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2018


http://hdl.handle.net/10138/230911
https://doi.org/10.1080/01916599.2017.1402800

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To cite this article: Jukka Kortti (2017): Religion and the cultural public sphere: the case of the Finnish liberal intelligentsia during the turmoil of the early twentieth century, History of European Ideas, DOI: 10.1080/01916599.2017.1402800

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/01916599.2017.1402800

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Published online: 27 Nov 2017.
Religion and the cultural public sphere: the case of the Finnish liberal intelligentsia during the turmoil of the early twentieth century

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ABSTRACT

The political public sphere is at one and the same time both public, and private and religion operates in both the public and the private spheres in the modern way of life. This article approaches the dynamics between the cultural and the political public sphere from the point of view of religion; how the cultural intelligentsia developed its worldview fuelled with attitudes towards religion in times of political turmoil. The case study, based on the empirical analysis of cultural periodicals and societies around them, concerns the Finnish liberal intelligentsia in the early twentieth century. The first decade of the 1900s was a particularly important period of formation for the Finnish public sphere; the societal turmoil highlighted the importance of cultural periodicals in defining what was important for the national public sphere. The case of religion is an illustrative example of it, particularly from the point of view of the liberal intelligentsia of the era.

KEYWORDS

The cultural public sphere; religion; secularization; liberal intelligentsia; cultural periodicals; Finland

1. Introduction

The combined concepts of the public sphere and deliberative democracy can be said to constitute the very idea of European civilization and culture.1 As an idea, the public sphere is intimately tied to the wider struggle for realizing the visions of European democratic polity and culture. As a modern ‘invention’, it has its roots in the Enlightenment and has been worked on by intellectuals and activists alike. In academic research, the concept of the public sphere is used in history, philosophy, law, sociology and communication. After the locus classicus of the discussion Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit by Jürgen Habermas was translated into English2 back in the late 1980s – 27 years after publication of the German original – it started a wide critical debate around the subject in Anglo American communication studies.3 The theory has occupied historians’ minds as well.4

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4About the applications of the theory in the studies on American history, particularly from the point of view of the nature of the civil society, see John L. Brooke, ‘Reason and Passion in the Public Sphere: Habermas and the Cultural Historians’, Journal of European History of Europe Ideas, 2017 https://doi.org/10.1080/01916599.2017.1402800

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For a historical approach to media, the Habermasian concept of the public sphere is relevant in many ways. In Habermas’s terms, the central concept of his argument, the bourgeois public sphere (bürgerliche Öffentlichkeit), needs the cultural public sphere in order to deal with issues that are not connected to economic and political interests and operate in the private sphere. Habermas also points out how the political public sphere was culturally prefigured by the ‘literary public sphere’. Especially ‘reason’ was enunciated by the literary culture. Therefore, the concept of the cultural public sphere refers to the contested terrain of politics, public and personal – how they are articulated through aesthetic and emotional modes of communication.

Nevertheless, most theories of the public sphere, including that of Habermas, have concentrated on the significance and the essence of deliberation and the cultural forms of the public sphere have been neglected. The claim for investigating the cultural public sphere is based on the notion that cultural forms can play a central role in supporting people in their role as citizens. By culture – both high and popular – people are able to shape their subjectivities, to walk in other people’s shoes and, first of all, to provide models of rational deliberation.

Overall, Habermasian theorization on the cultural public sphere is somehow incomplete; Habermas does not discuss the idea very profoundly. Nevertheless, Habermas was not the first one to emphasize the importance of the cultural side of the public sphere. Sociologist Ernst Manheim was one of those German sociologists of the Weimar era who was interested in theorizing the public sphere. In his study Die Träger der öffentlichen Meinung. Studien zur Soziologie der Öffentlichkeit [The Carriers of Public Opinion. Studies on the Sociology of the Public Sphere], he highlights the role of different kinds of societies, associations and networks of the eighteenth-century bourgeoisie, whereas Habermas emphasizes the role of the nineteenth-century bourgeois family in creating the fundamentals of a normative, ethical society. This cultural public sphere, according to both theoreticians, educate citizens to work in the realm of the political public sphere.

In this article, I approach the dynamics between the cultural and the political public sphere from the point of view of religion. The case study, based on the empirical analysis of cultural periodicals and societies around them, concerns the Finnish liberal intelligentsia in the early twentieth century. The daily press and literature, especially the newly emerging form of the novel, were important media of the period; indeed, a great deal of research has already been done on both media. Instead, cultural magazines and periodicals, usually having a small circulation, were not as popular a mode of research as books and newspapers, although they have played a focal role among the cultural intelligentsia from time to time. Moreover, cultural periodicals can be seen as a marriage between literature and journalism. The periodicals and magazines have been essential for an individual or a group to develop their ideas and worldviews. Nevertheless, the period and the context is particularly interesting from both the point of view of religion and the public sphere.

Firstly, the period aroused liberalism, culture criticism and the first Finnish modernists in literature. Especially after the nationalistic Fennoman movement divided in two, the liberal writers of this group of the ‘the Young Finns’ wanted to ‘open windows’ towards Europe. The period was also the heyday of social movements, associations and the arts (the ‘Golden Age of Finnish art’). All this took place during the period when the Tsar (or Emperor as the Finns called him) Nicholas II, Russian governments and Russian nationalists started the Russification (the so-called years of oppression, 1899–1905 and 1908–1917) of Finland, aiming to limit the special status of the Finnish Grand


Habermas, Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, 51.


Duchy. This Russian fear of separatism as well as the First World War from 1914 onwards was manifested in the tightening censorship by the Russian Empire. The symbolic forms of culture, especially literature, served as effective tools for the Finnish resistance. On the other hand, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries also unfolded into the great era of literary realism.

Secondly, one of the main issues among the liberal cultural intelligentsia all over Europe in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century was the critical attitude towards state-church Christianity. From the standpoint of the modern liberal intelligentsia, the Church was labelled a conservative institution, whose authority was dismantled by the progression of science. Particularly technological innovations and the theory of evolution highlighted the superiority of reason and questioned the fundamentals of Christianity. The Church was also challenged on moral issues to reform since it was seen as a symbol of corruption and as an institution that maintained the evils of ancient class society.  

In Finland, the juxtaposition between clerics and liberals was fuelled during the Russification period, since most of the priests were advocates of ‘Realpolitik’ and compliance towards the Russian Empire, whereas the liberals were constitutionalists fighting against ‘oppression’.

Thirdly, the Finnish public sphere, in the Habermasian sense, was a rather new idea at the turn of the century. In a small and young European nation such as Finland, the public sphere started to develop as late as in the late nineteenth century, when major ‘epistemic commons’ (cultural institutions, the press, associations and organizations, the school system, etc.) were created. You could even say that the national public sphere was not in place before the Russian revolution of 1905 and the creation of the first unicameral parliament in 1906 that ended the first Russification period mentioned above.

2. The young Finns and their periodicals

The topic of my presentation today has a current interest. Nowadays, we often hear it said that the increase of mischief and crime is due to the growing of unfaithfulness in our country. That Christianity and specifically the Lutheran state Church constitute the only strong basis for the preservation of the system of society, and, for instance, the program the Prometheus association has drawn up may seriously endanger our nation and hence the government shall not confirm it.

The quotation above is the first sentence of the presentation entitled ‘Morals and Christianity’ by Edvard Westermarck held in a gathering of the Prometheus association in 1906. It was published in the periodical Nuori Suomi. Edvard Westermarck (1862–1939) was a philosopher, social anthropologist and the first professor of sociology at the London School of Economics. He was a father figure of the cultural radicals that wanted emancipation from Christian idealistic nationalism, as well as from the domination of ecclesiastical dogmatism. Westermarck, an agnostic, had adapted...


13Esitykseni aiheeksi olen tallä kertaa valinnut aiheen, jolla tavallaan saattaa olla aktuaalinen merkitys. Kuullaan hyväksytyn monasti lausutavan, että lisääntyvä vallattomuus ja rikoksellisuus maamme on seurauskena enertyvästä uskottomuudesta, että kristinusko ja erittäinkin luterilainen valtioikko muodostavat ainoan vahvan pohjan yhteiskuntajärjestyksen säilymisele ja että esim. sellainen ohjelma kuin se, minkä yhtedys Prometeon on toiminnalleen laatunut, saattaa todelliseen vaaraan kansamme ja sentähden ei hallituksen pidät sitä vahvistaa.


the foundational aspiration of the sociology (Comte, Durkheim) that science would displace religion in modern societies.16 Westermarck ‘sought for truth’ and ‘despised humbug and hypocrisy’ in his thinking and activities and, as many of his followers, advocated the separation of church and state.17

The periodical Nuori Suomi (1906–1907), instead, was the chief organ of the political group called Young Finns, a liberal faction of the Finnish party. For the ‘birth of the Finnish public sphere’, the nationalistic Fennomans movement was important. Yet it came into existence from within the Swedish-speaking elite in the early nineteenth century. Fennomans pushed to raise the Finnish language and Finnic culture from its peasant-status to the position of a national language and national culture. The Finnish national movement gradually evolved into a class movement, reflecting the division of the Diet into four estates: nobility, clergy, burghers and peasants. Finnish speakers had an edge over the clergy and peasants. Swedish was primarily the language of the upper class.18

The whole movement, as well as its successors, was highly influenced by the Hegelian philosopher and statesman J. V. Snellman (1806–1881), who was one of the main leaders of the movement.19 Snellman, among other things, established the first Finnish modern ‘newspaper’ Saima (1844–1846) that espoused ‘The Libertarian Theory’ of the press.20 The Fennomans actual chief organ, the newspaper Suometar (1847–1866) later gave its name as the nickname (suomettaralaiset) for the Fennomans. The Fennomans were also prime movers in the highly influential Finnish associations of the nineteenth century, such as the Finnish Literature Society and the Society of Popular Education as well as in the business world (Finnish-minded banks and insurance companies).

In the 1890s, the Fennoman movement divided into two parts: the conservative and moderate ‘Old Finns’ and the more liberal and radical ‘Young Finns’. Politically, the main dividing factor was the attitude towards the Russification policies that the Russian Empire started in the late 1890s – not as much towards the language (Fennomans and Svekomans) as before. The Finnish party was divided into the ‘Old Finns’ (the supporters of Realpolitik and compliance) and the ‘Young Finns’ (Constitutionalists). Most of the clergy supported compliance. The artistic faction of the Young Finns was formed by the major figures of the ‘the Golden age of Finnish art’, who were born in the early 1860s: the painters Eero Järnefelt, Akseli Gallén-Kallela, Emil Wikström and Pekka Halonen; the composer Jean Sibelius; and the authors Juhani Aho and Arvid Järnefelt. The last-mentioned belonged to the founders of the newspaper Päivälehti (later Helsingin Sanomat), which became the chief organ of the ‘Young Finns’.

However, the Finnish literary public sphere that operated in the arenas of art and cultural life was born in the previous century. The periodicals such as Finsk tidskrift (1876–1885) of the Swedish speakers and Valvoja (1880–1924) of the Finnish speakers were central in defining the aesthetics and cultural way of living. Valvoja was established by those who later became the major figures among Finnish-speaking academics; some of them made their marks as politicians as well. While the periodicals were ‘cultural periodicals’ by definition, they also contained articles on politics (around 5 per cent of the contents of Finsk Tidskrift and over 14 per cent of the contents of Valvoja in the 1880s). However, religion took only from two to three per cent of the article contents.21

20Of the recent definitions of the Libertarian Tradition as one of the theories of the press, see Clifford G. Christians and others, Normative Theories of the Media. Journalism in Democratic Societies (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 47–52.
One of the active contributors of Valvoja was the writer Juhani Aho (1861–1921), ‘the first Finnish professional author’. He worked as a journalist (also as the editor-in-chief) in several newspapers and published, together with his brother Pekka Brofeldt, the magazine Uusi Kuvailehti (New Pictorial Magazine, 1890–1903) from 1892. Uusi Kuvailehti was, as its title indicates, a pictorial magazine, not a cultural periodical, as in the cases of Valvoja and Finsk tidsskrift. Yet Young Finn-minded Uusi Kuvailehti was not political until the Russification started at the turn of the twentieth century. The magazine ceased publication in 1903 after Pekka Brofeld was forced into exile. However, the reason for his exile was not the editorial policy of Uusi Kuvailehti, but his activities in the resistance movement Kagal.

Another later ‘great man’ of Finnish literature, the poet Eino Leino (1878–1926) belonged to a younger generation of the liberal Young Finns. Leino was likewise an active newspaper writer, and contributed to cultural periodicals and magazines. He founded the cultural periodical Nykyaika (Modern Times, 1897–1899), together with his older brother Kasimir Leino. Although the periodical outlined in its sample issue that it will be ‘a popular periodical for literature, art, science, commerce, industry, and societal issues’, politics would not belong to its editorial policy; however, ‘the years of oppression’ eventually forced Nykyaika to take a stand on the political turmoil.

Later in the mid-way through the first decade of the twentieth century, Leino was a driving force behind the cultural periodical Päivä (1907–1911), yet he did not belong to the editorial staff, but published articles and particularly poems in the paper. First of all, he was a central figure in the circle of Päivä – a circle of the cultural intelligentsia that gathered regularly in the editorial office of the periodical. Those intellectuals included, again, the main figures of the Finnish arts scene, but mainly the group was formed by the younger generation of artists, writers and academics. Activist Herman Stenberg was the editor-in-chief of Päivä. Stenberg was previously the editor-in-chief of the periodical Nuori Suomi.

In this article, I approach the periodicals especially from the point of view of religion – how the cultural intelligentsia developed its worldview fuelled with attitudes towards religion in times of political turmoil. According to the content analysis of the periodicals, religion was a major topic in both Nuori Suomi and Päivä periodicals, whereas in Uusi Kuvailehti magazine and especially in the Nykyaika periodical the proportion of the articles on religion was not that significant. However, in the writings of the authors (Juhani Aho and Eino Leino) behind the last-mentioned periodicals, religion was a central theme at times.

3. Religion, science and secularization

Both religion and the development of science were important topics in the content of the periodicals of the liberal Young Finns. The articles and news of science and inventions were a regular content of Uusi Kuvailehti and Nykyaika. Religion was the main area of focus, together with politics, in the articles of Nuori Suomi and Päivä (see the figures below).

German idealism played a central role in the Finnish intellectual life until the 1880s. Particularly the Hegelian philosopher and statesman J. V. Snellman’s ideas of the nation and Bildung have been highly influential among the Finnish intelligentsia until the late twentieth century (including some of the Marxists). An alternative to the Christian idealistic nationalism began to emerge in the 1880s

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About the background that led to establishing Valvoja, see Mikko Juva, ‘Valvojan ryhmän syntyhistoria’, in Turun historiallinen arkisto XI (Turku: Turun historiallislen Yhdistysen julkaisu XI, 1951), 190–227.


23Nykyika’. Nykyaika sample issue 1897, cover page.

24I have conducted the content analysis according to the categories used in the history of the Finnish press (Leino-Kaukiainen, ‘Perinteiden vaalijat’, 404). In practice, this means coding all the articles (excluding literary and other reviews, aphorisms, captions, causeries, essays, short stories, poems, plays etc.) and classifying them into these various categories (see Figures 1–4). The analyses include all the issues of the papers during the periods; hence, no representative samples have been made. In total, the number of issues is 404 and the number of the coded articles are 1795 (on each journal, see Figures 1–4).

25See Kortti, ‘Intellectuals and the State’.
Figure 1. *Uusi Kuvaleti* article content 1897–1903.

Figure 2. *Nykyaike* article content 1898–1899.

Figure 3. *Nuori Suomi* article content 1905–1907.
among the Swedish-speaking intelligentsia, who consisted of internationally oriented scholars and
writers.\(^2\) One could even speak of their openly hostile attitude towards Christianity and the Church.
The state Church was seen as restricting the freedom of an individual, since all the Finns were obliged
to belong to the Church.\(^2\) Although the Swedish speakers were forerunners in Finland, when it
comes to these new liberal ideas of the era, soon a significant faction of the Finnish-speaking intel-
ligentsia joined the movement as well. Yet the Finnish-speaking liberal intelligentsia remained more
nationalistic than their Swedish-speaking or European intellectual contemporaries, especially during
the Russification period.\(^2\)

The movement could be seen as a part of ‘the New Enlightenment’, which had begun in Central
Europe already in the mid-nineteenth century. Moreover, the Finnish intelligentsia were first
exposed to the main books of the pre-French Revolution Enlightenment only in the late nineteenth
century, since the tight censorship by the Russian authorities had made such purchases difficult.
These cultural radicals wanted emancipation from Christian idealistic nationalism, as well as from
the domination of ecclesiastic dogmatism.\(^2\)

Naturalism and positivism evoked a response among the Finnish intelligentsia in the 1880s. For
some, it meant completely discarding the Christian message; some started to highlight the ethical
part of religion according to the ideas of religious liberalism. In this sense, the Church hierarchy
was seen as the managers of conservatism. During the following decade, however, there was a
truce in the war against the Church. This was for two reasons. Firstly, the threat of Russification
helped restrain the criticism of the Church by the intelligentsia, since the Church was now seen
as a valuable institution to strengthen nationalism and to maintain its ethical norms. Secondly,
some of the Finnish theologians, such as Professor of Dogmatics G. G. Rosenqvist, for their part,
saw that it would be possible to accept Darwinism. They also started to take seriously the historical
criticism of the Bible.\(^3\)

On the other hand, the influence of the revivalist movement was rather strong among the Finnish
theologians during the late nineteenth century, and a majority of them ultimately relied on the

\(^{26}\) Stefan Nygård and Johan Strang, ‘Facing Asymmetry: Nordic Intellectuals and Center–Periphery Dynamics in European Cultural

\(^{27}\) Timosaari, *Edvard Westermarck*, 61.

\(^{28}\) See Jukka Kortti, Kulttuurista politiikkaan: ‘Aho, Leino ja kulttuurilehdet estetiikan ja politiikan rajoilla’, *Ennen ja nyt* (2016),


authority of the Bible.\textsuperscript{31} However, there were certain attempts at rapprochement to be found between the radical liberal intelligentsia and ‘Bible fundamentalist’ theologians. Assistant Professor of Theology Eero Kaila, who later became an MP and archbishop, joined in on the debate of the Prometheus association meeting in spring 1908. The members of the association were surprised that Kaila did not take the doctrine of Atonement literally, which meant for them that Kaila denied the deity of Christ. Kaila, who did not deny the deity of Christ, and Ernst Lampén, who had written the report, continued the discussion later in the periodical \textit{Päivä}.\textsuperscript{32}

Nonetheless, criticism reared its ugly head again at the turn of the century. There were several reasons for this. Firstly, the question of the freedom of religion – or more specifically, its lack – incited criticism among the radicals of the Swedish- and Finnish-speaking intelligentsia. Only Finnish Protestant religious groups were allowed to practice their religion in public (the Greek Catholics had their own legislation), according to the Nonconformist Act of 1889. The other factors were the rising labour movement, the popular Nietzschean philosophy, Tolstoyanism and Theosophy.\textsuperscript{33}

The most obvious link between science and religion was in the rise of Theosophy and other types of Esotericism. The new paradigms of psychology, philosophy and natural sciences seemed to resonate with Esotericism in order to reveal the deepest secrets of nature. The idea was to combine knowledge and intuition ‘scientifically’. On the other hand, the movement was also a reaction to the Enlightenment-based rationalism, a sort of anti-positivism; everything cannot be explained by reason alone.

Yet a small group of Swedish-speaking intellectuals and artists were interested in theosophy already in the mid-1880s. European and American Esoteric ideas landed properly in the Finnish cultural public sphere at the turn of the twentieth century. What was particular to the Finnish context was the national epic \textit{Kalevala}, which was seen as a nationalistic myth that explained the evolution of the universe; in other words, the Kalevala was seen as an alternative to Christian theology. This nationalistic tone estranged Finnish Theosophies from the international Theosophical movement. Secondly, Finnish Theosophy was influenced by Tolstoyanism – not only that both worldviews were searching for a ‘real’ deity and were critical towards the Church, but also because those movements found an echo in the same, rather a small group of intelligentsia. Theosophy in Finland, though intelligentsia driven, was also less elitist than in many other countries at the turn of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{34}

As Charles Taylor and many others have emphasized recently, the narrative of Western secularization that ‘science causes secularization’ is not linear but a complicated, multifaceted process to which many different sorts of human endeavour has contributed, albeit science has a significant role in secularization.\textsuperscript{35} This is evident particularly in Juhani Aho’s career.

\section*{4. Rivalism and the essence of spirituality}

Religion was an important theme in Juhani Aho’s novels and short stories. He came from a priestly family. His father was a revivalist preacher and later parson, and his grandfather and great-grandfather had both been Lutheran priests as well. Despite, or because of this, Aho was very critical towards the Lutheran Church in his early works. Two of his major novels, \textit{Papin rouva} (Daughter of a Priest, 1885) and above all \textit{Papin tytär} (Wife of a Priest, 1893) treated the work of a ‘bread and butter priest’ (\textit{leipäpappi} in Finnish) rather cynically. Aho was one of the main figures of the first generation of the liberal Young Finns, who were critical towards the state Church and sceptical

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{Luukkanen} Tarja-Liisa Luukkanen, \textit{Aksel Adolf Laurell ja Oikean teologian myytti} (Oulu: University of Oulu, 2016), 199–261.
\bibitem{Tamminen} Riku-Kaisa Tamminen, \textit{Kansakoulun uskonnonvapaus vuosisadan vaihteen murrokissa}, 4–5.
\end{thebibliography}
towards Christianity, and who favoured free thinking. In addition, Aho had become acquainted with Spiritism, Theosophy and Buddhism already in the 1880s, when he spent his formative years in the literary salon of the writer and social activist Minna Canth – one of the main female figures of Finnish cultural history.36

Canth’s salon was preceded by a similar literary salon held by Elisabeth Järnefelt that Aho as well as many others of the young Fennoman radicals had participated in during the 1880s. They were designed to be an amiable and open conservation among culturally compatible participants who desired, through the charms and delicate intimacies of polite interchange, to hear the latest news, encounter cultural luminaries of the moment, make social and political connections, experience intellectual stimulation, and find amusement,
as K. Steven Vincent writes in his account on the early nineteenth-century French salons.37

Besides his family and ideological background, probably the example of Nordic writers, such as Norwegian author Henrik Ibsen and Danish literary critic and scholar Georg Brandes, had an influence on Aho’s attitude. Particularly the revivalist movement was of interest. Although there were doubts that he converted to Pietism after he had published the novel Heränneitä (Revivalists, 1894), in which he deeply examined the essence of the spiritualism of the movement, he confirmed his suspicious attitude towards religion. Nevertheless, Aho reduced his overt criticism of religion in Heränneitä. These doubts about becoming religious stem also from the mentality of the mid-1890s, when the intelligentsia started pursuing a new religiosity along with a growing interest in Tolstoyanism and different forms of Esotericism. For instance, Aho’s close friend Arvid Järnefelt, who became interested in Tolstoyanism, turned from unbelief to religious soul-searching at that time.38 For instance, Järnefelt wrote in Päivä about how Tolstoyanism approaches political ideologies and governmental power.39

In Uusi Kuvalehti, the proportion of religion varied from five to nine percent of the article content in 1897–1903 (see Figure 1). The articles, however, were not only about Christianity. According to the character and policy of the magazine, they often dealt with world religions such as Islam and Buddhism.40 The articles, which were regularly translated from international papers, concerning Christianity were mostly historical and theological approaches by nature.41 However, there were also very topical articles on religion such as the articles about Theosophy.42

Juhani Aho himself did not write that much about religion in Uusi Kuvalehti. However, in the Christmas issue of 1901, he wrote about the revivalist meeting he had visited in Lapua in Ostrobothnia, province of Western Finland that was a central area of the movement. As in his Heränneitä novel, the tone of the article was respectful, even admirable towards the revivalist Ostrobothnian people.43 As a part of the biographical writing about his father in law, A.F. Soldan, he published an article by Soldan about his faith entitled ‘My confession of faith’ in Uusi Kuvalehti.44

Brother Pekka, who was the real primus motor of the magazine, wrote a caption article about H. Hoffmann’s painting Christ at Gethsemane in the Easter issue of 1900.45 With Juhani Aho’s
personal contacts, *Uusi Kuvailehti* accessed expensive printing picture plates for free from international, namely Swedish papers. Often the stories were made based on those pictures received. Pekka, who had also changed his last name to Aho, wrote a deeply religious account of the painting: ‘So do not resist his [Christ] teaching, but try to acquire it so you are able to gain an eternal life’,\(^{46}\) as he finished the article. Pekka Aho had a personal revival experience during his exile in Sweden during 1903–1904, but in this article some two years before, the changes in his philosophy of life are yet to be seen. This is evident when reading his previous articles about the Lutheran Church. In the mid-1880s, when Pekka Brofelt wrote about a religious meeting between a priest and a layman in the *Keski-Suomi* newspaper, he edited together with his brother Juhani. At that time Pekka’s caricaturing style irritated the conservative readers.\(^{47}\) In 1902, Pekka Aho wrote another article in *Uusi Kuvailehti* based on a picture that represented the painting by Gustave Doré of Christ taken to his crucifixion.\(^{48}\)

Juhani Aho continued to write about revivalists in his *Kevät ja takavalvi* (Spring and Blackberry Winter, 1906) novel. It was a historic novel about the rise of the revivalist movement in the mid-nineteenth century. In some later analyses, the novel has been seen as if being influenced by Theosophy and other spiritual ideas of the era.\(^{49}\) However, according to the historian Irma Sulkunen, Aho disdained those ideas and *Kevät ja takavalvi* was more of a breakaway from Tolstoyanism, if anything. Sulkunen sees Aho’s revivalists novels and short stories as writer’s balancing between liberal ideas and his sympathy for the religious folk. *Kevät ja takatalvi* was also commenting on the political turmoil of the early 1900s in which revivalists of the mid-nineteenth century were associated with the political resistance of the early twentieth century.\(^{50}\)

In *Nuori Suomi* periodical’s contemporary review, the book was seen as if it would have been written by a Pietist. Though the novel had its undeniable merits, particularly in depicting the characters, it was seen partly as boring. The critic of *Nuori Suomi* saw that Aho had now passed his artistic peak in his career.\(^{51}\) During the same year, Aho was selected for the Bible translation committee after he had criticized it for not having any literary experts on the committee. *Nuori Suomi* saw this move as Aho’s revenge, since he did not receive a pension from the Senate.\(^{52}\) Aho’s work on the committee became central and enhanced the process of instituting him as a ‘national author’.\(^{53}\)

5. Was Jesus an invention of Saint Paul?

In *Nykyaika* by the Leino brothers, religion was a minor topic (see Figure 2) and all the articles concerning religion were articles translated from international periodicals such as the German *Zukunft* and *Die Zeit* and the French *Rev. des Revues*. In addition, a great proportion of the articles on religion were about world religions.\(^{54}\) In *Nuori Suomi*, Leino contributed to the discussion on religion in the context of the political organization after the Finnish parliamentary reform of 1906. He used the pen name Lucifer in the causerie which criticized, even sneered at the manifesto of the party that later became the Christian Workers’ Party.\(^{55}\)

In general, Christianity never became a central issue in Eino Leino’s work although he had a significant theosophical period later in the 1910s, including highly *Kalevala*- and Karelianism-

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\(^{46}\)Elkää siis hänen oppiaan vastustako, vaan koettakaa se omistaa itsellenne, niin voitatte ijankaikkisen elämän.


\(^{49}\)Rajala, *Nasten mies ja aatteiden*, 271.


\(^{52}\)Tuhkimo, ‘Viikon varrella’, *Nuori Suomi* 25 (1906): 198.


\(^{54}\)See e.g. ‘Budhalaisuus’, *Nykyaika* 15–16 (1898): 583–7; ‘Intian uskonnolliset olot’, *Nykyaika* 23 (1898): 859–63.

\(^{55}\)Lucifer, ‘Eräs ohjelmajulistus’, *Nuori Suomi* 10 (1907): 81.
influenced poetry and prose. Theosophy was linked to the rise of neo-romanticism in Finnish art life at the turn of the twentieth century. Artists, such as Eino Leino, wanted to create ‘new art’ (in addition to ‘new science’). Leino was fascinated by ‘national neo-romanticism’ and the ‘renaissance of the spirit of Kalevala’. He saw that Finnish neo-romanticism in literature left realism behind in 1897 when Juhani Aho published his *Panu* novel. Leino himself was interested in and influenced by Theosophy in many ways particularly in the last innovative period of his career in the 1910s, but it is a controversial issue among the literary historians whether or not he really was a Theosophist. He apparently became acquainted with Theosophy through the painter Pekka Halonen. Also Pekka Ervast, the prime mover of Finnish Theosophy, wrote for *Sunnuntai* on Theosophy and took part in the meetings of the periodical. Nevertheless, Eino Leino took part in the meetings of Theosophists already in the early 1900s and finally joined the Finnish Theosophical Association in 1906, but apparently, he was not a very active member. He could not, however, have been called the master of the Finnish Theosophy movement. Leino also published, together with L. Onerva, a

Educator and writer Ernst Lampén wrote a great proportion of those articles concerning religion in the *Päivä* periodical (see Figure 4). He belonged to the older generation (b. 1865) of the liberal Young Finns. He made his career as a language (Finnish and Swedish) teacher and as a travel journalist, but he was also an active freethinker. In *Nuori Suomi*, which was a kind of a predecessor of *Päivä*, Lampén wrote many articles about religion, but particularly in his numerous articles in *Päivä*, religion was his main issue. For instance, in 1908, Lampén wrote about religious freedom, Jesus and socialism, Easter as a pagan rite, celebrating ecclesiastical holidays in general, the Church administration as cultural policy, Finnish Church history and German theology. Most of the editorial staff was forced to resign from *Nuori Suomi* in the spring of 1907, because they were seen as being too radical from the point of view of Ylioppilaiden keskusteluseura (The Student Debating Society), which formed the editorial staff of *Päivä*, including the editor-in-chief, activist Herman Stenberg.

When Lampén wrote about Easter as a pagan rite and, among other things, claimed that Jesus was an invention of Saint Paul, it started a vivid discussion on the pages of *Päivä*. Discussion about the historical Jesus continued in the following year when *Päivä* published philosopher Rolf Lagerborg’s speech titled ‘Modern research on Jesus’ held in the Prometheus Association, which was very critical towards the Church and religion. The Prometheus Association was a student-based association, and Professor Westermarck was the chair of this highly political association established after the turmoil of 1905 Russian Revolution and the ‘Great Strike’ in Finland. The aristocratic Swedish-speaking liberal Lagerborg, a student of Westermarck, was one of the main figures of the Prometheus Association. As a moral philosopher and cultural radical, Lagerborg ‘wanted emancipation from the domination of ecclesiastical dogmatism and the shared value system emphasized by Christian Idealistic Nationalists’, as Marja Jalava, who has studied Lagerborg from the point of view of intellectual history, puts it. 

Ernst Lampén belonged to the Prometheus Association as well. In 1909, the cathedral chapter (*domus capituli*) of Turku (the former capital of Finland) sued Lampén and the editor-in-chief of

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56 Holm, *Spiritualismin muotoutuminen Suomessa*, 94.
59 See e.g. Maria Tarasheimo, ‘Niille nuorille “Päivän” lukijoille’, *Päivä* 23–24 (1908): 189–90.
Päivä Herman Stenberg for libel, because of Lampén’s writings. The subject was writer Ilmari Kianto’s short story ‘Abraham and Sara’, which the cathedral chapter saw as blasphemy. Lampén took a very active role in this case in the pages of Päivä writing widely about what the Old Testament actually said about Abraham and Sara. This incident induced Päivä to formulate a proposition for submission to Parliament that would change the law on blasphemy, which eventually did not pass in Parliament (still existing in the form of breaking of the freedom of worship).62

6. Religion and the parliamentary reform

Most evidently, religion as a subject of the cultural public sphere entered into the political public sphere in the Finnish parliament reform of 1906. The Russian Revolution of 1905 culminated as the general strike in the Grand Duchy of Finland on 31 October 1905 and the new act of Parliament on 20 July 1906. The strike ended the Russification period that had started in the February Manifesto of 1899 by Nicholas II. The Manifesto included several issues that underlined the imperial government’s rights in Finland without the consent of Finland’s own legislative bodies, which had played a relatively independent role during the ‘autonomy’ era as compared to other parts of the Empire.

Of the political parties, the case of religion was important also for the rising Finnish working-class movement. Until 1899, Social Democrats were rather favourably disposed towards Christianity, since particularly revivalist movements included features that the Finnish working-class leaders saw as levelling down social and societal differences. In the early twentieth century, though, they turned not only against the Church and Christianity, but against all religion except for a minor faction that favoured Theosophy. (Some of them even saw later that ‘the Great Strike’ did not escalate into violence, due to the vanguard of Theosophies that managed to hold back the demonstrations with their message of peace and love63). However, after the strike the rising working-class movement had to be more delicate with its opposition to religion. Christian doctrines had a stronghold particularly among the rural poor people, and the leaders of the Social Democrats had to soften their ideas about religion.64

One of the questions concerning the political turmoil of the era was the role of Church and religion. During the Finnish parliamentary reform of 1906, the Nuori Suomi periodical was a strong advocate for religious freedom. Particularly towards the end of the year, when this platform of the Young Finns was formed, the bulk of the periodical was dedicated to religion (see the Figure 3).

The writer Ilmari Calamnius (later Kianto), for instance, criticized those Young Finn newspapers, whose policies were not clear enough in their demands for religious freedom, but gave room for Lutheran clerics to express their conservative views. According to Calamnius, the partisan newspapers had to follow the programme of the party, which did not advocate continuing the hegemony of the state Church.65

Religious freedom was also important for the Ylioppilaiden keskusteluseura, the student organ of the Young Finns; they wished to be included in the Young Finns’ platform for the election. The younger members of the Young Finns proposed that state and church must be separated; religious freedom includes the right to resign from the Church and to no longer have to pay the church tax; the civil register must be founded; the religious content of the oath must be removed; other religious education must be made optional in schools; and teaching should be reformed so that it is contextualized towards history.66

63 Fryqvist, Teosofien Suur-Suomi, 130.
The first election based on the general and equal suffrage of the unicameral parliament – one of the most modern of the time – was held in March 1907. The switch from an estate-based Parliament to the unicameral Parliament meant that the electorate grew ninefold. The result of the election came as a great shock to the Young Finns. The party that captured a majority of the votes was the Social Democrats (37 per cent). The Old Finns came in second (27 per cent) and the Young Finns won only 14 per cent of the votes.

The result of the election was a great disappointment for the Young Finns, and it was evident that the hazy ideas that the liberal intelligentsia had to offer, including that of religion, was not successful among those with less education. Instead, the Social Democrats headed up the polls and became the largest socialist party in Europe. The party had enormous support from the countryside, and was actually the biggest rural party in the election. Agitators with their red ties had replaced preachers with their simple black clothes (körtit i.e. Pietists, the representatives of the revivalist movement), and instead of Hallelujah people sang The Internationale.67

After the parliamentary reform, there were attempts to modernize the legislation on religious freedom in Finland. In Päivä, Akseli Nikula wrote a series of critical articles concerning the report of the committee on religious freedom in 1908, especially how the report still maintained major privileges of the Lutheran Church and hence watered-down the reformation of the legislation.68 Overall, Päivä – as the cultural periodical – often took part in the political debates on religion during the turmoil of Finland in the early twentieth century.

7. The dynamics between the cultural and the political public sphere

As a European periphery, Finland was a late modernizer and its national, including cultural, institutions and the press were created in the latter part of the nineteenth century. However, the literary public sphere that operated in aesthetics and in the arenas of cultural life, and which provided models for a civilized way of living, started to be articulated only in the 1880s. The first decade of the 1900s was a particularly important period of formation for the Finnish public sphere; the societal turmoil, including the tightening of censorship, highlighted the importance of cultural periodicals in defining what was important for the national public sphere. The case of religion is an illustrative example of it, particularly from the point of view of the liberal intelligentsia of the era.

Religion operates in both the public and the private spheres in the modern way of life. However, we must remember that this ‘modern world’ concerned only a minority of the population in the entire West for a long time – often only that small liberal faction of the cultural intelligentsia of a nation. Secularization did not concern the common people nor the female elite. Along with the spread of literacy and the rise of revivalist movements, many children of the common people did not even learn the doctrines of Christianity properly until the late nineteenth century, when the Finnish elementary school system was established. In other words, for the worldview of the great majority of the unwashed and the salt of the earth, the doctrines of Christianity remained central well into the twentieth century.69

And this continues to do so as we have seen what has happened in the rise of populist politics in the West recently. As Habermas noted already a decade ago, liberal democracies are deeply rooted in Christianity and this is still evidently realized in the political public spheres of the twenty-first century.70

The political public sphere is at one and the same time both public and private. The latter includes the idea that the public sphere consists of an arena that operates outside the state, namely through the idea of the freedom of speech, in addition to addressing the common good (res publica) as the political public sphere does. According to Habermas, the private sphere of the bourgeois is the realm where political subjects are culturally educated. The most relevant medium for this has been the novel.

Fiction, narrative art in general, are the media where the cultural public sphere above all operates. In Finland, the period during the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century constituted a ‘golden age’ of the Finnish novel and poetry, as well as of music and the visual arts. Religion was a central topic in the literary fiction reflecting the international tendencies among ‘the republic of letters’ of the period. Of the central Finnish authors of the era, particularly Juhani Aho dealt a great deal with religious issues of the period in question.

Nevertheless, from the point of view of the cultural public sphere, the cultural periodicals were an interesting media since they operated between fiction and faction. In the case of religion, it meant short stories and poems on religious topics in the periodicals, but also articles, discussions and debates on Christianity, world religious and the role of religious freedom in state and society. In general, cultural criticism formed a central focus of the periodicals and played an important part in the cultural public sphere, which concerned itself with religious topics as well. According to Habermas, these kinds of deliberative discussions were central, not only from the point of view of educating citizens into moral life, but also in preparing citizens for political participation. At the same time, this development can be seen as an example of how the line between the state and society was blurred, which Habermas saw as the sign of the degeneration of the bourgeois public sphere. However, this decay was not realized until the era of the tabloid press and broadcasting, a period when these new media substituted the literary public sphere.

What made the case of religion particularly political was the political and societal turmoil Finland faced during the era. As the pioneer of the Finnish Theosophical movement, Pekka Ervast emphasized already in the 1890s that transcendental and psychic skills had significant practical benefits in the period of transition towards a new age. Because of the context, the personal, intimate sphere of life became political, and the cultural periodicals, bearing the lighter burden of censorship, were important arenas between these two spheres.

The cultural periodicals were often founded by small intellectual circles, or they created one. These core public spheres were formal as well as informal. The ‘Päivä circle’ is a good example of that. Firstly, it was a loosely organized debating society that gathered either in the editorial office of the periodical or in the nearby restaurants (especially the restaurant Catani) in Helsinki. The circle consisted of writers, artists, such as composer Jean Sibelius and activists who favoured liberalism; many of them were active members of the Young Finns. Eino Leino was the central figure in the Päivä circle: He knew all and all knew him. On the other hand, many of them, such as Ernst Lampén, belonged to the official societies such as the Prometheus Association and the meeting of the association apparently fuelled their writings in Päivä. In addition, the periodicals often published the reports and outlines of the meetings of the associations. However, one must remember that these associations, particularly those of an esoteric movement, were exclusive and often hierarchical – at least they had a central figure; a guru or
other leader.\textsuperscript{76} Ernst Manheim emphasizes these kinds of networks, including periodicals, in his theory of the sociology of the public sphere. Manheim founds his arguments on the eighteenth-century bourgeois, and it could be argued that they were less significant to the political culture in Europe towards the twentieth century, due to the rise of the partisan press and electoral organizations.\textsuperscript{77} However, in such a new nation and culture as Finland in the early twentieth century, those networks – the salons, circles and associations – still had an important role to play in the national public sphere.

Like Habermas, also Manheim sees that, whereas the political public sphere prepares people for participating in societal activities as citizens, people educate and develop themselves (\textit{Bildung}) morally as humans in the cultural public sphere – that is, before they enter into the political public sphere. Manheim also divides the public sphere into three parts: the transcendental (\textit{Die transzendentale Publizität}), the pluralistic (\textit{Die pluralistische Öffentlichkeit}) and the qualitative (\textit{Der qualitativen Öffentlichkeit}) public spheres. In short: the transcendental public sphere is recognized when a message is meant for all, and the pluralistic public sphere is realized when a writer takes into consideration that his or her audience is fragmented in the way that she knows that some of them agree, some disagree with him or her and some have not yet made up their minds. Nevertheless, whereas in both the pluralistic and the transcendental public sphere a writer speaks to all, in the qualitative public sphere, the audience is very restricted, consisting of the people who have already decided their standpoints.\textsuperscript{78}

In the cultural periodicals, and the case of religion dealt with in this article, these definitions of the public sphere by the sociologist Manheim are realized in an interesting way. Of the associations mentioned, the qualitative, core public sphere was realized in the activities of the Prometheus Association and the gatherings of the \textit{Päivä} periodical. On the other hand, although having the readership mostly among the same educated-minded faction (the Young Finns) of society, the periodicals referred to here were also targeted by those who potentially could disagree with the editorial or individual writer of a periodical. Moreover, such periodicals as \textit{Uusi Kuvalehti} also wanted to speak to a wider audience in a ‘transcendental manner’.

Overall, in studying the history of the public sphere, cultural periodicals are a fruitful source. As a combination of literature and journalism, they can reveal those dynamics between the cultural and the political public sphere. Religion proves, moreover, to be a rewarding area in which to analyse these dynamics, as both a realm of life that concerns the public and private spheres, and as an issue that is central to Enlightenment-based intellectual history.

\textbf{Disclosure statement}

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

\textbf{Funding}

This work was supported by the Finnish Cultural Foundation, under grant \textit{From Culture to Politics: The Dynamics Between the Cultural and the Political Public Sphere in the Early Twentieth Century}.

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\textsuperscript{76}Fryqvist, \textit{Teosofien Suur-Suomi}, 11.
\textsuperscript{77}See Vincent, ‘Elite Cultures in Early Nineteenth Century France’, 332.
\textsuperscript{78}Manheim, \textit{Die Träger der öffentlichen Meinung}, 41–58.