlement was still in its infancy, infrastructure was sparse, and people

[6] Sven Wilskman, Swea Rikets Ecclesiastique Werk i Aplhabetisk Ordningh (Örebro: Johan Lindh, 1781); Marko Nenonen, Noituus, taikuus ja noitavainot. Ala-Satakunnan, Pohjois-Pohjanmaan ja Viipurin Karjalan maaseudulla 1620-1700 (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 1992), 263ff.; Bengt Ankarloo, Trolldomsprocesserna I Sverige (Lund: Rätsshistoriska Institut, 1972).

were few and far between. A round-trip to the nearest church could take three days. However, this article mainly focuses on the southern and western areas, that were well connected and closer to the European countryside in their cultural, religious and gender ideals and practices.

Religious paradoxes and "feeling like a woman"

Premodern religion, though catering for the needs of a patriarchal society and though hierarchical by nature, was not necessarily oppressive towards any gender. Historians of religion have emphasised that among theologians and in spiritual instruction, "feeling like a woman" was not a disparagement. [7] The phrase referenced Christ's bride in the mystical union between the Church and the Divine. Moreover, the corporeality of Christ and his sacrifice that lay in the heart of Christianity was, by the late medieval period, considered symbolically feminine. Since women were considered to be more carnal than men, women could also more easily identify and be identified with the incarnate nature of Christ, and to share in the suffering that was supposed to free humankind from sin. Thus, to take part in the imitation of Christ, the men who wished to be leaders of the congregation also had to present themselves as imitating women. This is visible in a number of late medieval pious instruction manuals and meditation texts.[8]

Though this was, of course a symbolical and ideological discourse rather than pragmatic or political, it had also implications in lay piety and thereby in the practical life of the parishioners. The feminine was therefore not necessarily hierarchically less preferential to the masculine, although some scholars emphasize that this reversal of roles was only temporary.[9]

Whereas the role of such imitation was diminished with the role of religious mysticism in many forms of Protestantism, mysticism did not wholly disappear from even the most orthodox Lutheranism. On the contrary, it has a role in Lutheran religious experiences, even in Luther's own descriptions of his awakening, and later in the person cults that developed. In other words, the

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[7] Bynum, Holy Feast.

[8] McNamer, Affective Meditation 119-148.

[9] Karant-Nunn, The Reformation of Feeling, 185.

portrayal of masculinity among Lutherans always included a dimension of femininity, frailty, and ecstasy.[10]

In this discussion, it is essential to note that late medieval and early modern Christianity, both Protestant and Catholic, may have worked on the platform of neo-Platonic binaries that organized the world into pairs of opposites, such as black and white, light and darkness, or men and women, but it also seems to have flirted with paradoxical inversions of the same binaries. To be righteous, it was necessary to be humble, to be saved it was necessary to feel the enormous weight of sin one carried and to beg for forgiveness. This paradox led to different expressions in Protestantism and Catholicism, but it was important in both. The Protestant idea of salvation by faith alone was based on the human incapability of not sinning, therefore the utter sinfulness of the flawed humans, who could only be saved if they admitted to and believed in their sinfulness and submitted to the Divine grace. The Catholic Reformation's focus on the Mary Magdalen figure and the expenditure on refuges for fallen women indicate a similar quest to identify and associate virtue with the sinful. There was competition to present oneself as the worst sinner, the weakest vessel, for the early modern believer took pride in being as humble as possible.[11] Early modern people believed not only in communal and individual sin and salvation, but also in the idea that "the last will be first, and the first last" (Matthew 20:16). Sin and virtue, humility and pride, and freedom and servitude to God formed binary pairs that were constantly turned upside down; they intermingled and eventually formed paradoxes in which sin and virtue did not exist without each other, humility was pride, and servitude was freedom.

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[10] See analyses on Luther's experiences in Lyndal Roper, Martin Luther, Renegade and Prohet (London: Bodley Head 2016); Descriptions of Luther-Cult e.g. Robert Scribner: Incombustible Luther: The Image of the Reformer in Early Modern Germany. Past and Present 110 (1986), 38-68.

[11] Martin Luther, 'On the Magnificat', in Luther's Works, The American Edition, Jaroslav J. Pelikan & Helmut Lehmann, eds., 55 vols., (St. Louis & Philadelphia: CPH & Fortress Press, 1955-1986), 295-358. The same can be found concerning theology in Finland in e.g. Ericus Erici Sorolainen's 'Sermon on the 1st Sunday after Christmas' in his Postilla I-II (Stockholm: Ch. Reusner 1621-1624). For similar interpretations see also e.g. Phyllis Mack,'Religion, Feminism, and the Problem of Agency: Reflections on Eighteenth-Century Quakerism,' in ed. Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor, Women, Gender and Enlightenment (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2005), 434-459, McNamer, Affective Meditation, 119-148 or Bynum, Holy Fast.

The identity and subjectivity of a religious self was formed in this submission to rules and the whole that was mightier than oneself. [12] While categories of male and female sex as physical or biological entities did not share in this blurring, the social and cultural categories of the feminine and the masculine gendering did.

In this context, the concept of gender also changed. Instead of a hierarchy, historians of religion usually approach gender as a matrix or a web of qualities that could be drawn upon by people to present themselves as religiously successful men or women. These qualities fall less clearly into neo-platonic categories, and therefore both men and women drew on the same qualities, albeit perhaps in different situations and for different ends. The question is or was, therefore, not so much *what* men or women did or were able to do in terms of religion, but *how* they did it. How did men perform religion to be good men, or women to be good women? While these performances certainly were regulated, as Judith Butler points out,[13] the early modern or medieval regulation was not self evidently similar to the modern religious regulation, and although it operated on binaries – the categories of masculine and feminine – the medieval and early modern Christianity's play with paradoxes set their asymmetric hierarchy into a continuous swinging motion. To be masculine, men had to be feminine. The same applied also vice versa to women, as testified by a number of medieval saints vitas describing fasting even until the bodily signs of femininity disappreared or by the protestant descriptions of women taking up male tasks and roles in the absence of "good and Godly" – that is, of course, Protestant – men.[14] Gender turns into a performative project: it is something people do – and therefore appropriate and change – instead of what they are, and it is something that people qualify, instead of something that qualifies them. Together, gender and religion formed a performative space, a stage that empowered people to do things and qualify the ways they did things. [15]

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[12] Mack, 'Religion, Feminism, and the Problem of Agency'; See also Saba Mahmood, Politics of Piety. The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 2005).

[13] Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge 1990), 45-9, 163–71, 177–8.

[14] Bynum, Holy Fast; Protestant examples discussed e.g. in Peter Matheson, Argula von Grumbach. A woman's voice in the reformation. (Edinburgh: Clark 1995); Sini Mikkola, Esikuvallinen uskonsisar: Sukupuolen merkitys Martin Lutherin käsityksessä Argula von Grumbachista reformaation edistäjänä. Suomen kirkkohistoriallisen seuran vuosikirja 2016, ed. P. Latvala and O. Lampinen-Enqvist (Helsinki: Suomen kirkkohistoriallinen seura 2016), 41-69.

[15] Sari Katajala-Peltomaa, Gender, Miracles and Daily Life. The Evidence of Fourteenth-Century Canonization Processes (Brepols: Turnhout 2009).

Gendered status and religious performance

How did the performances of religion and gender work, then? All around Europe and especially in the rural areas of places like Finland, the official church calendar was complemented by a range of unofficial religious celebrations according to the calendar and harvest year. These formed the platform for regular religious performance. The feasts included celebrations of the church holy days – Easter, Christmas, and so on – but also feasts that had been separated from the Lutheran Church year, such as saint's days or the Corpus Christi.

In Jääski in 1686, a villager called Tuomas Pullinen testified against his neighbour, Berend Tappain, and incriminated himself at the same time by explaining that he knew of his neighbour's practices because "he did well celebrate the same Corpus Christi and St Catherine's days, by putting on his best Church clothes, and drinking special beer, with no strangers or servants but only those born at home and their own folk". Furthermore, Pullinen said that he slaughtered a lamb and cooked it as a dedication to God. [16] The neighbours also admitted to celebrating St George and St Olaf with special ale. Usually the celebrations included psalm singing and prayers. In a couple of cases, the lay people were also reported to have celebrated an "irregular Mass" – these descriptions include elements of blasphemy, although at least some of these celebrations seem to have been done in all earnestness.[17] These features also likened the celebration in various ways – by dress, singing, and prayer – to the celebration of holy days in church. The villagers and householders had brewed special beer or ale and drank toasts in honour of the saints celebrated. Such toasts to the Virgin Mary or the saints had been an important part of convivial piety throughout Europe, especially in the late medieval Baltic region, most importantly in Livonia.[18] A special meal was also a common

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[16] District Court Records: Jääski 2–3. June 1686. Jääski, Ranta ja Äyräpää, II KO a:3: 227–229. (National Archives of Finland, hereafter NAF).

[17] District Court Records: Ruokolahti 18.–20. February 1689, Jääski, Ranta ja Äyräpää, II KO a:3: 183. NAF. See also Göran Malmsted, 'In Defence of Holy Days: The Peassantry's Opposition to the Reduction of Holy Days in Early Modern Sweden. Cultural history 3:2 (2014), 103-125; Miia Kuha, Pyhäpäivien vietto varhaismodernin ajan Savossa (vuoteen 1710) (Jyväskylä: Jyväskylän Yliopisto 2016).

[18] E.g. Anu Mänd, Pidustused keskaegse Liivimaa linnades 1350-1550 (Tallinn: Eesti Keele Sihtasutus, 2012); Linda Kaljundi, 'Pagans into Peasants. Ethnic and Social Boundaries in Early Modern Livonia'. In Re-forming Texts, Music and Church Art in the Early Modern North, ed. Tuomas M.S. Lehtonen and Linda Kaljundi. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2016), 357-392.

feature: a lamb or a calf was slaughtered and prepared beforehand to be consumed in honour of the saint, especially St Catherine and St Olaf. Sometimes the meals took place in the cattle sheds, sometimes in the house, and sometimes the meals included presentations in specially built or *ad hoc* offering places.[19]

Finnish historians used to locate these celebrations in the remote and therefore peripheral areas and among the poorest or the least educated populace, who were thought to have been subject neither to the proper teachings nor to the control of the church. In reality, however, saint's day rituals were not restricted to the peripheries, nor to the poor and ignorant; The cases could take place in the tightly inhabited settled areas, where the Vicar's and the Chaplain's eyes could see everything that went on, as well as the more remote regions, where catechism hearings and sermons could more easily be dodged. The participants were often relatively well-to-do freehold-owning peasant farmers, sometimes wealthy ones, people who were familiar with the generally accepted manners and rules, even not formally educated. In the Jääski case, for example, the first offender, Berend Tappain, was a local peasant farmer. Whereas all of the ordinary people living in the rural countryside are today sometimes called "the peasantry", at the time those who considered themselves to hold some sort of ownership or permanent right to a landholding distinguished themselves from the rest of the rural folk as "the settled folk" – *bofast bo(e)nde* in Swedish or *talonpoika* in Finnish (literally meaning "sons of the house"). Ownership meant different things to different people, and in the eyes of the elites, some of these people were only renting the land from the crown, nevertheless, the *talonpojat*, be they freehold or tenant farmers were the better-off stratum of the rural non-gentry. At the end of the description of the court session, when the parties had been sentenced to fines and the sentence was referred for the approval of the Court of Appeal, the records also note that both parties were "well able to pay their fines". This was not always the case, and especially when servant folk and landless people were sentenced, the monetary fines had to be commuted to corporal punishment: consequently, the ability to pay is testimony to relative prosperity.[20] Tappain seems to have worked as a juror in the previous years' court sessions. In the Swedish secular courts (Finland was a part of Sweden at this time), the office of juror was a position of trust in the community: the same men held the office from one year to the next. Jurors were often used as local experts in court, not only having a say in how matters should be judged, but also acting as tools of the crown in carrying out both court decisions

[19] Ilmari Talve, Suomen kansankulttuuri (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society 1990), 251, 262–3.

[20] Rural District Court Records: Jääski 2.–3. June 1686. Jääski, Ranta ja Äyräpää, II KO a:3: 227–229. National Archives of Finland. NAF.

and all other sorts of local government business.[21] Tappain was certainly not poor nor ignorant by contemporary village standards, but rather a prominent member of the community. While this tells little about Tappain's religious or other education, it shows both that he was in a position to know how the legal court operated, and that probably knew very well what kind of customs were generally accepted in his village. It should not be assumed that he naively admitted to behaviour that he guessed would look suspicious. His testimony, therefore, reflects what a good if not major part of the community thought.

The saint's day celebrations were calendar festivals held to cater for the needs of a northern agricultural society; they abound in hierarchical references between kin-members and outsiders or landowners and work force, and there is much eating and lighting of fires in reference to the sufficiency of food, warmth, light, and so on. Travel to sacrificial places is also sometimes recorded, but these rituals away from the homestead lack the sort of domesticity and intimacy of devotional pilgrimage rituals in the medieval cults of saints in the southern parts of Europe. One of the reasons may be a different gendering of the ritual. This may account for some differences in the expressions of intimacy, since intimacy between men and between women was different. Even when both men and women performed the rituals, however, they worked differently: in southern Europe, many of the pilgrimage rituals were performed by women, for reasons that related closely to their personal and family circle - to beg or express gratitude for curing their children or family members -- as part of their care and duties as mothers and wives. In Finland, the regular calendar celebrations were often male events although women did take part in some of them. Whereas people did request cures for their family members or their cattle, they seem to have performed the duty as household masters and mistresses, representatives of the household rather than mothers of a close family. Yet different methods of personalization can be seen in the more *ad hoc* type of saint's celebrations women resorted to when they found themselves in a situation of special, pressing need.[22]

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[21] Eino Jutikkala, Suomen talonpojan historia (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society 1958).

[22] Martti Haavio, Karjalan jumalat. Uskontotieteellinen tutkimus(Helsinki: WSOY, 1959), 19–20, 136–137; Nenonen, Noituus, taikuus ja noitavainot, 69-72 Marko Nenonen, Envious are all the people Witches Watch at Every Gate." Finnish witches and witch trials in the 17th century. Scandinavian Journal of History. Vol 18 (1993:1) pp. 77— 91; The same goes for the rest of Europe, see Katajala-Peltomaa, Gender, Miracles and Daily Life, 207–213.

In other words, active religious participation was important to the parishioners. This is not only a matter of the importance of performing the correct religious rites in a bargaining religion, but also about claiming religious agency and subjectivity. It is true that at some points this subjectivity could be representative: one did not always have to take part personally in the action, and one could send a representative, such as a neighbour or a member of the household. However, representation in household and kin matters – as well as matters concerning the whole village – was an accepted principle in secular matters, so why was it not also the case in religious matters that concerned those same communities? The more personal the matter, the greater the duty it was to take a personal part in the religious activity.[23]

The participants in the saint's day celebrations drank beer, slaughtered an animal, cooked a meal, and ate it. Both in church and on the irregular holy days, a meal was the centre of the ritual and worship. They let out their cattle in a specific way and knelt down in prayer. The farmers' own cult was one of tangible action and performance instead of words.[24] Various levels of agency are evident in the saint's day rituals. Most of the rituals were performed by men, although presumably (it is not mentioned) the meals would be prepared by women. Except for the rituals of letting out the cattle, the place of women and children was standing and watching nearby. Although the examples cited above give scant detail of these specifics, the court records detail the use of magic in the letting out of the cattle, and women and children played a major part. Children made a noise with rattles and horns to frighten away beasts and bad spirits, while women led the cattle out over a fire or stood over the gateposts with their legs spread to bless the cattle.[25] Many of the descriptions note – as

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[23] On the secular representative nature of the household or village, see, e.g. Jari Eilola, Rajapinnoilla. Sallitun ja kielletyn määritteleminen 1600-luvun jälkipuoliskon noituus- ja taikuustapauksissa. Bibliotheca historica 81 (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2003); On personal duties towards saints in personal matters like illness, see, e.g. Katajala-Peltomaa Gender, Miracles.

[24] Cf. Charlotte Appel, Vaerdige gaester ved herrens bord. Sognepraesternes rolle I administrationen af skriftemål og altergang efter reformationen. In: Religiös tro og praksis i den dansk-norske helstat fra reformasjonen til opplysningstid ca. 1500-1814, ed. Arne Bugge Amundsen and Henning Laugerud (Bergen: Universitetet i Bergen - Institutt for lingvistiske, litterære og estetiske studier, 2010), 15-48.

[25] Raisa Maria Toivo, Witchcraft and Gender in Early Modern Society. Finland and the Wider European Experience (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008); Laura Stark-Arola, Magic, Body and Social Order: The Construction of Gender through Women's Private Rituals in Traditional Finland. Studia Fennica Folkloristica 5 (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 1998); Göran Malmstedt, Bondetro och Kyrkoro. Religiös mentalitet i stormaktstidens Sverige (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2002), 159, 185.

does the one from Jääski – that in the household rituals only “those born in the house” participated, instead of the whole household with servants, live-in workers, and more distant relatives – sometimes even a spouse that had moved in was left outside. The rituals thus marked not only the external boundaries of the household but also those within – the boundaries of kin and family. In marking and enforcing the community, the private celebration also enforced the hierarchies within the household in a way comparable to seating orders in church.

As they relate to daily work and livelihood, the rituals also reinforced a sense of belonging to the community in which the work and rituals were performed. These were rituals where members of a certain household, family, kin group, or village were separated from others and marked as belonging together. The same took place on a larger local scale in the church, where the parish was collected into one community among – but slightly different from – other Christians. Sharing a meal is universally thought of as a mark of unity. In the church services, and especially in the communion, the unity of the whole parish was enforced, with both past and future generations being symbolically present. This was important for both the parishioners and the realm, but the unofficial celebrations put smaller communities at the centre. Communality is an oft-noted characteristic of pre-modern religiosity.[26] The communality was enhanced by tying the religious together with the mundane, especially with drinking. For instance, C. Dixon Scott suggests that attendance at the church service accompanied a visit to the alehouse, which integrated villages, communities, and kin.[27] In rural areas with no alehouses, drinking during the celebration served to integrate the household.[28]

In the religious rituals, the gender roles related to everyday life and livelihood for each and every status – those who owned land, those who were either born in the house or entered a landed family through marriage, and those serving others – were reinforced in the sphere of the sacred. This was not simply an ordering of the community into neat rows of pews in the church according to their wealth and status: it was a performance in which everyone had to take their own place and agree to the places others took. It is not surprising that though there were women involved, sometimes as

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[26] E.g. Malmsted, Bondetro; Robert Scribner, Popular Culture and Popular Movements in Reformation Germany (London: Routledge 1987). Among others.

[27] C. Dixon Scott, The Reformation and Rural Society. The Parishes of Branderburg-Nasbach-Kulmbach 1528-1603. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 109.

[28] John Bossy The Counter-Reformation and the People of Catholic Europe. Past and Present 1970, pp. 51-70, esp. 62ff.

very important agents, this was also a sphere where male dominance was most visible. It was the husband who represented the household in the village and the sacred.

Embodied faith: A gendered compassion

However, there were other kinds of religious performances as well, those not so much directed towards the maintenance of social order. Prayer meetings were one such element. That a prayer was a performance is clear. More specifically, it was a bodily performance, much more than a verbal utterance or unspoken thought. In the western part of Finland, and particularly so in Satakunta on the south-west coast of Finland, even traces of a rosary cult can be found in the mid-seventeenth century. The court records of the rosary practice show that Marian devotion channelled religious feelings in seventeenth-century Finland. In 1646, a group of women were indicted for having held a convent or a "Resolia" at home in order to improve the failing eyesight of one of the village women. When indicted for superstition and questioned in court, the women reported that they had read a sequence of prayers nine times, prepared and consumed a special sacrificial dinner with beer on the table, and held hands and struck "with iron on flint stone".[29]

While prayer was, in the early modern period as it is now, difficult to define, the women themselves thought of and called this prayer. Other comparable events in the court records include cases where the agents themselves call an action a prayer and they refer to a (usually Christian) divinity – although others around them may have thought of the same actions as either joking or superstitious, sometimes even blasphemous. All the above-mentioned characteristics were typical elements of early modern prayer as described in the court records. Prayer was not merely words, but rather consisted of a series of tangible and ritual actions, such as kneeling in front of or beside or touching or circling around either the target of the prayer or the object that the prayer was to benefit – the sick person, the damaged limb, or the endangered field. Eating was also an important part of the lay prayer meeting, implicating both the Holy Communion and the bodily engagement of the participants, and it should not be separated from the meeting.

Scholars of medieval religion have investigated contemporary pious manuals as affective scripts, where the pious exercise was constructed from sequences and little actions following one another that would, if rightly performed, not only present but also produce the desired religious experience

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[29] Huittinen 4–5 June 1646. Ala-Satakunta I KO a 6, 148. NAF. See also Raisa Maria Toivo, Religion and Emotion: Rosaries as objects and the associated emotions in 17th century Finland. Scandinavian Journal of history 41:3 (2016), 289-305.

and religious emotion. In the pious texts, these were often small exclamations and short adjective descriptions that functioned as emotives – expressions that were meant to signify and communicate emotion as an interpretative explanation – both to others and to oneself – of something that goes on in one's mind internally .[30] The early modern Finns were barely literate, and few descriptions of the verbal parts of prayer are available. However, what the women told of their prayer rituals suggest that they also functioned as a script, but a script that materialized in action and in the body instead of through words and phrases. When groups of women performed the bodily rituals together, it was meant to produce a shared experience of the sacred and of the expectation and granting of divine help, conveyed by the body.[31]

Eating was important for various reasons. In magical thinking, making someone eat something was a way to gain access inside their bodies and thereby power over that body as well as the soul that dwelled within the body.[32] Eating together was also important because it connected the individual body with its private sensations to the community that shared the meal. Eating, especially ritual eating influenced by the sacrificial communion, also connected in a tangible and accessible way the mundane and daily to the sacred and religious. This was not less important in the Protestant and Lutheran culture than it had been in the medieval Catholic – rather the importance of physical experience of eating and drinking the Communion may have been emphasised in Lutheranism. [33] Many court cases tell how the parishioners took communion into their own hands and celebrated it outside church. These include blasphemy cases and cases of the kind described above in Jääski and Huittinen. Nevertheless, even for indictments of blasphemy and superstition, most cases testify to

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[30] I am appropriating terminology from William Reddy, The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2001). See also Jan Plamper, The History of Emotions: An Interview with William Reddy, Barbara Rosenwein, and Peter Stearns. History and Theory, 49:2 (2010), 237-265.

[31] Jacqueline Van Gent, Magic, Body and the Self in Eighteenth-Century Sweden (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 127ff.

[32] See e.g. Diane Purkiss, The Witch in History (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1996), 91-117; Eilola, Rajapinnoilla.

[33]Bridget Heal, Sacred image and sacred space in Lutheran Germany', in Sacred Space: The Redefinition of Sanctity in Post-Reformation Europe, ed. Will Coster & Andrew Spicer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 39–59; Amy Nelson Burnett, The Social History of Communion. Past and Present 211 (2011). 77-119, esp. 87–8; Susan Karant-Nunn, The Reformation of Ritual. An Interpretation of Early Modern Germany (London: Routledge, 2007) (originally 1997), 116–120.

respect towards the communion. Using communion bread and sometimes even wine for magical purposes, in healing for example, presumes that the items were thought of as holy and powerful, having an effect not only spiritually but also on the human body. The Lutheran communion was a bodily experience of the Divine body; it was not a commemorative meal but a true meeting with the essence of the flesh and blood of Christ, which were made a part of the human body by consuming them and which thereby sanctified the human body, at least for a moment. Not only in church communion, but also in the unofficial sacrificial meals, the religious experience was shared in a physical form. The physical and bodily, made the experience also sexed and gendered.

This shared physical experience of the sacred or religious could then be used to define the limits or the order of the community. The Huittinen prayer meeting had been organized because a woman in the village was losing her eyesight. All the participants stated that their prayer had been successful, and she was now “better”. Regardless of whether she actually saw any more clearly than before, the shared ritual had shown that she was a still a member of the community, although her place within it may have been changing. The ritual was also a way of recognizing this change, the transformation from someone who could and would be expected to work for the community to someone who needed and would receive help. The ritual signified that this change was accepted and legitimate, not a matter of idleness, laziness, or sin. If in the premodern context being well or healthy meant fulfilling the expectations posed,[34] this woman was certainly better again.

Such a ritual embodied compassion, one of the key religious emotions in the premodern period, in a tangible, physical expression, that took place by doing things: cooking, eating, stepping and kneeling. Believers touhed or encircled a thing by walking or crawling around it to either invoke the holy power embodied in a church, a statue or a well, or they walked around an item, a space, and animal or a person in order to embrace it in the protection of the holy power. They included their fellows in their rituals by doing things together, and sharing the physical action. The phenomenon is much like that described in Saba Mahmood’s (2005) influential ethnographic work on the women’s mosque movement in contemporary Egypt, which highlights that women’s religious experience occurs in and through the body and that piety is an embodied practice. Likewise, according to Caroline Walker Bynum, the body was constitutive of the religious self in Medieval Christian

[34] Jenni Kuuliala, ’Disability and Religious Practices in Late Medieval Prussia: Infirmity and the Miraculous in the Canonization Process of St. Dorothea of Montau (1404-1406)’. In: Lived Religion and the Long Reformation in Northern Europe. c. 1300-1700, ed. Sari Katajala-Peltomaa & Raisa Maria Toivo. (Leiden: Brill 2016), 46-74.

teaching.[35] The early modern believers, too, who touched, ate and walked in their prayers, performed religion with their bodies rather than or in addition to words. Their bodily performances of prayer also brought religion and faith into the spaces outside the church.

When the human body is brought in to the centre of any investigation, it inevitably turns into a gendered one. But what does this mean? The gendering of bodies is not a self-evident and unchanging factor, but was different in the early modern period from how it is now. The curing of the eyesight of the woman in Huittinen also very clearly highlights that bodies were not only used to produce experience and religion, but religion was used to produce the body. This is reminiscent of the way the body and gender have been approached in studies on Islam and Islamic cultures. Bodily performances and the experiences of the body moving and acting transform the self and allow it to pass through different normative regimes governed by different sets of formal or informal rules, norms, and expectations. The body is not "a mere receptacle or 'inscriptive surface' for the work of representation-cum-discourse" of religion but "[t]he body and bodily practices are central to the enactment of sacred space".[36] This clearly applied also to early modern religiosity, but did it do it the same way as in modern religiosity, Christian or Islamic? Moreover, was the corporeality of religious experience shaped differently for men and women? Was it differently construed?

One of these differences may have been that while both men's and women's bodies where thought of as porous and permeable, women's bodies were thought to be even more so.[37] Women's bodies were leaky vessels that did not always contain their bodily fluids. They could be more easily entered into by spirits and malicious people as well as by well-meaning magic, but they were also overflowing with emotion and spirituality, not governed by order and structure. This was partly what made the symbolic paradox of spirituality because of corporeality so strong. Therefore, as McNamer puts it:

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[35] Carolyn W. Bynum Fragmentation and redemption : essays on gender and the human body in medieval religion (Cambridge: MIT Press 1992) (Originally 1990).

[36] Julian Holloway, Make believe: Spiritual practice, embodiment and sacred space. Environment and Planning A 35: 1961-74, esp. 1963); Julian Holloway, 'Enchanted Spaces: The Séance, Affect, and Geographies of Religion'. Annals of the Association of American Geographers Vol. 96, No. 1 (2006), 182-187; Banu Gökarıksel, 'Beyond the officially sacred: religion, secularism,and the body in the production of subjectivity'. Social & Cultural Geography, 10:6 (2009), 657-674.

[37] Van Gent, Magic, Body, 127 ff.

> Recognizing that gender performance became an enduring, core mechanism for the production of this emotion not only helps to explain the historically specific social and ethical functions of compassion in late medieval England, it also helps expose emotion-driven fractures within so-called traditional religion – especially in the meditative practices of powerful lay men – at the cusp of the Reformation.[38]

Compassion, essential to the imitation of Christ, was largely a gender performance: to perform compassion was to feel like a woman. Compassionate feeling and religious performance for the benefit of others was first and foremost a woman's devotion.

The spiritual and the bodily were always intertwined, but for women, they were even more so. This difference may have increased during the Reformations' emphasis on order, regulation, and self-government as essential ingredients of masculinity, particularly religious masculinity.[39] Mysticism was not absent from Protestantism, especially from Lutheranism, and the Catholic Reformation relished in the mystical and the miraculous, but during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, even mystical experiences had to be controlled, especially if experienced by men.

This may explain one difference that can be found in men's and women's bodily religious practices in early modern Finland. It appears that regular, calendar-related feasts were often celebrated and the rituals conducted by men, like the celebration in Jääski. In the context of immediate emergencies, however – when someone fell ill or needed help, as happened in Huittinen ja Kokemäki – women more often took charge. This was not a cast-iron rule, however: there were many women taking part in the yearly feasts and there were also calendar rituals specifically for women – for example, letting out the cattle – and men took sometimes part in the emergency magic as well. However, more often the formal rituals were performed by men and the informal rituals by women.[40]

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[38] McNamer, Affective Meditation, 7.

[39] Scott H. Hendrix and Susan C. Karant-Nunn, ed, Masculinity in the Reformation Era (Kirksville: Truman State University Press, 2008).

[40] See e.g. the material in Raisa Maria Toivo, Faith and Magic in Early Modern Finland (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), and Raisa Maria Toivo. Protestantism, modernity and the Power of Penetration: Saints and sacrifice in 17th century Lutheran Finland. In Lived Religion and the Long Reformation in Northern Europe c. 1300–1700, ed. Sari Katajala-Peltomaa & Raisa Maria Toivo (Leiden: Brill 2017), 75-103.

It appears that the practices supported a gendered sense of belonging to a group of similar people, either to other men or women, or to a kin or family group. The gendering of religious practices and the emotions acted out in them were much more directly related to other people in the immediately surrounding community. Compassion for a neighbour with failing eyesight was not sought through imagining Mary's suffering, but through tangible work with the rest of one's neighbours to begin the charitable care in terms of the food, clothing, and company that a member of the community needed. Compassion was a decent woman's proper feeling, but it was also the feeling of a woman in a certain tangible social and geographical religious group. Men, on the other hand, did not perform the rituals for producing compassion; their rituals were for reproducing appreciation and a sense of being in command. It is a simplification – but it may be a useful one – to claim that women's rituals centred on compassion and help in emergencies, while the rituals of men centred on order in the everyday.

Conclusion

As far as early modern history is concerned, the inexorable connection of religion with everything – gender included – is an unavoidable starting point. Religion is an elaborate construction of complex and conflicting human minds. Late medieval and early modern Christianity, both Protestant and Catholic, may have operated on a platform of neo-Platonic binaries, but it continuously flirted with paradoxical inversions of the binaries. To be saved and righteous, it was necessary to confess to one's unavoidable sinfulness, and the early modern believer took pride in being as humble as possible. Sin and virtue, humility and pride, and freedom and servitude to God formed binary pairs that were constantly turned upside down, and eventually turned into paradoxes in which sin and virtue did not exist without each other, humility was pride, and servitude was freedom. The social and cultural categories of the feminine and the masculine were blurred and their relationship made more symmetrical. Feeling like a woman could be essential for the successful presentation of religious masculinity. Gender included hierarchies, but no longer permanently unbalanced relationships of "power over". In turned into a quality – or a web of qualities – that empowered people to do things, a performative project of identity in the Butlerian vein of thinking.

In the religious rituals of the early modern Finns, the gender roles related to everyday life and livelihood for each and every status – those who owned land, those who were either born in the house or entered a landed family through marriage, and those serving others – were reinforced in the sphere of the sacred. The religious experiences enforced and moulded gendered roles in the

family and community, but gender also produced religious experiences and identities through shared and individual communal and bodily practices. These experiences could be restrictive, since the sharedness meant that they had to be at least partly approved by others, but they could also be empowering and constructive, as they allowed a negotiation of individual and communal identity. A decent woman's as well as man's actions could well include a feast with beer and meat, and a corporeal display, if performed at the right time, with the right people and for accepted reasons.

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