



CHAPTER 9

Working-Class Women Living Religion in Finland at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

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INTRODUCTION

The nineteenth century was an age of popular revivalist movements. In Finland, the mass revivals that emerged in the eighteenth century swept across the country and reached the eastern and northern peripheries by the latter part of the nineteenth century. Despite some differences, all major revivalist movements were essentially based on Pietism, and all of them emphasized the personal experience of awakening. The movements changed the religious landscape by making religion more visible: faith was made a matter of choice, and a conscious experience of awakening and conversion became a crucial part of religious life, which was to have tangible consequences as well. Some revivalist movements concentrated on conversion and the practice of a reborn spiritual life, whereas others were

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particularly active in charitable social work among the poor and the suffering.¹ By emphasizing the awakening and religious conversion as a choice, revivalist movements opened up the religious landscape not only for the option of following God but also of opting out of religious observance.

Until the twentieth century, Lutheran Christianity was the official confession of Finland. Close ties between the state and the church were loosened by the Church Law of 1869, but the Lutheran Church remained the established church and freedom of religion was not granted until the early 1920s. The Dissenters' Act of 1889 recognized other Protestant denominations; some of them had followers in Finland already in the 1860s. While the established church and most revivalist movements preserved preaching as a male privilege, some new groups were more open to the active role of women in evangelization.² Revivals constituted new gendered positions and fostered tensions between the clergy and the laity.

Among the working classes, religion played a significant role as well. Leaders of the labour movement often complained that factory women in particular were too religious and blinded by their spiritual leaders, both the clergy and the new revivalist preachers.³ In the gendered and classed context of revivalist movements, women's religious experiences and their ways of practising religion were promoted and controlled by a wide spectrum of religious groupings. My aim here is to analyse how religion was lived in an industrializing society in which new religious movements and other civil society organizations both challenged and strengthened mainstream Lutheran Christianity. I concentrate on the town of Tampere, which was renowned for its female industrial labour force. The religious landscape of the industrial town is explored by asking how and where urban working-class women practised religion and shared their religious experiences. My research is informed by an intersectional approach in which gender, class, ethnicity, and other dimensions of inequality intersect

¹ Hope, *German and Scandinavian Protestantism*, 377–378; Sulkunen, *Liisa Eerikintytär*; Brekus, *Strangers & Pilgrims*; On revivalism and social reform, see e.g. Hartley, *Evangelicals at a Crossroads*; Kruczek-Aaron, *Everyday Religion*; Markkola, “The Calling of Women.”

² Markkola, *Synti ja siveys*, 29–31; Heikkilä & Heininen, *A history of the Finnish*; Antikainen, *Suuri sisarpiiri*; Davidoff & Hall, *Family Fortunes*; Braude, “Women's History,” 87–107.

³ McLeod, *Religion and Society*, 156–168; Kemppainen, *Sosialismin, uskonnon ja sukupuolen*, 38, 43; Markkola, “Työväenhistoria taivastielle,” 42–59; Haapala *Tehtaan valossa*, 201–202.

and overlap.⁴ The practices of intersectional relations are based on fluid and constantly re-negotiated, historically changing conceptions.

All revivalist movements and new Protestant denominations that reached Finland in the nineteenth century introduced their own normative notions of religious commitment. However, as Meredith McGuire argues, these conceptions of how people ought to believe and act fail to reach the ways in which people are touched by religion in their daily life: “At the level of the individual, religion is not fixed, unitary, or even coherent.”⁵ My research draws inspiration from this understanding of religious practices. However, as Nancy Ammerman and some other scholars of lived religion warn, it is not particularly fruitful to simply contrast the experience of ordinary people and institutionally defined forms of religion. Religion was lived in a wider social context, consisting of formal and informal religious and mundane settings.⁶ Therefore, my study of religion as lived and shared by working-class women explores both women’s everyday practices and those collective gatherings where religious practices were introduced, shared, and developed.

Religious practices cannot be understood apart from the meanings people give to them.⁷ Many studies of spirituality also emphasize practices and take seriously the women’s own self-understanding and experience.⁸ Based on Meredith McGuire’s definition of lived religion, I understand “experience” as an individual phenomenon as well as a social and shared one. Indicating close links between belief and practice, she concludes that lived religion is deeply social. Moreover, she points out that “the individual is able to experience, rather than simply think or believe in, the reality of her or his religious world.”⁹

⁴ “Intersectionality” was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 to challenge unidimensional approaches to race and sex in critical legal studies and antidiscrimination politics. Intersectionality became soon a widely deployed concept in humanities and social sciences. Cho, Crenshaw & McCall, “Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies,” 787–794.

⁵ McGuire, *Lived Religion*, 12.

⁶ Ammerman, “Lived Religion as an Emerging Field,” 88–89, 95; Kupari, “Lived religion and the religious field,” 215–216.

⁷ Katajala-Peltomaa & Toivo, “Introduction to Medieval and Early Modern,” 1–24; Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*; Hall, *Lived Religion in America*; McGuire, *Lived Religion*; Ammerman, *Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes*; A concept “popular religion” has usually been rejected as problematic because of the dualism between popular religion and official religion.

⁸ Stuckey, *Feminist Spirituality*, 5–8; Van Die, “A Woman’s Awakening,” 51–52.

⁹ McGuire, *Lived Religion*, 13.

Thus, in my reading, “experience” is not only what happens to an individual; it is also a social process. “Experiencing” is part of the everyday life of human beings. People experience outward circumstances, events, interactions, encounters, and other aspects of their material, social, and emotional surroundings. These experiences are intellectual, emotional, sensory, conscious, and unconscious. Experiences become social when they are reflected, shared, and confirmed. Experiences do not just remain individual and social reflections; when shared, experiences constitute collective resources, a social stock of knowledge, and accumulate in social institutions. Therefore, various communities of experience and “scenes of experience” (prayer houses, associations, and families) have an impact on the ways in which human beings belong to their communities. Further, a Koselleckian understanding of historical time as constructed in tensions between the space of experience and the horizon of expectations is relevant for my discussion of the lived religion of working-class women.¹⁰ For the urban working-class women, the processes and practices of sharing religion formed their spaces of experience and their horizons of expectation.

In this chapter, I argue that working-class women gave meaning to religious and social practices and experienced those practices in ways that can be analysed by using both the source material produced by them and the material telling about them. My major sources consist of applications to the Helsinki Deaconess Institution sent by working-class women in Tampere. In those applications, they describe their religious lives and their motivations to become a deaconess. Another set of material consists of letters to evangelical preachers, also sent by working-class women in Tampere. Additional material is collected from newspapers, periodicals, and statistical surveys. The religious landscape of Tampere is charted, and some key elements for the working-class women are discussed, such as the range of religious activities, the deaconess movement, and the working-class family as a site of religious practice. Further, women’s commitment to religious communities as well as their failure to adjust to normative conceptions or even to rebel against norms is explored to give a fuller account of lived religion in an industrial setting.

¹⁰ Katajala-Peltomaa & Toivo, “Introduction to Medieval and Early Modern,” 11–13; Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 267–76; Kivimäki, “Reittejä kokemushistoriaan,” 17–19; Berger & Luckmann, *The Social Construction*, 54–56, 85–89.

THE SCENES OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

The turn of the twentieth century was a turbulent period in Tampere. Between 1890 and 1917, the population doubled up to 45,000 inhabitants. During the most dynamic years in the 1890s, the annual increase of the industrial labour force could be as high as 1500 workers. Many of the new workers were women coming from the countryside. In the Finnish context, Tampere was the leading site of large textile factories; for example, at the turn of the twentieth century the Finlayson cotton mill employed over 3000 workers. Several other textile factories also recruited an increasing number of young female workers. The youth of Tampere was heavily dominated by women: in 1910, for example, the female-male ratio of the 20–29-year-old age group was 1.8 to 1. Consequently, Tampere remained a town where single working-class women constituted a significant share of the inhabitants until the latter part of the twentieth century. There were always more women than men in the church and civil society organizations, with the exception of some trade unions and political labour organizations that were dominated by men.¹¹ In this context, the religious experiences of working-class women were formed in a demographically biased setting.

Industrial towns offered working-class women several new opportunities to share their experiences. Factory workers toiled long hours, but as soon as their working day was over, the short evenings and long Sundays were not regulated by their employers. In contrast to farm servants and domestic maids, factory workers lived on their own and could choose how to spend their leisure time. If we look at a local newspaper in Tampere, all kinds of events were available. For example, an ordinary Wednesday night in February 1899 offered access to libraries, choir practice at a workers' institute, a free concert at a temperance house, bible study at a prayer house, a meeting of a youth association, and a lecture on relations between parents and teachers in child raising, among others.¹² On a dark winter's

¹¹ Haapala, *Tehtaan valossa* (1986), 217–223; Pirjo Markkola, *Työläiskodin synty: Tamperelaiset työläisperheet ja yhteiskunnallinen kysymys 1870-luvulta 1910-luvulle* (Helsinki: Suomen Historiallinen Seura, 1994), 43–45; Pertti Haapala & Jarmo Peltola, *Globaali Tampere, Kaupungin taloushistoria 1700-luvulta 2000-luvulle* (Tampere: Vapriikki, 2019), 91–92.

¹² *Aamulehti* 15.2.1899. The diversity of working-class pastimes is shown e.g. by Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, Hartley, *Evangelicals at a Crossroads*, Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures*.

night, working-class women did not have to stay at home if they wanted to spend some time with their friends and comrades.

In the same February week, Sunday was full of leisure activities. Some events, such as the philanthropic ball at the social club, were too exclusive, but many other entertainments were expressly designed for the working classes. At least five social evenings were advertised by temperance associations, the labour movement, and the youth association. Dancing, drama, music, and popular speakers attracted audiences to these events. Two events with a more serious programme were announced as being free of charge. One social evening organized by a temperance union was proud to present a famous missionary as its speaker. Two popular concerts by a local orchestra, a skating competition, and several meetings were also arranged on Sunday.¹³ Further, as soon as the first movie theatres were opened in Tampere, the diversity of pastimes increased even more.

Religious meetings competed with social events offered by temperance unions and the labour movement. For example, on the same Sunday, a total of 15 religious events were advertised in the local newspaper. Sunday sermons in Finnish and Swedish were available in two churches, the Lutheran Prayer house, and three other prayer houses. One of the events in a prayer house was targeted at youths.¹⁴ The established church was rather rigid in its structures, providing Sunday services and evening sermons in the two or three churches of the town. At the turn of the twentieth century, fewer than 10 per cent of the inhabitants in Tampere attended Sunday services. Religious holidays, such as Easter and Christmas, attracted larger audiences, however.¹⁵

While the physical distance between the church buildings and the fast-expanding working-class neighbourhoods increased, religious associations and revivalist movements acquired their own meeting rooms and prayer houses in order to come closer to their congregation. The geography of faith was in constant change. Some years later, the number of prayer houses and meeting rooms was much higher and the message to be shared gained new dimensions. Not only conversion and salvation but also

¹³ *Aamulehti* 18.2–19.2.1899.

¹⁴ *Aamulehti* 18.2–19.2.1899. Evangelical prayer houses in Viinikankatu 7 (Methodists), Puutarhakatu 17 (free church) and Rautatienkatu 12; *Aamulehti* 25.3.1905; Baptists' prayer house Pellavatehtaankatu 25. *Kansan Lehti* 5.4.1902.

¹⁵ Estimated by Kortekangas, *Kirkko ja uskonnollinen elämä*, 283–284; On competition between religion and other institutions, see Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures*, 146–149.

Christian perfection, sanctification, and holiness were preached in local prayer houses.¹⁶ Experiences of religion could be shared in differing ways.

New religious spaces provided by associations formed material settings in which religion was practised, shared, and sensed.¹⁷ Applications sent to the deaconess institution indicate that those spaces were meaningful sites for young working-class women. The Lutheran Prayer House Association, founded in 1891, was heavily dominated by working-class women, mainly factory workers. The association built an impressive house in 1894. In 1896, around 75 per cent of its members were women, and other figures from 1900 reveal that 80 per cent of members came from the working classes; the rest were artisans, burghers, and some members of the educated classes. Events in the house attracted non-members as well. Another religious arena for working-class women was formed by the Evangelical-Lutheran Youth Association, founded in 1894. The next year, a total of 375 members had joined; the share of women was as high as 75 per cent. This association, too, was popular among the factory workers.¹⁸ These slightly different associations became noteworthy scenes of experience for working-class youth and women to share their religious life and live their religion in a visible manner.

As a scene of experience, the Lutheran Prayer House became a local hub of revivalist movements and missions. One of the revivalist preachers, missionary Frans Hannula (1855–1914), was a regular visitor of the house, and a new revivalist movement, the so-called Hannula movement, was founded around him. Having worked as a missionary in Ovamboland, he gathered wide audiences not only in his prayer meetings, but also in mission festivals, which could attract over 10,000 participants. When Hannula entered the town, the prayer house was filled even within short notice.¹⁹ One of the deaconess candidates, a factory worker, described how she was

¹⁶ Sanctification/holiness preached by Aksel Skutnab and his followers who believed to be free from sin. *Sanomia armosta* 1.9.1907; Baptists' prayer house in Pinninkatu 29. *Tampereen Sanomat* 19.1.1908; In February 1909 new Lutheran prayer houses were in the outskirts of Tampere (Pispala) and nearby in Messukylä, other new prayer houses and meeting rooms were provided by the Salvation Army, YMCA, YWCA, and new evangelical sects. *Aamulehti* and *Tampereen Sanomat* 20.2–21.2.1909; *Kansan Lehti* 20.2.1909.

¹⁷ Materiality is a crucial aspect of lived religion. Ammerman, "Lived Religion as an Emerging Field," 91.

¹⁸ Kortekangas, *Kirkko ja uskonnollinen elämä*, 250–253.

¹⁹ Kortekangas, *Kirkko ja uskonnollinen elämä*, 251–252; Junkkaala, *Hannulan herätys*, 87, 93–96, 127.

reborn in a meeting arranged by Hannula; since then she had frequently attended services at the church.²⁰ The beloved preacher was also described by one woman, a worker in a warp knitting factory and a member of the Evangelical-Lutheran Youth Association, thus: “He is really born to be a preacher. We have to thank God for sending us such a man full of the Lord’s spirit to preach the Gospel and for the opportunity to hear his Word. While listening to his Word, I thought that I want to belong to Jesus from this day onwards.”²¹

It was no coincidence that the preacher was popular. It was often mentioned that he was a talented speaker. Moreover, he was able to navigate the rocky road between the church and the labour movement. As a missionary, he spoke in the meetings of the Christian labour movement, and he did not side with the church leaders against the labour movement. On the contrary, he argued that the clergy had provoked some negative attitudes among the working classes, and, on behalf of the clergy, he even apologized to the working classes for social injustice.²² In an industrial town, massive audiences could hardly be attracted by a preacher without some understanding of the conditions of the working classes.

DEACONESSES IN THE RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE

Some working-class women were touched so deeply by the message of churches, revivalist movements, and Christian associations that they were willing to work for the Kingdom of God. One such option for women coming from a humble background was provided by deaconess institutions.²³ At the turn of the twentieth century, several young women from working-class families in Tampere applied to enter the Helsinki Deaconess Institution, which was founded in the 1860s. Almost all of them had worked in industrial labour, mainly the textile industry.²⁴ These women consciously sought to make their faith visible and live according to religious ideals. As deaconess candidates, they naturally represented an exceptionally devoted part of the working classes. However, they also reveal

²⁰National Archive of Finland (NAF). Helsinki Deaconess Institution (HDI) Ba:1. Roll of deaconesses 1867–1906, sister 191.

²¹NAF, Hämeenlinna. The Evangelical Free Church of Finland (EFCF) I Fb:2. Antti Mäkinen’s correspondence. Naima Andersson to Antti Mäkinen.

²²Junkkaala, *Hannulan herätys*, 239; Junkkaala, “Hannula, Frans.”

²³Ivalo, *Diakonian lukukirja*; Paaskoski, *Ihmisen arvo*; Markkola, “The Calling of Women.”

²⁴NAF. HDI Ba:1. Roll of deaconesses 1867–1906, e.g. sisters 191, 208, 227, 256, 261.

more general patterns of the ways in which working-class women shared their religion and populated the scenes of experience in an industrial town.

Many working-class women learned the new vocation in their encounters with deaconesses hired by the City Mission of Tampere. The first woman wearing a deaconess suit, sister Hanna Mellberg, walked the streets of Tampere in the 1890s. Some years later, she was followed by other deaconesses. From 1908, a total of three deaconesses were based in the mission houses established in the working-class neighbourhoods.²⁵ Their distinctive presence strengthened the idea of the deaconess vocation as a realistic alternative for young women who were interested in faith, education, and work outside factories. Periodicals and other publications by the institution were also distributed to the working classes. They encouraged young women to accept the calling of the deaconess as a vocation, a life-long devotion in the service of God. The City Mission introduced deaconess education to working-class girls and fuelled their spirituality. Regular meetings and sermons in the mission and prayer houses provided remarkable scenes of experience, where working-class women could share their religious emotions and strengthen their understanding of the proper Christian lifestyle.

Nordic deaconess education mainly followed the German model deriving from the Kaiserswerth Deaconess Institution. Deaconess education consisted of practical skills in cleaning, doing laundry, caring, and nursing, as well as classes in religion and some other educational subjects. The main line of work was to nurse the poor sick, but deaconesses were also involved in education and social work among the poor.²⁶ The institutions explained that deaconesses were not Protestant nuns; however, the similarities were striking. The deaconessate represented a clearly marked choice to follow God: deaconesses belonged to the community of their institution, wore a deaconess suit, and were not paid for their work. The community took care of their daily needs and provided social security if illness or old age kept them from working.

²⁵NAF. HDI Ba:8. Catalogue of deaconesses and parishes ca 1898–1960; “Drag ur Stadsmisionens i Tammerfors verksamhet,” *Betania* 8–9/1908, 130–134.

²⁶The first deaconess institution was founded in Kaiserswerth in 1836 by Protestant minister Theodor Fliedner and his wife Friederike Fliedner. On deaconess education in Germany see Prelinger, “The Nineteenth-Century Deaconessate,” 215–225; Soine, “The Motherhouse and its Mission(s).” On the deaconess institutions in the Nordic Countries, see Markkola, “Deaconesses Go Transnational”; Martinsen, *Freidige og uforsagte*; Leis-Peters, “Hidden by Civil Society and Religion?,” 105–127.

In Tampere, deaconesses became role models for working-class girls who otherwise had few options beyond industrial work. Moreover, the deaconess institution in Helsinki sent pastors to Tampere to promote the deaconess cause. One of the girls from Tampere, Hilja, arrived at the deaconess institution in 1904; Olga and Eva arrived in 1911. All of them had learnt to know deaconesses employed by the City Mission. Olga was impressed by sister Hanna Mellberg, who walked the streets while visiting her patients, and Hilja mentioned sister Hanna as her inspiration. Two girls, who had a devout mother, explicated an experience of awakening. For example, during a period of revivalism “after the general strike” (i.e. the autumn of 1905) a pastor from the deaconess institution preached in Tampere. Eva, who was only 15 years old, experienced a religious awakening and wanted to enter the institution. The pastor advised her to wait, which only increased her motivation to apply. However, she had to wait several years before she was accepted.²⁷

The message of the institution was also heard by Maria, whose father had died when she was six years old. At the age of 12, Maria underwent a tonsillectomy and then experienced a religious awakening, which led her to a decision to stop reading novels and other stories. She finished primary school, and after confirmation classes at the age of 16, she entered the cotton mill in Tampere where she worked for more than seven years. She had read about deaconess institutions, subscribed to their bulletin, and went to listen to a sermon by the director of the Helsinki Deaconess Institution. After four years of consideration, she applied to the institution in 1900.²⁸ All these elements—the religious awakening, a new Christian lifestyle without secular literature, reading the bulletin, attending prayer meetings, and showing much deliberation—made her lived religion very suitable in the eyes of the deaconess leaders.

Another working-class woman from Tampere who presented acceptable ways of practising religion was Aina. Her father worked in a cotton mill, and she started factory work at the age of 14, after finishing primary school. At the age of 18, she was awakened by the sermon of missionary Frans Hannula and experienced conversion. She frequently went to church. Another sermon by a pastor from the Helsinki Deaconess Institution encouraged her to submit an application. She had also read their bulletin. Not even health problems during her early years, such as

²⁷NAF. HDI Ba:1 Roll of deaconesses 1867–1906, sisters 208, 347, 349.

²⁸NAF. HDI Ba:1 Roll of deaconesses 1867–1906, sister 38.

appendicitis, hysterical attacks, and the occurrence of abscesses hindered her from the deaconess call, and the institution did not turn her down. At the age of 38 she was consecrated, and she had a lengthy career serving the deaconess community.²⁹

Religious revivalism also brought Rosa to the Helsinki Deaconess Institution in 1907. She was only two years old when her father, a working man, died; her mother made a living for the family's six children by selling milk. Rosa received a primary school education and stayed at home until the age of 16, when she entered a wool-weaving mill as a weaver. Her mother was a devout believer and an active prayer who prayed for her children. Rosa's five siblings were not awakened, but Rosa, the youngest, believed herself to be a disciple of Jesus. Her friend had persuaded her to attend a prayer house; during her second visit, she was touched by God and could not resist the call. She was eager to share her religion by joining the Mission Association, attending events organized by the City Mission, and learning to know the deaconesses, with whom she talked about her calling.³⁰ Obviously, the deaconess leaders were satisfied with the quality of her faith, and the vocation of a deaconess became a visible sign of her practice of religion.

For the deaconess institution, it was crucial that only those women who believed they had been called by God could successfully join the community. The institutions underlined that deaconesses could not choose their vocation; they had to believe that they were called upon to serve the poor and the sick. Following Nancy Ammerman, the deaconess community can be understood as an institutionalized spiritual tribe which taught its members to "speak religion."³¹ In their work as deaconesses, they had to be capable of explicating the experience of awakening and be able to share their religion in a proper manner while working with the sick and the suffering.

"DISSENTERS" IN THE RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE

As soon as the Dissenters Act was passed in 1889, small Protestant denominations enriched the religious landscape of Finland. New religious movements provided particular scenes of experience for working-class women

²⁹NAF. HDI Ba:1, Roll of deaconesses 1867–1906, sister 56.

³⁰NAF. HDI Ba:1, Roll of deaconesses 1867–1906, sister 256.

³¹Ammerman, "2013 Paul Hanly Furfey Lecture," 200.

and other interested people. One of the revivalist movements that appealed to the emotions of the working classes and offered them new arenas was represented by the wide spectrum of evangelicalism. The evangelical free church movement, which in the 1860s and 1870s arrived in Finland via the country houses owned by the nobility and was supported by the Swedish-speaking upper classes, soon reached the working classes. For practical reasons, some free church missions were locally divided into Swedish and Finnish chapters; however, the division also involved and strengthened a class boundary, with the Finnish chapters consisting mainly of members of the lower social strata. The free church movement worked actively to promote home missions in urban working-class neighbourhoods. In Helsinki, for example, they founded a “chapel for the miserable,” where they engaged in evangelization and social work.³²

Tampere became one of the strongholds of the evangelical free church movement.³³ Revivalist meetings in their prayer house attracted young working-class women. One of these women was Anni, born in 1893, who worked mainly as a waitress in temperance restaurants. One of her workplaces was run by the labour movement. Anni experienced her awakening in a meeting in which two famous travelling preachers spoke. She joined the prayer house, and became a member of the Christian Endeavour, a Protestant youth organization.³⁴ Anni’s mother belonged to the YWCA, a Christian association for women, but her father was not interested in religion. Being a “dissenter” or a “sectarian”—as the Lutheran church classified the free church revivalists—did not hinder Anni from applying and entering the Helsinki Deaconess Institution.³⁵

In Tampere, the free church movement gathered both Swedish- and Finnish-speaking members into one chapter. This was praised by some visiting preachers. As one of them argued, a bi-lingual chapter led by a

³² Markkola, *Synti ja siveys*, 75–83; As free church revivalists did not form their own church until the 1920s, their membership is difficult to be estimated. According to their own statistics, the number of members in 1912 was 1988; of them a total of 1441, i.e. 72 per cent were women. *Suomalainen* 17.11.1913.

³³ Kortekangas, *Kirkko ja uskonnollinen elämä*, 261–262.

³⁴ United Society of Christian Endeavour (CE) was an interdenominational organization for Protestant youth, founded in 1881 in the USA. The first CE in Finland was founded in 1899 in Turku. The Jokinen brothers (Eeli and William) were itinerant preachers of the CE.

³⁵ NAF. HDI Ba:1, Roll of deaconesses 1867–1906, sister 465; The Lutheran Church called free church revivalists sectarians, members of a sect. Annual Report of the Lutheran Church, 1908–1912. *Viipurin Sanomat* 3.12.1913; Antikainen, *Suuri sisarpiiri*.

single preacher created a cosy atmosphere without class boundaries. In practice, however, the Finnish and Swedish sermons and prayer meetings were held separately. The free church movement in Tampere got its impulses from the work of its first preacher, Antti Mäkinen, who was born nearby as a son of a tenant farmer. After a religious conversion, he interrupted his studies in theology and entered evangelical preacher training in London. His frequent visits to Tampere attracted working-class followers.³⁶ The social background of the preacher gave him credibility among the industrial working classes. He was also admired and adored by working-class women; many letters sent to him cannot be read as anything other than fan mail.³⁷ These letters assured Mäkinen that he was missed in Tampere.

One of the Anglo-American newcomers was Baptism, which reached both the upper social strata and the working classes. In Tampere, Baptism became expressly the faith of working-class women. Their first meetings were held in 1890, and small Baptist prayer houses were opened in working-class neighbourhoods,³⁸ but a formal congregation was not registered until 1906. Directly, 12 working-class families and two other families were transferred from another Baptist congregation to the local one, and 17 working-class families and 6 single workers left the Lutheran church to join the Baptists. The number of baptized adults was slightly higher: in 1890–1905 a total of 334 converts were baptized in Tampere—72 per cent were women.³⁹ Moreover, the Methodist church was established in Tampere in the 1890s. One of the prayer houses advertising in the local newspaper belonged to the Methodists, who also for some years ran a theological seminar in Tampere.⁴⁰ Several small religious groups

³⁶ P. Viitanen, “Kaupungeissa ja maaseuduilla,” *Suomen Viikkolehti* 28.9.1899, 311; P. Viitanen, “Kaupungeissa ja maaseuduilla,” *Suomen Viikkolehti* 19.10.1899, 334; Markkola, “The Calling of Women,” 127; Annola, “Tehe minusta itselles,” 160–161.

³⁷ NAF, Hämeenlinna. EFCF I Fb:2. Antti Mäkinen’s correspondence.

³⁸ “Täkäläisten baptistien tai uudesta-kastajain seurakunta,” *Tampereen Uutiset* 18.5.1895; *Aamulehti* 28.11.1896.

³⁹ Kortekangas, *Kirkko ja uskonnollinen elämä*, 262–265. In 1910, the number of Lutherans in Finland was over 3 million. The number of Orthodox Christians was 52,000, Baptists 4460, Methodists 676, and Catholics 423. In 1900–1910 the increase of Baptists was 56 per cent and Methodists 21 per cent. Annual report of the Lutheran Church, 1908–1912. *Viipurin Sanomat* 3.12.1913.

⁴⁰ Kortekangas, *Kirkko ja uskonnollinen elämä*, 265–267; Metodismi Suomessa. <https://turku.metodistikirkko.net/?p=67> (accessed 27 November 2020).

challenging the Lutheran church offered new spiritual homes to working-class women and the other inhabitants of the industrial town.

At the turn of the twentieth century, working-class families and their children were reached by the Salvation Army. Following the international model, the Salvation Army focused on social work and popular revivalist meetings. In Tampere, for example, an impoverished working-class family allowed their six children to attend the Salvation Army's evening gatherings in which the participants received presents.⁴¹ Presents and other forms of social work increased the Army's credibility among the workers. Both male and female Salvation Army soldiers were recruited from the working classes. In particular, social work—so-called slum work—became a new field of work for working-class women. In 1901, the first slum station and a day nursery were founded in a working-class neighbourhood in Tampere.⁴²

Revivalist meetings arranged by the free church movement, Baptists, Methodists, and the Salvation Army, among others, appealed to the emotions, senses, and imagination. As an experiential evangelical religion, the Salvation Army in particular offered the working classes new bodily and spiritual ways to express religious feelings.⁴³ Among the evangelical revivalists, the practice of “post-prayer meetings” was commonly used. After a prayer meeting, people were invited to stay at the prayer house to talk and pray with the preachers. During the post-prayer meetings, all preachers and other activists of the congregation talked to people and held private prayers with them. These meetings sometimes lasted until midnight. Some preachers proudly reported that many new converts had joined the movement.⁴⁴ In these meetings, working-class women were heard, comforted, and offered caring attention, but they were also pushed to experience an awakening. Religious emotions and religious choices were as much shared

⁴¹ Hjelt, *Tutkimus ammattityöläisten*, 114–130; Nieminen, *Pelastussotaa Suomessa*.

⁴² Markkola, *Synti ja siveys*, 126; On the Salvation Army and the working classes, Taiz, *Hallelujah Lads and Lasses*; Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*; Hartley, *Evangelicals at a Crossroads*, 102–104.

⁴³ Taiz, *Hallelujah Lads and Lasses*, 74; Markkola, *Synti ja siveys*, 83–87.

⁴⁴ P. Viitanen, “Muistoja matkaltani Suomessa II,” *Suomen Viikkolehti* 16.2.1899, 51; P. Viitanen, “Kaupungeissa ja maaseuduilla,” *Suomen Viikkolehti* 19.10.1899, 334; Discussion on post-meetings, e.g. Auk. Oravala, “Jälkikokouksista,” *Ylhäältä apua* no. 11, 1.11.1912, 166–168; “Jälkikokouksista,” *Herättäjä* no 17, 26.4.1912; *Suomen Viikkolehti* no. 26–27, 29.6.1929; Critical remarks “Kenen hoitoon,” *Kotimaa* no 29, 11.3.1912.

as they were produced and imposed, and in some cases manipulated as well.

“IMMATURE” WOMEN AND MISTAKEN FAITH

Many women lived their religion according to the standards set by themselves, not by the institutions or religious associations. Some working-class women had to interrupt their training and leave the deaconess institution. Some of them were sent home for health reasons, whereas others were turned down because of their mistaken faith. Hilja was one of the working-class girls from Tampere who heard that sister Hanna was trained in the deaconess institution. Hilja did not read God’s word, nor did she read about the work of deaconesses, but she prayed to God to let her enter the same institution. Her prayers were heard, and she entered the deaconess institution in September 1904. However, already the following April she was advised to return to the factory floor. She was deemed to lack talent, and her spiritual life was considered underdeveloped.⁴⁵ Obviously Hilja should have read more, and she should have been able to explicate her experience of conversion. Lived religion that was based on silent prayer and the admiration of deaconesses did not meet the normative conceptions of religious commitment. She did not speak religion.⁴⁶

Another woman from Tampere, born in 1885, entered the Helsinki Deaconess Institution in 1907. Her family background was complex. Her mother was reported to be a devout believer and her aunt was a deaconess, but her stepfather was described as having been hard. She was drawn to God as a child. At the institution, she stated that the world attracted her later but also caused a crisis of conscience, and by the time she applied to the institution she believed herself to belong to God.⁴⁷ The first years of deaconess training were obviously successful; however, after four years, she was directed to leave the institution. According to the records, she did not seem to understand her calling. It was also noted that she made a slightly immature impression. Consequently, she was not consecrated, but her training guaranteed her a position as an assistant nurse in a public hospital. Four years later she married.⁴⁸ This is an example of a religious

⁴⁵ NAF. HDI Ba:1 Roll of deaconesses 1867–1906, sister 208.

⁴⁶ McGuire, *Lived Religion*, 11; Ammerman, “2013 Paul Hanly Furfey Lecture,” 200.

⁴⁷ NAF. HDI Ba:1 Roll of deaconesses 1867–1906, sister 261.

⁴⁸ NAF. HDI Ba:1 Roll of deaconesses 1867–1906, sister 261.

experience that was not deemed stable enough. She was drawn to God, she believed herself to belong to God, she knew one deaconess personally, and she had read the institution's journal. Many elements of her faith resembled the experiences of more devout deaconesses, but something was missing. The ways in which she shared her religion did not meet the standards set by the institution. One key factor was the lack of convincing language: the experience of awakening needed to be verbalized to make it plausible in the deaconess community. It is also possible that her faith faded or changed over time.

The failure of this aspiring deaconess resembles the earlier fate of a rural woman who joined the institution in 1891 and was consecrated five years later at the age of 26. She seemed to be more interested in nursing than in spiritual work. According to the records, she decided to leave the institution because she was not called to the deaconessate and the motherhouse community. However, after leaving the deaconess community, she continued to direct the same hospital she directed as a deaconess.⁴⁹ The work of deaconesses did not become the vocation of these two women, but they received useful vocational training. They benefitted from the nursing classes provided by the institution, and they were able to continue their professional careers and practise their religion more freely, according to their own standards.

The combination of health and faith was another tricky issue for the deaconess educators. Weak health was not a problem if the practice of religion otherwise met expectations. However, health issues served as an additional negative if the applicant's motivation was found to be suspicious. Another Hilja from Tampere, born in 1884, failed to convince the institution. After eight months, she was found to be unfit. Hilja had based her motivation to become a deaconess on her difficult home situation and the sinful life she saw on the streets. Moreover, as an awakened Christian, she felt that she had to suffer in the market hall where she worked. All these factors urged her to serve God. Her father hated pastors and did not attend church, and her brothers were all atheists. However, her father stuck to customary Christianity, prayed every night, and read a sermon on Sundays. A family full of contradictions was suspicious enough; moreover, according to a dentist's inspection, Hilja's teeth were so bad that long and thorough dental care would have been needed. In sum, Hilja was

⁴⁹ NAF. HDI Ba:1 Roll of deaconesses 1867–1906, sister 9.

considered “hardly capable of development in this call.”⁵⁰ If we compare the records of Hilja and the previously mentioned Aina with her hysterical attacks and other problems, it is clear that the deaconess institution was willing to invest in the health of their sisters if their faith was convincing.

In the 1960s, when the scholars of folklore became interested in labour history, religion was mainly dismissed as irrelevant. Still, some working-class women spoke about religion as a natural part of their life course. As an example, we can consider a woman born in 1891. She belonged to her factory’s gymnastic club, sang in a choir called the Luther Choir, and was active in the Christian labour movement, but did not join other labour organizations. In the Finnish Civil War of 1918, she joined the service troops of the Red Guard. Being part of the workers’ (failed) revolution resulted in a prison sentence of six months, and afterwards also caused problems with her family. Nevertheless, singing in the Luther Choir, working with a Christian association, and providing the Red Guard with food were compatible in her lived religion.⁵¹ Lived religion consisted of many layers, and people might have picked differing elements in their faith and changed their positions over their life course.

FAITH IN FAMILIES

Homes are fundamental scenes of experience, and one might expect that religious values were often shared by family members. Many deaconess candidates certainly referred to their religious mother in their decision to apply to the institution. However, other aspects of family life could also motivate young women. Hilja, the awakened applicant mentioned above, portrayed her problematic home where her brothers were atheists and her father held prayers and sermons but hated the church.⁵² The diversity of religious experience was explicit in this family.

A closer look at some other working-class families may help to contextualize women’s religious experiences. Interestingly, religion as lived is present in the first Finnish household budget data from 1908 and 1909. In addition to large statistical data, some family descriptions were published to depict various aspects of working-class morality, living

⁵⁰ NAF. HDI Ba:1 Roll of deaconesses 1867–1906, sister 227.

⁵¹ Tape 82/1965. Tampere University Folklore Archive; McGuire, *Lived Religion*, 12; Ammerman, “Rethinking Religion.”

⁵² NAF. HDI Ba:1. Roll of deaconesses 1867–1906, sister 227.

conditions, and lifestyles. Special attention was paid to their “cultural stage,” which meant the education, reading habits, and church attendance of family members.⁵³ Six family descriptions were presented from Tampere. One family, including a male factory worker and his wife running a catering service, was more interested in the labour movement than the church, whereas an unskilled worker who was a widow with four children found contentment in her limited leisure time from religion. Her children, aged 8 to 15 years, read a newspaper and a religious children’s magazine. The widow was not keen on reading; instead, she attended the church and the prayer house meetings. Quite often, her ten-year-old daughter followed her, but the other children were not interested.⁵⁴ In this family, the practice of religion seemed to be rather private and family members did not fully share their religious practices.

For some working-class families, the Christian labour movement was important. The movement and its publications comforted a mother of four children aged 2 to 12 years, who supported her family by selling bread. Her husband led an irregular life and was often unemployed. All the books in their home were religious; they gave her hope, as she explained she had seen too much misery in her life. Nevertheless, she belonged to a local Christian labour association and followed the societal and political news in the Christian labour movement’s newspaper.⁵⁵ Another family from Tampere represented a decent Christian working-class home in which the father had internalized his role as the family’s religious leader. The Canadian historian Lynne Marks has pointed out that many married working-class men considered church involvement a crucial part of responsible manhood.⁵⁶ The father of the family was active in the parish; moreover, he belonged to the choir of a Christian labour association, and he used to read religious literature. The family subscribed to a religious journal and attended church regularly.

Regular church attendance was also mentioned by other families. An unskilled worker with a large family explained that they read the New Testament every Sunday and went to church every second Sunday, the husband more often than the wife. He had left the labour movement, and the family with seven children could not afford to attend any other leisure

⁵³ Hjelt, *Tutkimus ammattiyöläisten*, 114–130.

⁵⁴ Hjelt, *Tutkimus ammattiyöläisten*, 115.

⁵⁵ Hjelt, *Tutkimus ammattiyöläisten*, 120.

⁵⁶ Hejlt, *Tutkimus ammattiyöläisten*, 122–123; Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, 14.

activities.⁵⁷ A couple comprising an unskilled worker and a washerwoman attended church every second Sunday, too, and they reported that it had been their habit to receive Holy Communion once a year. This frequency met the standards of the Church Law; however, for some reason it was commented in the survey that this couple did not care about public issues, and “hardly about religious issues either.”⁵⁸

These examples show that working-class families lived religion in a variety of ways. Regular church attendance was still part of their religious practices; however, differences between family members were tolerated. Religion was lived by reading books and journals, sharing the message of the New Testament at home, or listening to sermons in church and the prayer houses. These fluid practices became shared experiences. Some workers admitted that reading was not their way of taking part in worship. Some men emphasized good Christian habits, such as home prayers, Sunday prayers, and Holy Communion every year. Women’s visible practice of religion included both reading at home and going to church and religious meetings.

BELIEVER’S PROTEST

The socialist labour movement criticized working-class women for being too religious and humble in front of the clergy and other representatives of the upper classes. It is known from the turn of the twentieth century that women working in factories were more active in their religious life compared to working-class men.⁵⁹ However, some working-class men were devoted Christians in a pronounced way, as the examples above suggest. Moreover, it can be questioned whether working-class women lived their religion in a humble and obedient way. It is also possible that they gave other meanings to their faith and sought empowering elements from their lived religion. This can be scrutinized with the help of one letter that a female factory worker in 1900 sent to a preacher, whom she clearly

⁵⁷ Hjelt, *Tutkimus ammattityöläisten*, 127–129. Until 1911, all confirmed parish members were obliged to take Communion once a year. It was a precondition for entering marriage. In 1905, 40 per cent of male and 51 per cent of female unskilled workers in Tampere received Communion. Industrial workers were more active: 46 per cent of male and 55 per cent of female factory workers took Communion. Kortekangas, *Kirkko ja uskonnollinen elämä*, 292–293.

⁵⁸ Hjelt, *Tutkimus ammattityöläisten*, 124–126.

⁵⁹ Kortekangas, *Kirkko ja uskonnollinen elämä*, 294.

appreciated and admired.⁶⁰ She was a converted evangelical who had no reason to give a negative image of herself.

In the letter, the writer clearly indicates her experience of conversion. There had been a time when she did not have peace of mind. However, by saying “here I am, send me,” she received an inner peace. She felt herself to be a chosen one and also heard a call, “I need you.” She replied, “your will be done, but what are you going to do with me?” She tried to obey the congregation, but the leadership did not match her inner call. Thus, she was expelled from the religious community, and she states in the letter that she cannot submit to discipline. She was a believer, but her ways of living religion were not supported by the local free church community. When forced to do something against her own will, she could not help but fight.

The letter ends with a lengthy description of an incident that not only bothered the writer but also illustrates her lived religion. At work she had to sew long bags on a piece-rate basis, whereas other women sewed short bags. Sewing long bags took a longer time and she felt that she was treated unfairly. She spoke first to her foreman and then to his supervisor, but the piecework conditions were not changed. She realized that the supervisor was behind these instructions, and her peers confirmed it. This led to a row with her foreman, whom she blamed for being stupid and unfair. The row escalated and the argument ended in a tussle. According to the woman, the foreman twice put remains of snuff in her mouth and she spat it into his eyes. He tried to remove her from the hall, but she refused. However, she was shivering, felt bad, and went home for some time. It did not help her: she still had to sew long bags while the other women sewed short bags. She concluded that the supervisor and the preacher Braxen⁶¹ had agreed on this arrangement. It is not clear if the supervisor was part of the Free Inner Mission movement, but this woman seems to believe that she was punished by the religious community, whom she wanted to belong to on her own terms.⁶²

The heated message reveals several aspects of working-class women’s spiritual and mundane life. This woman had asked for inner peace and got it; in other words, she expresses the experience of religious conversion. Although full stops and commas were missing from her writing, she

⁶⁰NAF, Hämeenlinna. EFCF I Fb:2. Antti Mäkinen’s correspondence.

⁶¹The local preacher of the Free Inner Mission.

⁶²NAF, Hämeenlinna. EFCF I Fb:2. Antti Mäkinen’s correspondence.

mastered religious discourse in which letters were introduced with appropriate Biblical greetings. She trusted the preacher and saw him as her sympathizer and comforter while the local preacher did not understand her. It seems obvious that this woman was hot-tempered and stubborn, but she justified these characteristics by referring to her spiritual difference. Her exclusion from the revivalist congregation was presented as a problem of incompetent leaders rather than a woman who followed her own inner call. As a daughter of God, she could not obey authorities who acted against her inner call. As Nancy Ammerman points out, religious practices were not confined to single institutions, such as the prayer house community or the free church movement.⁶³ This female worker's faith, her lived religion, was a source of justice in her social and working life. She was empowered to demand fair conditions at work.

Thus, the letter tells us about factory floor discipline and the ways in which defiant women were treated. The woman's fight with her foreman did not correct unfairness in the piecework; however, despite her bad behaviour, she did not lose her job either. The story of the foreman using the remains of snuff as a physical punishment could of course have been invented, but on the other hand there must be some cultural context for telling this kind of a story by which a working woman wanted to appeal to the preacher in a convincing manner. Obviously, both the workers and the foremen could behave quite brutally. The inner voice—lived religion—could empower working women to resist that brutality. Moreover, the local preacher and the supervisor could also refer to Christian rhetoric by stating “whom I love, I also punish.”

Not all believers spat at their foremen. The daily practices of faith and the lived religion of individual working-class women varied remarkably. Unfortunately, documents such as the previous letter are very rare. Nevertheless, the letter hints at the multidimensional and complicated relations between class, gender, and religion. On the factory floor, industrial workers were subjected to the will of their foremen and supervisors. In the parish, members were expected to adjust to the codes of conduct defined by the religious leaders. These hierarchies could also be questioned if one's personal faith was strong enough. Conversion as an experience produced new horizons of expectation and emancipatory elements in the lives of working women. This daughter of God was not ashamed of

⁶³ Ammerman, “Rethinking Religion,” 13.

reporting her conflicts to her dear preacher. She seemed to be convinced that it was an appropriate way to live according to the standards of her faith.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

For the religious landscape of Tampere, the turn of the twentieth century spelled turbulent times. A rapid increase of population coincided with a multitude of religious movements. Not only new Lutheran revivalist movements and associations but also evangelical nonconformist denominations were established. All new prayer houses, associations, and churches offered working-class women a wide spectrum of arenas to practise religion. These arenas constituted scenes of experience where individual experiences were acquired, interpreted, shared, confirmed, and turned into collective resources. The scenes of experience provided working-class women an institutional setting to give meaning to their religious experiences and taught them how to talk religion. Explicit instructions and normative undercurrents trained working-class women how to believe and act in a revivalist context.

Nevertheless, various scenes of experience contributed to the manifold religious experiences. Many working-class women were happy to share the values and norms set by the mainstream Lutheran church. They practised religion and shared their religious experiences by reading devotional literature, going to church, and attending prayer meetings. For exhausted working-class wives, the practice of religion meant rest, safety, and comfort in their daily routines and hardships. Religious indifference was also increasing. At the same time, however, the space of experience and the horizon of expectations regarding women's spiritual life were altered by the new prayer houses with their evangelical message. While some rather marginal groups preached Christian perfection and holiness, all revivalist and nonconformist communities demanded a conscious experience of conversion. They formed communities of experience in which the members were expected to share the personal experience of awakening and make their conversion visible by witnessing verbally or by serving the community. As a result, some awakened women entered the deaconess institution or joined the Salvation Army. For them, lived religion turned into an experience that changed their life course.

In addition, a considerable number of women found their own ways to practise religion. They might have admired deaconesses without being actively involved in a religious group, or they attended the prayer house

meetings and assumed some suitable parts of the message in their religious life. They lived religion according to the standards set by themselves. Further, some women could be exceptionally empowered by the conversion. In line with other women, working-class women gave differing meanings to faith and practised religion in a variety of ways. However, working-class women could express their lived religion in such a manner that was beyond the horizons of women from the upper classes. For the converted evangelical mentioned above, demanding justice at work and in the religious community resulted in a violent protest. Religious experiences and meanings given to faith by working-class women were full of nuances. Being a believer might have brought about obedience to authorities and capitalists, as the labour movement feared, but it could also motivate resistance.

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