

# Religious participation in the local communities of 17<sup>th</sup>-century Eastern Finland

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The importance of tradition and the persistence of beliefs and practices have often been emphasized when studying early modern lay religiosity.<sup>1</sup> However, recent research has put more emphasis on flexibility as well as local varieties and diversity in religious practices. Using the approach and methodology of lived religion, faith and religion have become seen as inextricably linked to other spheres of life, while the nature of lived religion as a social process has also been emphasized. Researchers have shifted their focus from control and the dichotomy between “popular” and “official” religion to religious experiences and expressions. While the communal and shared experiences of religion have been observed to play an important role in the early modern era, researchers have also considered the more individual aspects and agency within the sphere of religion.<sup>2</sup>

This article focuses on religious participation within the local communities of 17<sup>th</sup>-century Eastern Finland, an integral part of the kingdom of Sweden during the early modern era, and especially in Savo, a rural area near the eastern border of the realm. I analyse how Eastern Finnish peasants adjusted their religious practices to their individual circumstances and which kinds of interactions and influences affected their choices in the sphere of religion. An important point of departure is that commoners (*allmogen*), even in a certain area, did not form a uniform group. Instead, there were many variations that also affected how religion was lived out in their everyday lives. First, I examine different circumstances restricting people’s ability to participate in religious activities as well as which kinds of options were available in different situations. Second, I focus on the forms of

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

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

interaction and influences affecting individual choices regarding the sphere of the sacred. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the state and the church strove towards uniformity in the practice of religion within the realm, and the authorities exerting control was a central element in social and religious life. However, when looking upon control more as a background element, I focus on the different ways in which choices concerning religion were made in everyday life, how they were negotiated within communities, and in which kinds of interactions religious ideas and practices were produced.

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

Historians have been interested in religious practices and thought regarding the sacred among the peasantry in different parts of 17<sup>th</sup>-century Sweden, especially since the 1990s, and there is an abundance of information on the variety of religious rituals and practices among the laity, from visiting holy wells and offering churches to using rosary beads in healing rituals.<sup>7</sup>

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

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

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

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

7 Terese Zachrisson, *Mellan frombet och vidskepelse: Materialitet och religiositet i det efter-reformatoriska Sverige*, Gothenburg 2017, pp. 189–208; Raisa Maria Toivo, “Religion and emotion: Rosaries as objects and the associated emotions in 17th-century Finland”, *Scandinavian Journal of History* 2016. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03468755.2016.1179835>; Monica Weikert, *I sjukdom och nöd: Offerkyrkoseden i Sverige från 1600-tal till 1800-tal*,

However, there is general agreement that the practices that did not comply with the official norms should not be seen as remains of Catholicism or, in some cases, even pre-Christian religion; rather, the religious practices of the laity should be studied as a part of the Lutheran religious culture.<sup>8</sup> Swedish historian Göran Malmstedt has observed that even though many of the holy days of the Catholic Church, like the feast of St. Olof, were officially abolished after the Reformation, their celebration often continued among the peasantry. This indicates that there were rituals outside the prescribed religious practices that the laity had a need for so that they could secure divine protection and the reproduction of nature.<sup>9</sup> Swedish historian Terese Zachrisson has emphasized that even after the Reformation, it was important for the laity to have physical and material points of access to the sacred. She has suggested that in Sweden, the limits of Lutheranism might have been more flexible as no other religious denominations were present.<sup>10</sup> Finnish historian Raisa Maria Toivo has emphasized the conservative nature of Lutheranism, which enabled adapting the teachings of the Lutheran church to the everyday needs of the parishioners.<sup>11</sup> All in all, researchers agree that there were many aspects of religiosity in the lives of the laity not in accordance with Lutheran doctrine, but that there was no serious attempt by the church or secular authorities to eliminate these practices even though they were occasionally prosecuted. Recently, the focus has turned towards analyses of emotions, materiality, corporeality, and communal aspects in the religious experiences of the laity.<sup>12</sup>

As the main source material of this study, I have used surviving court and visitation records from the parishes of the province of Savo (*Savolax*)

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Gothenburg 2004. Researchers of magic and witchcraft processes have also uncovered different aspects of conceptions regarding the sacred among the laity. See, for example, Linda Oja, *Varken Gud eller Natur. Synen på magi i 1600- och 1700-talets Sverige*, Stockholm & Stehag 1999; Jari Eilola, *Rajapainnoilla. Sallitun ja kielletyn määritleminen 1600-luvun jälkipuoliskon noituus- ja taikuustapauksissa*, Helsinki 2003.

- 8 Raisa Maria Toivo, *Faith and Magic in Early Modern Finland*, Basingstoke 2016, p. 102; Göran Malmstedt, "In Defence of Holy Days: The Peasantry's Opposition to the Reduction of Holy Days in Early Modern Sweden", *Cultural History* 2014:2, p. 119, <https://dx.doi.org/10.3366/cult.2014.0066>; Terese Zachrisson, "The Saint in the Woods. Semi-Domestic Shrines in Rural Sweden, c. 1500–1800", *Religions* 2019:10:6, p. 386. doi:10.3390/rel10060386.
- 9 Malmstedt 2014, pp. 103–104, 118–119.
- 10 Zachrisson 2019.
- 11 Toivo 2016, p. 102.
- 12 See, for example, Sari Katajala-Peltomaa & Raisa Maria Toivo, "Introduction: Religion as Historical Experience", in *Histories of Experience in the World of Lived Religion*, Sari Katajala-Peltomaa and Raisa Maria Toivo (eds.), Cham 2022. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92140-8\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92140-8_1).

from the period 1639–1712. The cases analysed in this article are examples from a larger body of court material related to religion, mainly from the jurisdictions of Savo, Pien-Savo, and Kajaani fiefdom. For my PhD dissertation, I documented all lower court record cases in some way related to religion, including witchcraft and magic trials, and studied the surviving visitation records from the area. Focusing on the religious practices of the laity related to the observance of holy days and how this was controlled by the state and the church, I noticed contradictions that could only be explained by differences in, for example, the distance from one's household to the church, wealth, and other individual circumstances.<sup>13</sup> This observation is the starting point of the current study, where I aim to explore this variation with a focus on the choices made in the sphere of religion and the individual circumstances affecting these choices. A perspective that emphasizes interaction, variation, and individual agency makes it possible to arrive at new interpretations based on the material and gain a more nuanced understanding of the religious lives of the laity. However, for an analysis of religion practiced by individuals in their everyday lives, there are some limitations in the sources. In parish visitations, deans and bishops who visited the parishes paid attention to deficiencies in proper Christian life and imposed sanctions on those who did not conform to normative behaviour. Misdemeanours were handled briefly and the kinds of religious practices deemed acceptable did not need to be discussed.<sup>14</sup> In the court, the focus was on the suspected crime, and especially in minor accusations, the scribe wrote down only what was relevant for passing the sentence.<sup>15</sup> However, by engaging in a close reading of both sets of source material, while being sensitive to agency and individual choice, it is possible to observe variation in religious practices among the peasants.

In my analysis, I use the concept of *lived religion* as a methodological tool. Historians Raisa Maria Toivo and Sari Katajala-Peltomaa have recently developed this approach in the study of the medieval and early modern

13 Kuha 2016, pp. 26–29, 32, 158. As additional material, I have also used some court cases related to my ongoing research project on the wives of clergymen in the late 17<sup>th</sup>-century Swedish realm.

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

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

era. They have emphasized that in the study of pre-modern societies, it is often difficult to separate intentional religiosity from less conscious or less clearly religious practices as the spheres of the religious and the mundane were deeply intertwined. They see religion “essentially as an element of daily life, a way to live, interact and participate in one’s community”.<sup>16</sup> Lived religion was not merely spirituality, it was also intrinsically linked to the social and communal life in a parish, village, or household. Understanding religion as “lived” puts the emphasis on doing – what people did in their everyday lives linked to their faith.<sup>17</sup> In this context, accusations regarding the use of magic can also be used to gain information on religious beliefs and practices in everyday life.

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

### Varying abilities to participate in religious activities

Early-modern Eastern Finnish peasants shared living conditions that both restricted and enabled different kinds of decisions regarding their religious life. The control by the state and the church was getting stricter in the second

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

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

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

19 Kuha 2016, pp. 41–45.

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

half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, but the vast distances gave the inhabitants of Savo more freedom compared to peasants or others in lower ranks of society in some other environments. Churchgoing was an important part of the religious life of commoners, even if this was not always possible in the challenging living conditions in places such as Eastern Finland. The distances were long, roads poor, and weather conditions could make travelling difficult and dangerous.<sup>21</sup> Before leaving the household for the journey that often took several hours or even some days for some, the farmer had to consider the seasons and tasks related to agricultural work. On the other hand, there were punishments that could follow from neglecting regular attendance at the church, communion, or catechetical teaching.<sup>22</sup> Church attendance was controlled especially rigorously on prayer days summoned by the crown and aimed at joint prayer to plead for God's forgiveness.<sup>23</sup> Otherwise, the control of church attendance was not particularly strict, and especially in remote parishes of Northern Savo, the clergy understood that it would not be reasonable to expect all parishioners to attend church every Sunday.<sup>24</sup>

The ability to participate in religious activities at the parish church varied according to individual circumstances, one of which was the distance from one's farm or cottage to the church. In Northern Savo, in the easternmost part of the realm, it was stipulated in 1670 that people who had to travel more than 4 *mil*, or about 40 kilometres, to church would not be obliged to attend church services more frequently than once every three weeks.<sup>25</sup> For

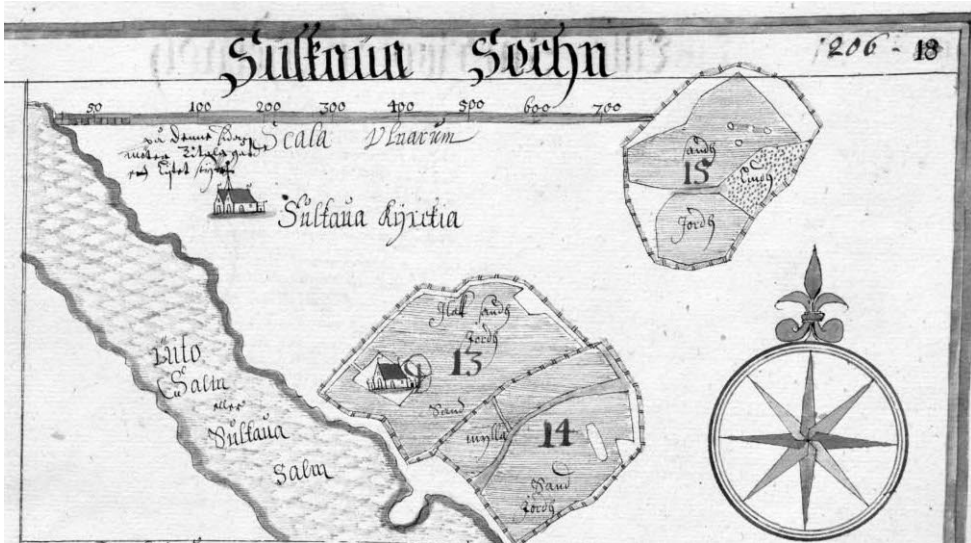
21 On churchgoing practices of the laity, see also Miia Kuha, "Popular Religion in the Periphery: Church Attendance in 17th Century Eastern Finland", *Perichoresis* 13:2, 2015, <https://doi.org/10.1515/perc-2015-0008>; Miia Kuha, "Rörelse i periferin. Kyrkobesöket i 1600-talets Savolax", in *Politiska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

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

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

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

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



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

Source: National Archives of Finland, Maanmittaushallituksen uudistusarkisto, Maakirjakartat, Lille Saffwolax Heradh Sulkava Sochn, MHA C 1: 205–206. The map is available online at the Astia service of the National Archives of Finland, <https://astia.narc.fi/uusiastia/viewer/?fileId=6014621762&aaineistold=2511047834> (accessed 2 September 2022).

those living in the village where the church was situated, or in some of the nearby villages in a radius of some 10–20 kilometres, it was significantly easier to participate in church services compared to those who had to travel over twenty – or even sixty – kilometres one way to reach their parish church.<sup>26</sup> The distance from the church was also relative since the types of nature, access to roads, and especially waterways had an important impact on travelling. Even though waterways made travelling easier, bad weather could prevent the journey altogether.<sup>27</sup> One of the difficult decisions one

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

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

had to make was when to take a new-born child to be baptized at the parish church. The Church Law of 1686 required that a child was to be baptized within eight days of birth, but especially in Northern Savo, many baptisms were delayed until the age of a few weeks or, for some, even a couple of months.<sup>28</sup>

Extended families were an especially typical feature of this area, and in large households, there were many adult members to take turns going to the church while others stayed back home taking care of the house, animals, and small children who were not taken along every time. For example, farmer Anders Kupiainen from the parish of Kerimäki was absent from the church service on the third prayer day in the summer of 1692. He had stayed home alone tending to his house, cattle, and five small children, the eldest of whom was only seven years old, while nine people from his household had travelled to the church. His father, three brothers, two male cousins, and “three women” had embarked on the journey to the church, some 15 kilometres one-way. Thus, Kupiainen was able to state a legitimate reason for staying at home and was saved from punishment.<sup>29</sup> While every member of the household was not even expected to attend church every time, this case interestingly shows us that even the master could stay at home. If he did, he had to perform tasks that were commonly considered women’s work, such as taking care of children and cattle. Maria Ågren and the Gender and Work project have recently shown that in rural areas in Sweden, the division of labour was flexible and both men and women could perform all tasks in the rural household.<sup>30</sup> Even though mothers and other female members of the household generally took care of children, different situations involved different norms. According to Linda Oja, the gender coding of tasks could vary depending on circumstances.<sup>31</sup> Exceptions could be made so that everyone, women included, would have a chance to participate in religious practices at the church. Prayer days were also important social occasions for meeting others at the church due to the requirement of broad participation. Taking communion, which typically happened only a few times a year, was a special occasion. In these instances, a married couple was advised to go

28 Kuha 2016, pp. 75–76.

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

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

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



to church together to showcase their harmonious relationship and leave behind someone else from the household.<sup>32</sup>

Wealth and poverty could also affect one's ability to participate in religious practices at the church. In the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Swedish realm, and especially Finland, experienced several crop failures and many people struggled to maintain even some kind of livelihood.<sup>33</sup> A group of men explained at court that they had not been able to attend church "because of hunger".<sup>34</sup> It seems that they were forced to work for their living and could not embark on the long journey to the church, at least not on this occasion. According to the ordinances against swearing and breaching the sabbath from 1665 and 1687, absence from church could be accepted on the grounds of weakness or illness, or if the defendant lived so far away that travelling caused considerable inconvenience or hazard.<sup>35</sup> Illness and weakness were often reported as reasons for being absent from church, but they could also be used as excuses, when the real reason behind such negligence was the need to work, which was strictly prohibited on holy days. In one case, a defendant's brother and neighbour witnessed that the man had been burning a plot of forest on a prayer day and had not been ill, as he had claimed before the court.<sup>36</sup> Working was reported as a reason for absence also in other cases.<sup>37</sup> The daily agricultural work was in many ways necessary, but work also constituted an important value in Lutheran culture. According to Luther, everyone had a calling (*vocatio*) to a task in society, and he emphasized that even everyday activities were holy in the eyes of God.<sup>38</sup> Thus, also the regular tasks of a farmer were given a religious meaning, at least in the message of the clergy. However, Sundays, prayer days, and other holy days had to be left free of work, especially during the church service.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Everyday tasks such as preparing food, heating the house, and taking care of children and cattle could be performed, as well as important seasonal tasks such as fishing.<sup>39</sup>

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

People's abilities and different ways of participating in religious activities were also gendered to a certain extent. At the court, only men were typically accused of neglecting church attendance, as the master of the household was held responsible for the religious practices of his household. However, as widows governing their households, women could also be accused of not attending a church service.<sup>44</sup> Deans and bishops could also impose fines on all members of the household according to their hierarchical position for absence in the visitation.<sup>45</sup> Women were expected to attend church services and catechetical instruction just like men. They also had their own ritual, churching (*kyrktagning*), that occurred after the lying-in period after

39 Schmedeman 1706, pp. 461–462.

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

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

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

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

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

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

childbirth. Churching was a ritual that highlighted the position of married mothers and underlined the position of marriage as the backbone of society.<sup>46</sup> In early-modern religious life, performing one's social status was deeply intertwined with religious practices. According to Annika Sandén, women used this ritual for their own purposes, to attest their status in society as wives and mothers.<sup>47</sup> The roles of wife and mother were advocated as ways for Lutheran women to fulfil their vocation, their religious calling in society.<sup>48</sup>

For those who were not able to travel to their parish church all that often, there were other available means of religious participation. In the realm of Sweden, sacred presence could be felt both at the church and at other sites such as the household and the forest. Those who stayed at home for different reasons, were prevented by bad weather, or lived far from the church were particularly strongly urged to take care of their home devotion, fall on their knees to thank God and pray, and teach the Catechism both to their children and themselves.<sup>49</sup> In practice, teaching and learning at home meant reminiscing and reciting the main articles and prayers by rote, since the commoners typically did not have access to books.<sup>50</sup> Because of the nature of the sources, there is no evidence of this kind of prescribed home devotion, except for situations where prayers were used in a way that the authorities saw as superstitious, such as reciting the Lord's Prayer three times while performing a ritual aimed at producing some kind of an effect.<sup>51</sup> When accused of celebrating holy days that had been abolished after the Reformation, the peasants also mentioned praying as one of the things they did in these celebrations.<sup>52</sup> Based on these examples, it can be

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

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

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

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

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

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

52 Kuha 2022, p. 150. See also Raisa Maria Toivo, "Prayer and the Body in Lay Religious

assumed that for many people, praying was a part of their religious lives at home, even though the visitation records show that before the 1690s, many of the commoners in this area exhibited great trouble remembering the articles of the Catechism and even the most important prayers.<sup>53</sup> There were even some people who had never been to the church.<sup>54</sup> These probably only constituted a very small minority, but it is interesting that their religious lives were formed by practices and rituals completely outside the church.

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

Of these celebrations, the feasts of *Ukko* and *kekri* seem to have been specific to Finland, and I have not come across mentions of their celebra-

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Experience in Early Modern Finland", in Katajala-Peltomaa & Toivo 2022, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92140-8\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92140-8_5).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Religious rituals outside the church were probably especially important in the lives of people living at great distances from the nearest church. However, Raisa Maria Toivo has pointed out that the celebration of saints' days, for example, was common also in areas that cannot be considered peripheral and within wealthy households with a good standing in the community.<sup>63</sup> It is even mentioned in the sources that Lutheran clergymen participated in some of these annual celebrations of local communities in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>64</sup> With influences from the church, Christian hymns and prayers gradually became part of the celebrations outside the church.<sup>65</sup> In addition, laypeople who travelled long distances in their daily tasks related to, for example, burn-beating and fishing also created small devotional sites in the woods or crossroads, often marked by a wooden cross. Terese Zachrisson has used the term "semi-domestic devotion" with regard to these practices

60 For example, Göran Malmstedt mentions the celebration of St. Olof's, St. George's, and St. Lawrence's feast days, the Rogation Days (*gångdagarna*), and the observance of Saturdays in honour of Virgin Mary. See Malmstedt 2014.

61 See Martti Haavio, *Suomalainen mytologia*, Porvoo 1967, 148–178; Anna-Leena Siikala, *Itämerensuomalaisten mytologia*, Helsinki, 4th edition 2016 (2012), pp. 395–402, 410–411; Kuha 2016, pp. 146–152; Toivo 2016, pp. 131–135.

62 "Jagh är intet hijt kommen att fordra någon giæld, uthan att tacka gudh och fremmande maat äta". DCR Visulahti 15/7 1648, KO a: 2: 788v–791r, NAF, Helsinki.

63 Toivo 2016, pp. 106–108.

64 Visitation record 1670, Kuopio church archive II Cd: 1, JoMA.

65 Kuha 2016, p. 135; Toivo 2016, p. 93.

that took place somewhere between the household and the church.<sup>66</sup> There were also specially constructed small shrines within the farmland properties, and offering trees were also used as private spaces of worship close to the household.<sup>67</sup> The variety of these kinds of devotional spaces reflects different kinds of religious needs: a farmer working in his forest fields could visit a cross in the woods, whereas a devotional site situated close to the household in particular served women, the old, and the infirm. For example, in the parish of Kangasniemi, a peasant widow had “a small house” in the middle of her yard. This house was probably meant for making offerings since the visiting dean ordered the parish clerk to burn it down.<sup>68</sup>

Household mistresses, just like masters, had specific obligations in the religious rituals that were performed especially on saints’ days and other annual holy days in local communities.<sup>69</sup> The surviving court records from the Savo region reveal that women, for example, made offerings both at the church and in domestic settings, while also participating in the rituals of the feasts. Even so, the ability of women to celebrate holy days was somewhat more limited compared to men, especially since mostly work typically performed by women was considered necessary and thus permitted on holy days.<sup>70</sup> Men seem to have been able to more frequently continue spending their holy day after the church service, socializing with each other and drinking in taverns or households that sold beer, while women took responsibility for the household and carried out the kind of work that was permitted, such as cooking and tending to children and animals.<sup>71</sup> This kind of work probably also made it possible to spend the day in devotion if one so wished, reciting prayers, and singing hymns while doing household chores.

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

The most profound influences on religious life in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century undoubtedly came from the church and the clergy. Everyone was supposed to take part in catechetical teaching and learning the basics of the Catechism was obligatory if one wished to take communion or marry. Thus, being able to recite the most important articles of the Catechism became an important prerequisite of social life. The parish clergy regularly examined all parishioners,

66 Zachrisson 2019.

67 Visitation record 1670, Kuopio church archive II Cd: 1; Siikala 2016, pp. 84–86.

68 Visitation record 1661, Kangasniemi church archive, II Ce: 1, NAF, Mikkeli.

69 Toivo 2016, p. 56.

70 Schmedeman 1706, pp. 461–462.

71 Kuha 2016, p. 164.

but they paid special attention to the education of the youth.<sup>72</sup> The pastor (*kyrkoberde*) and the curate (*kaplan*) or curates had a position of authority in the parish; however, they and their families also interacted with parishioners in their everyday lives. In the Protestant areas of Europe, clerical families were expected to offer an example of the Christian way of life to their parishioners.<sup>73</sup> Ideally, the requirement of setting an example put the pastor's wife in the position of role model for the women in the parish. Due to their position, the wives of clergymen were present at the church in most services and ceremonies, where the parishioners were able to observe their behaviour. They participated in baptisms, weddings, and funerals and also served as godmothers.<sup>74</sup> Church historian Hilding Pleijel has even referred to the pastor's wife as the "mother of the parish".<sup>75</sup>

It is not possible to tell from the existing source material whether the women in the parish thought of the pastor's wife as a role model in terms of everyday piety. However, in a few surviving cases from the Savo area, women seem to have taken a role of implementing a proper Christian way of life among their family and neighbourhood by controlling normative religious behaviour. In the court records from the parish of Sulkava, for example, there is a case with a lengthy examination of suspected blasphemy. On St. Stephen's day, a feast was held in a wealthy farmer's household, with drunken men performing a parody of the communion service in the evening.<sup>76</sup> One of the men who participated in the celebration as a guest told the court that the mistress of the household had only allowed the young man acting as the

72 For example, Visitation record 1670, Kuopio church archive, II Cd: 1, NAF, Joensuu; Esko M. Laine & Tuija Laine, "Kirkollinen kansanopetus", in *Huoneentaulun maailma. Kasvatus ja koulutus Suomessa keskiajalta 1860-luvulle*, Jussi Hanska & Kirsi Vainio-Korhonen (eds.), Helsinki 2010, pp. 259–261. On the practical advancement of the church service and the peasants' participation, see Göran Malmstedt, *Bondetro och kyrkoro. Religiös mentalitet i stormaktstidens Sverige*, Lund 2002.

73 Susan C. Karant-Nunn, "The Emergence of the Pastoral Family in the German Reformation: The Parsonage as a Site of Socio-Religious Change", in *The Protestant Clergy in Early Modern Europe*, C. Scott Dixon & Luise Schorn-Schütte (eds.), Basingstoke 2003.

74 Solveig Widén, "Prästfruns ställning och roll i församlingarna i det svenska riket på 1700-talet", *Kyrkohistorisk årsskrift* 1994. See also Malin Lennartsson, "Att föregå med ett gott exempel. Våld och misshandel i den tidigmoderna prästfamiljen", in *Väldets mening. Makt, minne, myt*, Eva Österberg & Marie Lindstedt Cronberg (eds.), Lund 2004, pp. 63–64.

75 Hilding Pleijel, *Från hustavlans tid. Kyrkohistoriska folklivsstudier*, Stockholm 1951, pp. 57, 62–64. See also Lennartsson 2004, p. 64.

76 For further information on the case, see Miia Kuha, "A Parody of the Church Service in Seventeenth-Century Finland. Reconstructing Popular Religion on the Basis of Court Records", *Frühneuzeit-Info* 23:1–2, 2012.

clergyman to sing Christian hymns and say things he had heard from the clergy.<sup>77</sup> This indicates that the men had started singing or saying something that might appear blasphemous or superstitious. Since the laity were urged to pray, recite the Catechism, and sing hymns in their home devotion, the mistress did not seem to think that there would be anything wrong with that if it occurred in a correct manner. In another case, the mistress of the neighbouring household urged her neighbour to go to church on the following prayer day. She and her husband embarked on the long journey to the church while the neighbour ended up being accused of negligence.<sup>78</sup>

The parsonage as a household was rather public in nature. As a result, even within the boundaries of the household, the wives of clergymen came into contact with many of the members of the community.<sup>79</sup> In some localities, parishioners went to the parsonage after the church service and were served or sold beverages. According to Finnish historian Kustaa H. J. Vilkuna, it was common that the clergy kept taverns in the countryside. It was often a practical solution since rural inns (*gästgivare*) were often of poor quality and people with higher social standing instead preferred to stay at the parsonage.<sup>80</sup> Drinking at the parsonage is also mentioned in Jenni Lares' study on the meanings of consuming alcohol in 17<sup>th</sup>-century Finland. The legislation concerning the selling and consumption of alcohol was getting stricter in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, and the selling of ale and spirits by clergymen was forbidden in the Church Law of 1686.<sup>81</sup> However, parsonages kept serving travellers in the countryside, and there are also mentions of ordinary parishioners enjoying the hospitality of the parsonage. In the parish of Puumala, when the pastor's wife faced charges for poisoning a neighbour based on a false accusation in 1691, the parishioners testified that they had often been served both beer and spirits in the parsonage and no harm had ever been caused.<sup>82</sup> In 1700, the pastor in Leppävirta complained that the parishioners would gather in the parsonage every holy day to his harm and hindrance.<sup>83</sup> This indicates that the parishioners were used to

77 "huus modher allenast lät Sunj siunga för sikh gudelige Psalmer och seija hwadh han aff Presten hördt hadhe". DCR Sulkava, 6–7/5 1668, Pien-Savo, KO a: 1: 117, NAF, Helsinki.

78 DCR Iisalmi 12–14/2 1652, Kajaani fiefdom, KO: a: 1 [no pagination], NAF, Helsinki.

79 For example, DCR Puumala 18–19/11 1691, Pien-Savo, KO a: 4: 252–263, NAF, Helsinki.

80 Kustaa H. J. Vilkuna, *Juomareiden valtakunta. Suomalaisten känni ja kulttuuri 1500–1850*, Helsinki 2015, pp. 131–132.

81 Jenni Lares, *Alkoholinkäytön sosiaaliset merkitykset länsisuomalaisessa maalaisyhteisössä*, Tampere 2020, pp. 102, 177.

82 "betygande att dhe äftta druckit der både öl och brenwijn, men aldrig fått någon ohelsa der af", DCR Puumala 18–19/11 1691, Pien-Savo, KO a: 4: 262, NAF, Helsinki.

83 Visitation record 1700, Leppävirta church archive, II Cd: 1, NAF, Joensuu.



enjoying hospitality in the parsonage on particular occasions and in their mind, it would be convenient to gather there more often than the clerical family found suitable. On the other hand, it was the duty of the parishioners to build and maintain the parsonage, and they probably looked upon it as even more of a public building than the clerical family did. Historian Beat Kümin has shown that in certain areas of Central Europe, clergymen running taverns could make considerable proceeds from selling wine or beer, with examples dating from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>84</sup> This practice was by no means exclusive to the area of present-day Finland. It must also be noted that Luther did not denounce drinking altogether, but he did emphasize the need for moderation. Participation in local sociability also gave the clergy a chance to control the behaviour of the laity.<sup>85</sup>

Influences that affected both thought and practices regarding religion also had other origins than the church and the clerical family. Children were socialized to the religious practices of their families and communities.<sup>86</sup> These practices varied from learning to recite the Catechism to everyday protective magic and participating in saints' day rituals. In addition to the church and the household, religion was lived in everyday encounters with neighbours and acquaintances. With these encounters, religious practices also took new forms and were subject to constant change with new influences. In the parish of Kuopio, for example, a farmer was worried about his horses as he had experienced bad luck with his former, short-lived ones. Apparently, he talked about the situation with others, and a "Russian", a Karelian orthodox man travelling in the area informed him of a ritual that he could perform to turn his luck around. The man suggested that the farmer should go to the church on a great holy day, light a candle above his horse's neck, and then take the candle to the church altar. The farmer followed the advice, but the publicity of the deed led to him being caught. This case shows that it was possible to experiment in the sphere of religion and that social encounters brought new influences, especially when they were in accordance with how appropriate action within the sacred space of the church and churchyard was perceived. It also shows how the annexation of Kexholm and Ingria brought Russian Orthodox influences to Savo.<sup>87</sup> In

84 Beat Kümin, "Sacred church and worldly tavern: Reassessing an early modern divide", in *Sacred Space in Early Modern Europe*, Will Coster & Andrew Spicer (eds.), New York 2005, pp. 22–23.

85 Kümin 2005, pp. 25, 33.

86 Sari Katajala-Peltomaa & Ville Vuolanto, "Lapsi ja uskonto. Kaksi näkökulmaa sosiaalisuuteen myöhäisantiikissa ja sydänkeskiajalla", *Kasvatus & Aika* 2009:3.

87 See also Kimmo Katajala, *Suurvallan rajalla. Ihmisiä Ruotsin ajan Karjalassa*, Helsinki 2005; Toivo 2016, pp. 112–114.

another case from a few decades earlier, a “Russian” man was in different households paid for performing folk healing, counter-magic, and rituals for improving the success of crops.<sup>88</sup>

Turning to divine help was often something that people did in critical life situations. Offerings were brought to the altars of churches in hope of a safe delivery, relief from illness, or the return from a dangerous journey.<sup>89</sup> In the province of Savo, the church of Kuopio was known as a sacrificial church where brought offerings were also related to improving the success of livelihoods.<sup>90</sup> According to Johannes Daun and Terese Zachrisson, similar information survives from Gotland as well, where people brought offerings to church hoping for better luck with lambs.<sup>91</sup> In critical situations, it was also common to turn to different kinds of experts on folk healing or other means that would qualify as superstitious in the eyes of the authorities. For example, Päfwel Mackoinen from the parish of Iisalmi, the northernmost parish in the Savo area, travelled north with two companions to find “Lapps” who he believed could help him get back his “luck with children” (*barnlyckan*) that he had lost. His new-born children, especially sons, had died soon after birth. However, he did not find the helpers he was looking for and was forced to turn back home.<sup>92</sup> Even if the discussions leading to these choices are not described in any more detail, the seeking of the “Lapps” was clearly a result of interaction. Mackoinen had probably discussed the situation with his family and neighbours to arrive at the interpretation that he had lost his luck regarding children. Through discussions with others, he was also able to gain information about the “Lapps” who would supposedly be able to help. He was accompanied by two other men on his trip. When Mackoinen reached the locality where he was supposed to find the experts in question, he was told that these experts had travelled somewhere else, or perhaps they did not want to share or reveal their skills to a stranger. Turning to the realm of the otherworldly was a relevant option when faced with different kinds of critical problems of everyday life and seeking experts could have been just as relevant as going to church and praying for help, or bringing offerings to the altar, especially in cases where an interpretation of stolen or lost luck had been made and an expert was needed to restore

88 DCR Pellosniemi, Carl Hastfer's fief 17–18/7 1645, Savo, KO a: 2: 359v–364, NAF, Helsinki.

89 Weikert 2004, pp. 109–110, 146–149.

90 DCR Kuopio 26–30/6 1693, Pien-Savo, KO a: 4: 440–443, NAF, Helsinki.

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

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

it. Luck meant a general good fortune in life, the health and reproduction of humans and animals, and the success of crops and different kinds of tasks. To preserve one's luck, it was crucial to follow certain practices often transmitted from one generation to the next.<sup>93</sup>

In another case from the end of the research period, almost sixty years later, discussions over life's misfortunes revolved around God instead of lost



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

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

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

## Conclusions

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

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

95 Soili-Maria Ollé, *Visioner av världen. Hädelse och djävulspekt i justitierevisionen 1680–1780*, Umeå 2007, pp. 1–2.

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

97 See Kustaa H. J. Vilkkunen, "Jumala elä rankase minua. Yksilöllisen subjektin synty", in *Siperiasta siirtoväkeen. Murrosaikoja ja käännekohtia Suomen historiassa*, Heikki Roiho-Jokela (ed.), Jyväskylä 1996.

religious thoughts and practices were shaped by what happened at the church, what an individual had learned from his or her parents, what the norms of acceptable religious practice consisted of, and which kinds of incentives and ideas resulted from social interaction. People created possibilities for religious participation also for themselves, and there was a lot of initiative in the sphere of religion. There were also traditions, rituals, and values that were passed on from the previous generation to the next.

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

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

The importance and intertwining of work, family, and religion come across both in the source material and in previous research concerning the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Although going to church was a central part of the religious lives of early-modern people, a considerable part of the religious lives of

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

men and women was lived at home and in other spatial settings, such as the forest. For lay people living in the Eastern Finnish countryside with long distances between households, villages, and churches, the journey to attend the Sunday or holy day service at the nearest church might occur once in three weeks, or even more rarely. In the meantime, religion was lived in social interactions, devotion at home, during annual religious celebrations, and rituals performed individually or communally.

## Summary

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

*Keywords:* Lived religion, 17<sup>th</sup> century, peasantry, Lutheran Church, Finland