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Why Are Young Men Increasingly Drawn to Christianity? A Study of Finnish Young Men

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ABSTRACT

Recent surveys in the Global North suggest a possible reversal in established gender patterns of religiosity, with young men increasingly engaging with Christianity. This study examines this development in Finland, a highly secular country, drawing on qualitative individual and small-group interviews with 30 men attracted to Christianity. Our analysis identifies multiple, overlapping reasons for this engagement. Some reflect long-standing religious functions, such as the search for community and meaning, particularly in times of personal crisis. At the same time, the findings highlight time-specific factors shaping contemporary interest in Christianity, including experiences of societal fragmentation and insecurity, perceived moral and cultural uncertainty, and ongoing debates about masculinity and gender roles. Christianity was often framed as countercultural, offering structure, responsibility, and stable role models in contrast to relativism and individualism that were seen to characterize the society in general. In addition, digital media and online religious content played an important role in initiating and sustaining interest in Christianity. The study contributes to debates on secularization, gender, and youth religiosity by showing how young men draw on faith to construct alternative identities in a late-modern, Global North context.

1 | Introduction

Recent studies suggest that young men in Finland are increasingly drawn to Christianity. These studies suggest that young men are possibly not only more religious in traditional terms compared to young women but also more religious than men from the previous generation and even more religious than young men used to be just a few years ago (Ketola and Sohlberg 2024; Tervo-Niemelä et al. 2025b; Ketola 2020; Salomäki 2022; Porkka and Tervo-Niemelä 2024). Similar research results have recently been seen in other countries as well and the phenomenon has also gained remarkable media attention across the Western world (see, e.g., New York Times 2024).

These changes challenge two well-established phenomena in the empirical study of religion. First, the notion that religiosity is declining and that younger generations are less religious than previous generations. Second, the assumption that women are more religious than men. Empirical studies have consistently shown that women are more religious than men, particularly within Christianity and in countries where Christianity is the majority religion (Hackett et al. 2016; Lummis 2004). Women's stronger religiosity has been so pronounced that researchers have considered it a universal phenomenon (Stark 2002; Beit-Hallahmi 2014). Finland has been one of the countries where this gender difference has been exceptionally clear, with women being significantly more religious than men (Kääriäinen et al. 2005).

Replication Statement: The data, interview transcripts, and related materials supporting the findings of this study are not publicly available immediately after publication because they are part of an ongoing research project with further analyses planned for subsequent publications. The authors intend to deposit anonymized data and supporting materials in the Finnish Social Science Data Archive (FSD) within 5 years of the final article's publication. Until that time, data may be made available upon reasonable request to the corresponding author, subject to ethical and confidentiality considerations.

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This remains true among older age groups (Ketola and Sohlberg 2024; Tervo-Niemelä et al. 2025a).

In this study, our aim is to explore the reasons behind the suggested growing interest in Christianity among young men through interviews with young Finnish men who are attracted to Christianity. We seek to understand what draws them to Christianity and what they perceive as the key reasons why young men in general find Christianity appealing.

2 | Religious Change Among Young Men in Finland and Other Countries

The weakening role of institutional religiosity has been evident in many ways for a long time in the Western world, especially in the Global North. This has been the case in Finland as well (Cärtner et al. 2025; Salomäki et al. 2024). For instance, the proportion of people who believe in God taught by Christianity and religious participation has steadily declined, especially in the 21st century (Ketola and Sohlberg 2024). Finland, along with other Nordic countries, has long had low levels of religious participation, and the proportion of religiously active or religiously identified individuals is low in international comparison, clearly below the European average (Evans and Baronavski 2018; Kääriäinen et al. 2005).

However, recent studies have shown that the decline in belief has more strongly taken place among women (Tervo-Niemelä et al. 2025b; Ketola and Sohlberg 2024). One factor behind this trend is believed to be the strengthening of liberal and politically left-leaning attitudes among women and the related criticism of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF, the folk church in Finland with 61% belonging in 2025), being too conservative—for example, because ELCF is officially not accepting church weddings for same-sex couples (Niemelä 2015; Laiho 2023; Ketola and Sohlberg 2024). Liberal worldview is more likely to be associated with non-religiosity, whereas a more conservative worldview is linked to religiosity (Taira et al. 2023). The recent Religious Landscape Study in the United States shows that religious decline in the United States had primarily taken place among liberals, whereas among conservatives there was hardly any change (Smith et al. 2025). In Finland, studies show that among young women, there is a particularly high number of nonreligious individuals with liberal values (Ketola and Sohlberg 2024).

At the same time, the development among men has been fuzzier. Although traditional measures of religion have been linearly and steadily declining among women, according to several recent studies, young Finnish men are now more religious than men in previous age cohorts and more religious than young women. The trend was to some extent visible in representative surveys of Finns already in 2020 and 2022, but even more so in 2024 (Ketola 2020; Ketola and Sohlberg 2024; Salomäki 2022). In 2024, the difference between young men and women aged 18–29 had become particularly pronounced when measuring the relationship with Christianity. In 2024, 18% of young men aged 18–29 said that they believed in God as taught by Christian churches, compared to 11% of women. For the first time, the number of those who did not believe in God at all was greater among young women (38%) than among young men (31%). (Ketola and Sohlberg 2024) Among older generation of men and women, the traditional gender gap where women are more religious still holds (Ketola and Sohlberg 2024; Tervo-Niemelä et al. 2025b). Young men also identify as believers more often than young women, whereas young women are more likely to consider themselves spiritual. Women across all age groups are also more likely than men to believe in some higher power, the existence of angels, and reincarnation (Ketola and Sohlberg 2024).

Large research data collected from Lutheran confirmands around the age of 15 between 2019 and 2025 in Finland show similarly that boys are more likely than girls to be drawn to Christianity. Confirmation remains very popular among teenagers, with more than 70 percent of all youth in Finland attending, many of them not belonging to church when entering. The data, collected annually from 2019 to 2025, include responses from more than 130,000 young people. These data are especially convincing since the exceptionally large data have annually been collected among confirmands using the same method. In 2025, respondents accounted for 50% of all confirmands and one-third of all 15-year-olds in Finland. The change in belief is very clear among boys; the share of those believing in God increased from 36% in 2019 to 67% in 2025; the share had increased each year. In 2024 and 2025, belief increased also among girls, though it remained below the level among boys. During the same period, confirmation attendance decreased only a few percentage points (from 75% to 73%), so the change is not due to a lower share of youth being confirmed (Porkka and Tervo-Niemelä 2024; Porkka and Tervo-Niemelä 2025; Tervo-Niemelä and Porkka 2023). There has also been an increase in the number of people joining the ELCF, and the number of teenage and adult baptisms was higher than ever recorded, both in 2024 and 2025 (Kirkon Tilastot 2026).

Studies suggest that similar changes might be taking place also in other countries. Statistics from the Church of England show that church attendance grew for the fourth year in a row in 2024 and the numbers of teenage and adult baptisms rose by more than 10% point reaching the highest number since the age categories were first recorded 6 years earlier. The attendance numbers, however, had not reached the pre-pandemic levels, but in some cases, they had risen above the levels that might have been expected had there been no pandemic (Church of England 2025). Also, a large, but contested (see, e.g., Voas 2025; Hackett 2026) study conducted in the UK has suggested that the Church of England is experiencing a period of growth driven by young adults, particularly young men (McLeer & Barward-Symmons 2025). According to the report, young men are more likely than young women to attend church and to believe in God, and more likely than previous cohorts of young men. However, these findings have been subject to significant critique regarding data and interpretation (see, e.g., Voas 2025; Hackett 2026). The report was subsequently withdrawn after the underlying survey data was found to be faulty, rendering the findings unreliable (Bible Society 2026a). However, subsequent publications by the Bible Society continue to suggest possible signs of increased interest in Christianity, based on alternative forms of evidence (Bible Society 2026b). In the United States, a study by the American Bible Society shows the first time since 2021, an increase in Bible use and scripture engagement, particularly among younger adults and among men (Fulks et al. 2025). The recent *Religious Landscape Study* 2023–2024 (Smith et al. 2025) showed that the

decline of religion in the United States has slowed and may have leveled off. The study also found that the traditional gender gap in religiosity among young adults has largely disappeared: While young women show a steady decline, the youngest cohort of men shows an increase in the proportion who identify with a religion (Smith et al. 2025).

Studies also report general increase in belief among young people. In Sweden, a large representative SOM survey that has been conducted annually by the SOM-Institute of the University of Gothenburg since 1986 with the main purpose of following Swedish public opinion over time concludes that the trend has shifted and secularization seems to have stopped increasing both among Swedes with and without an immigrant background. This is especially noticeable among young people aged 16–24 (Hagevi 2025). In a youth barometer study in 2024 in Sweden, Jesus was seen as "trending" and there was a shift toward a more spiritual dimension and a search for a deeper meaning (Ungdomsbarometer 2025). In 2024, the largest number of people was also joining the Church of Sweden since the church started registering new members in 1970 (Svenska Kyrkan 2025).

Previous studies have discussed potential explanations for these changes in religiosity and the increase in belief among young men in Finland (see Porkka and Tervo-Niemelä 2024). One explanation is linked to the crises and increased insecurity in the world: Young people today are growing up in a world marked by multiple insecurities. Another explanation is the idea that Christianity may be emerging as a new counterculture (Porkka and Tervo-Niemelä 2024). For older people, non-religiosity or atheism was typically an active choice and a countercultural phenomenon, often involving criticism of their parents' nominal Christianity and a desire to break away from either strict and outdated values or superficial practices (see Niemelä 2007). When it comes to today's youth, non-religiosity is no longer countercultural; instead, with the general decline in faith, it is possible that religiosity has become a new counterculture (Porkka and Tervo-Niemelä 2024). Among young people in Finland, religiosity has become an identity associated with being a minority: Young believers are more likely to feel like they belong to a minority than their nonreligious peers. In contrast, this trend is reversed in older age groups (Ketola and Sohlberg 2024).

Another possible explanation often brought up is the increased conservatism among young men that has been reported in many studies (Porkka and Tervo-Niemelä 2025; Ketola and Sohlberg 2024). In Finland, the values of young women have shifted strongly toward the political left and in a more liberal direction. Men tend to be slightly more conservative than average and politically right-leaning. This value shift has led to a significant difference in the worldviews of young women and men, a difference not seen in older age groups (Ketola and Sohlberg 2024). A similar phenomenon, where young women have become increasingly liberal and leaning toward political left, whereas young men have either become more conservative and leaning toward political right or remained stable, thereby in both cases widening the ideological gap between the genders, has also been observed in other countries (see, e.g., Nennstiel and Hudde 2025; Burn-Murdoch 2024; Saad 2024). Recent Gallup data from the United States show that the proportion of young women (18–29) who identify as liberal (40%) is substantially higher than for young men (25%), illustrating a widening gender gap in ideological identification among younger cohorts (Saad 2024). A study comparing 32 European countries shows that such an ideological gap emerged and/or widened over time in 11 European countries and is particularly pronounced in Finland, Denmark, and Sweden, countries that are also characterized by high levels of gender equality. The authors of the study suggest that this could indicate that in countries with higher gender equality, sensitivity to remaining gender disparities might become more salient and politicized (Nennstiel and Hudde 2025).

These changes raise the question of whether young men are increasingly drawn to Christianity because they hold conservative values. Previous studies suggest that the situation is most likely more complex. Data from the Youth Barometer indicate that there are also religious liberals among young religious men, although in somewhat smaller numbers (Tervo-Niemelä and Porkka 2024).

3 | Contemporary Masculinities and a Crisis of Masculinity

Another possible explanation brought up explaining the religious change among young men is related to struggles related to manhood and masculinity among young men and, in relation to it, the media, especially social media and its influencers (Porkka and Tervo-Niemelä 2024). The rapid shifts in gender expectations—partly driven by feminist movements and equality policies—have generated what some scholars describe as a "crisis of masculinity," wherein traditional sources of masculine identity, such as breadwinning and familial authority, have eroded without clear alternative scripts emerging (Kimmel 2013; Roberts 2018). This perceived vacuum has fueled the rise of the manosphere, a constellation of online communities that articulate grievances around male marginalization and offer reactionary frameworks for masculine identity (Brito et al. 2024; Ging 2019). According to a British study, young men have often been influenced by conservative-leaning figures, such as Andrew Tate and Jordan Peterson (Duffy et al. 2024). A US-based study shows that boys and men are substantially struggling with current social changes and with competing messages about manhood, which affect their sense of connection, community, and purpose. Influencers within the manosphere have capitalized on social media algorithms and platform optimization to respond to these struggles. Their messaging ranges from lifestyle coaching and self-improvement content to financial advice, dating and relationship strategies, and health and fitness guidance. In addition, they often include ideological critiques of changing gender norms. Moreover, Christian influencers also play a significant role in shaping the narratives within the manosphere (Brito et al. 2024). Research shows that the youngest generation of adults uses social media the most. A total of 33% of young men and 40% of young women aged 18–29 in Finland report that they receive keys to spiritual growth from the internet. For one-fifth (20%) of men, but only one-tenth of women (9%), these are related to Christian spirituality (Ketola and Sohlberg 2024).

Recent scholarship has emphasized that contemporary masculinities are increasingly plural, contested, and negotiated. The concept of toxic masculinity has been used to critique forms of masculinity associated with dominance, emotional suppression, and aggression (Kupers 2005). Research on inclusive masculin-

ity has, in turn, demonstrated that emotional expressiveness and relationality among men have gained increasing legitimacy (Anderson 2009). However, scholars have also cautioned that such shifts do not necessarily unsettle gendered power relations, as emotional openness may coexist with authority and privilege (DeBoise and Hearn 2017).

Following Connell (2005), masculinities, understood not as fixed character types but as configurations of practice within gender relations, are understood in this article as hierarchically organized, with hegemonic masculinity referring to culturally dominant ideals of manhood that legitimize gender hierarchies while marginalizing alternative masculinities (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Nordic masculinity research has examined how the development of the welfare state and gender equality policies has shaped the cultural construction of masculinities (Holter 2007; Hearn and Pringle 2006; Hearn et al. 2012). In the Finnish context, traditional models of manhood, such as military masculinity and emotional restraint, are shifting toward more diverse forms (Jokinen 2010).

At the same time, it should be noted that the popularization of the concept of toxic masculinity has obscured its analytical limitations, underscoring the need to distinguish between norms of masculinity and men as individuals. This conflation has contributed to broader dynamics of value polarization, wherein progressive and traditionalist views on gender increasingly diverge (Ging 2019).

Research on hybrid masculinities has highlighted how men selectively incorporate traits from marginalized masculinities while retaining structural privileges (Bridges and Pascoe 2014). In the Nordic context, this manifests in the integration of ideals of emotional openness and caring fatherhood into hegemonic masculinities without necessarily challenging institutional positions of power. Paradoxically, advanced gender equality policies in Nordic countries may themselves have contributed to growing tensions around masculinity, as some men perceive equality measures as threatening to their status and identity (Mellström 2016).

This article does not aim to develop a typology of masculinities or to provide a comprehensive theoretical account of masculinity. Rather, it examines how young men themselves articulate and negotiate their interest in Christianity as men. In this article, we focus on the perspective of young men and the reasons they themselves identify for being drawn to Christianity. We ask why the young men we interviewed personally are drawn to Christianity. We also explore what they perceive as the reasons why young men in general are attracted to Christianity.

4 | Method

The study is based on qualitative interviews conducted among young men who are attracted to Christianity. Our aim was to reach a diverse group of young men who identify as Christian or are interested in Christianity. Participants were recruited through social media and via gatekeepers in different Christian groups across Finland.

Between November 2024 and February 2025, we interviewed a total of 30 young men. We conducted both group interviews and individual interviews. The material consists of 12 individual interviews and six group interviews, with 18 participants in total taking part in the group interviews (2–4 participants per interview). We deliberately employed both individual and group interviews, as discussing religion and personal beliefs can be challenging for some participants. Offering the possibility to participate either individually or in a small group was intended to lower the threshold for participation. Previous research suggests that Finnish men, in particular, tend to speak relatively little about religion and other existential or emotionally demanding topics (Tervo-Niemelä et al. 2025a).

The use of group interviews enabled us to capture interactional dynamics and shared meaning-making processes, whereas individual interviews allowed for more personal, vulnerable, and in-depth reflections. At the same time, we were aware of methodological challenges associated with group interviews, such as the risk of conformity to majority views or dominant voices overshadowing quieter participants (Morgan 1997). To mitigate these risks, the group interviews were intentionally kept small (2–4 participants) and were usually conducted either among participants who already knew each other or among participants with broadly similar backgrounds (e.g., involvement in similar Christian groups). This design aimed to facilitate open discussion while allowing sufficient space for each participant's perspective.

Most interviewees (24) were met in-person in six locations in four different parts of Finland. Interviews with six young men were held online via ZOOM due to distance or other practical difficulties in attending an interview in person. All other interviews were in-person interviews.

The interviewees included two *trans* men and 28 *cis* men. All men were white and born in Finland. Eight of them were between 16 and 19 years, 11 were between 20 and 24, and nine were between 25 and 30; two were older than 30 (see Table 1). Most identified themselves as believers, whereas some were searching for their faith but were strongly interested in Christianity, and a few were agnostic but still interested in Christianity. Young men were most often raised in homes that were either religious (12), nonreligious (6), or religiously neutral or religiously passive but positive (cultural Christians, 7). Young men were linked to the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Protestant free churches, and various revivalist movements. One had previously been a member in a religious group but is now searching for a new community. Seven had joined a Christian church in adulthood, and two were reflecting joining. Two had earlier left the church but joined back later. Others had been members since childhood. Seven had been believers since childhood, and others had either experienced a gradual development or conversion experience or were still searching. Regardless of their background, a genuine interest in Christianity united them.

Interviewees regarded themselves both as conservative (12) and liberal (11), and some were in between or not clear (7).

The interviewees were introduced to the study information and data protection statement before the interview. Most interviewees received this information several days before the interview so they could reflect on their participation based on this information. However, with some interviewees we did not have prior contact,

Table 1 | Interviewees by age, denomination, religiosity, upbringing, and values. $N = 30$.

		Number of interviewees
Age	16–19	8
	20–24	11
	25–30	9
	30+	2
	Total	30
Denomination/Religious group	Evangelical Lutheran local parish	18
	Lutheran revivalist movement	6
	Free Evangelical/Pentecostal	5
	None	1
	Total	30
Religious identity	Believer	24
	Seeker	4
	Agnostic	2
	Total	30
Church participation	Active	21
	Passive	6
	None	2
	No information	1
	Total	30
Upbringing	Religious	12
	Cultural Christian	7
	Mixed	1
	Nonreligious	6
	No information	4
	Total	30
Value system	Conservative	12
	Neutral	3
	Liberal	11
	Not clear	4
	Total	30

but our gatekeepers had organized the interviews, and our first contact with them was in the actual interview. In these cases, we always started the interview by introducing the study and its privacy policy. In all interviews, we also made sure that the interviewees had understood the information, and they were also given a chance to ask questions related to the study before the interview started. We also asked for consent for the interview and its recording. All interviewees agreed with the recording.

All direct and indirect personal information that would make it possible to identify the interviewees has been changed. The interviewees have been given pseudonyms, and the interviews have been coded using labels such as *I8g3* or *I13i*. In these codes, the number following *I* (interview) indicates the chronological order of the interview; *i* denotes an individual interview, *g* a group interview, and the number following *g* indicates the number of participants present in the interview.

In this article we are focusing both on young men's perception of their own interest in Christianity and their perceptions and observations related to the interest in Christianity among young men in general. In analyzing the data, we searched for these themes in the interview material and listed them for each of the interviewees: What he sees as factors why he himself or young men in general are attracted to Christianity.

We categorized these factors using template analysis. Template analysis is a flexible form of thematic analysis. Central to template analysis is the development of a coding template, usually on the basis of a subset of data, which is then applied to further data,

revised, and refined. One key advantage of the method is that it enables researchers to place some order on their large qualitative data from the start of the analytic process. It is also permissible to start with some *a priori* themes, identified in advance as likely to be helpful and relevant to the analysis (Brooks et al. 2014; Thorpe and Holt 2008). In our study, we had conducted all the interviews ourselves, and we already had a preliminary idea of the categories even before the actual analysis. In the analysis, we stated with five interviews, and through the repeated reading of them, we developed an initial template. However, this template was also influenced by our understanding of the other interviews we had conducted and listened to. The initial template consisted of 13 categories. After the initial coding using this template, we encountered several new themes that did not fall into any of these categories. At the same time, we understood that several of our initial categories were strongly overlapping with each other. After reading and coding new interviews, we refined the template several times and ended up with the final template consisting of nine categories. Within each category, we also searched for subcategories. We present the nine main categories and the various themes linked to each of them in the following chapter.

5 | Results

The themes that young men reflected on when discussing issues that draw them to Christianity were categorized into the following nine categories: (1) personal crises and the search for meaning; (2) community and safety; (3) permanence, traditions, and stability; (4) the faith and theology of the Church and rituals; (5) religion as a counterforce and counterculture; (6) church as a place for self-development; (7) confirmation time; (8) faith in public and the role of social media; and (9) a crisis of masculinity and a positive and responsible male image. The interviewees referring to each of these themes are listed in Table 2.

6 | Personal Crises and the Search for Meaning

> After my burnout, I had to ask myself: what really matters? (Ville, I1g3)

The most often discussed theme in the interviews was related to personal crises and to the search for meaning. When it comes to the amount and body of text, this is the topic taking most space in the interviews as well. As many as 24 interviewees (out of 30) discussed how personal crises, emotional struggles, or existential questioning had led them to explore or deepen their Christian faith. These crises ranged from burnout and depression stories to grief, loneliness, or the experience of purposelessness. Young men described their fears, emptiness, illness, and loss. For example, Patrik (I7g3) told about his struggles when ending his sports career; Simeon (I18i) told about his depression and his "dark night of the soul" when he was not "at all sure about God," Julius (I12i) told about his anxiety and how his depression had started to lift, Miikka (I16i) about his anxiety, Ville (I1g3) about his burnout, Nuutti (I2i) about his search for meaning, and Valdemar (I17i) about him being "quite on edge." Young men also reflected their experiences during military service and the war in Ukraine and the existential crisis the possibility of death in war had awakened in them.

Young men told their stories of how the secular world alone had not fulfilled their deepest needs. The entry into faith was often told as occurring during periods of emotional vulnerability. These are deeply personal turning points where young men report feeling vulnerable and in need of something deeper—faith, hope, structure, or connection.

Patrik (I7g3) described his moment of conversion during his crisis as a professional athlete: "I started to fear hell. The life I am living, this is obviously not right in the eyes of God. — I started to sigh more—'God, if you're really there, help me.'" This led Patrik to a profound personal transformation where he underwent a radical shift in faith, moving from a cultural believer to total surrender.

Some young men framed their turn toward faith as a quest for existential meaning rather than a direct reaction to crisis. Their described their search for meaning and the need to believe in something that gives life a deeper purpose. For instance, Nuutti (I2i) remarked: "*Life should have meaning, more than just focusing on yourself*."

In this category, faith was strongly seen as a source of peace of mind and meaning in life. Young men also reflected how they appreciated the role of churches in supporting people and offering hope. Nuutti (I2i) continued: "*How amazing that churches were built for the purpose of gathering, hoping, and praying for good things*."

7 | Community and Safety

> My faith community has definitely supported me. — it offers a space where people can be accepted and feel safe. — Friends, companions, and the social context—these matter a lot. (Aleksi, I4i)

Community and safety are the second largest and second most dominant theme in the interviews. In total, 22 of 30 interviewed young men referred to the topics related to community and safety. Within this category, young men discussed Christianity offering belonging, fellowship, and a safe social environment. Young men referred to church as a "safe home."

They discussed the sense of community and belonging they feel in parish and church setting and the feeling of safety that it brings. For the feeling of safety and community, the open and accepting atmosphere in the church was seen as important.

Young men also described the trustworthy and warm people they find in the church. They can be church workers or other young people whom they find in the church. They are people who make them feel at home. Young men talked how the church is a place to receive support and discuss life's challenges. Finding friends in church circles was also an important theme.

Young men also described how the church is a safe place to be vulnerable and a place where they feel they can be themselves. After having to play a role in school and other places, young men finally felt that they did not have to pretend. For example, Antero (I9i) talked how parish is a place where those who are mobbed

Table 2 | What draws young men to Christianity? Nine categories and the interviewees mentioning the theme.

Main theme	Number of interviewees	Interviewees
1. Personal crises and the search for meaning	24 (80%)	Joonas (I1g3), Jukka (I1g3), Ville (I1g3), Nuutti (I2i), Theo (I3g2), Aleksi (I4i), Matti (I5g4), Harri (I6g3), Samuli (I6g3), Veikka (I6g3), Johan (I7g3), Mikael (I7g3), Tapio (I8g3), Viljami (I8g3), Antero (I9i), Leevi (I10i), Helmeri (I11i), Julius (I12i), Joakim (I13i), Kuisma (I14i), Kasper (I15i), Miikka (I16i), Valdemar (I17i), Simeon (I18i)
2. Community and safety	22 (73%)	Joonas (I1g3), Jukka (I1g3), Ville (I1g3), Nuutti (I2i), Theo (I3g2), Aleksi (I4i), Harri (I6g3), Samuli (I6g3), Veikka (I6g3), Johan (I7g3), Mikael (I7g3), Viljami (I8g3), Antero (I9i), Leevi (I10i), Helmeri (I11i), Julius (I12i), Joakim (I13i), Kuisma (I14i), Kasper (I15i), Miikka (I16i), Valdemar (I17i), Simeon (I18i)
3. Permanence, traditions, and stability	21 (70%)	Joonas (I1g3), Jukka (I1g3), Ville (I1g3), Nuutti (I2i), Theo (I3g2), Aleksi (I4i), Harri (I6g3), Samuli (I6g3), Veikka (I6g3), Johan (I7g3), Mikael (I7g3), Viljami (I8g3), Antero (I9i), Leevi (I10i), Helmeri (I11i), Julius (I12i), Joakim (I13i), Kuisma (I14i), Kasper (I15i), Miikka (I16i), Valdemar (I17i), Simeon (I18i)
4. The faith and theology of the church and rituals	20 (67%)	Joonas (I1g3), Jukka (I1g3), Nuutti (I2i), Theo (I3g2), Aleksi (I4i), Harri (I6g3), Samuli (I6g3), Veikka (I6g3), Johan (I7g3), Mikael (I7g3), Patrik (I7g3), Viljami (I8g3), Antero (I9i), Helmeri (I11i), Julius (I12i), Joakim (I13i), Kasper (I15i), Miikka (I16i), Valdemar (I17i), Simeon (I18i)
5. Religion as a counterforce and counterculture	17 (57%)	Joonas (I1g3), Jukka (I1g3), Nuutti (I2i), Theo (I3g2), Aleksi (I4i), Harri (I6g3), Samuli (I6g3), Veikka (I6g3), Mikael (I7g3), Viljami (I8g3), Antero (I9i), Helmeri (I11i), Julius (I12i), Joakim (I13i), Kasper (I15i), Miikka (I16i), Simeon (I18i)
6. Church as a place for self-development	14 (47%)	Ville (I1g3), Theo (I3g2), Aleksi (I4i), Matti (I5g4), Samuli (I6g3), Veikka (I6g3), Tapio (I8g3), Leevi (I10i), Julius (I12i), Joakim (I13i), Kuisma (I14i), Kasper (I15i), Miikka (I16i), Valdemar (I17i)
7. Confirmation time	12 (40%)	Ville (I1g3), Theo (I3g2), Aleksi (I4i), Leevi (I10i), Julius (I12i), Joakim (I13i), Kuisma (I14i), Kasper (I15i), Miikka (I16i), Valdemar (I17i), Simeon (I18i), Veikka (I6g3)
8. Faith in public and the role of social media	12 (40%)	Ville (I1g3), Theo (I3g2), Aleksi (I4i), Antero (I9i), Julius (I12i), Joakim (I13i), Kuisma (I14i), Kasper (I15i), Miikka (I16i), Valdemar (I17i), Simeon (I18i), Veikka (I6g3)
9. Crisis of masculinity and a positive and responsible male image	11 (37%)	Joonas (I1g3), Jukka (I1g3), Theo (I3g2), Aleksi (I4i), Harri (I6g3), Samuli (I6g3), Veikka (I6g3), Mikael (I7g3), Viljami (I8g3), Antero (I9i), Joakim (I13i)

in school, those who are very shy or belong to minorities; they can be seen and heard: "*Many have been mobbed in school and then they have joined church activities. For the first time they feel that they are genuinely accepted*." Young men also talked how the church is a safe place to be different, and it is a safe space for minority identities. The church was also seen as a place where they can be vulnerable and referred to their wounds. However, young men also described their experiences when the church was also experienced as unsafe. For example, Kasper (I15i), as a trans man, had deeply hurting and painful experiences in religious communities: "*As a transman, I've had painful experiences in some church settings, but in other places I have truly felt seen and accepted*." He had left his former religious community and at the time of the interview, he was searching for a new community where he could feel accepted.

Openness for questions and possibility to question faith was seen as a part of the experience of feeling safety in church. Young men felt accepted as they are when they were not forced to be or believe in a ready-made model.

Young men also felt existential security in the church. They described how the current world is unsafe and uncertain in many ways: They referred to the war in Ukraine, the economic instability, unemployment, and uncertainty of the future. They felt that the church and faith bring security and is a source of hope in uncertain times. Church was a place that offered safety and hope amid global and personal crises. They described faith as means to explain the world and provide comfort in uncertain times. Faith offers a foundation of values, ethics, and morality that helps navigate life's uncertainties.

> I believe many are seeking comfort during uncertain times. — Faith can bring hope when everything else seems shaky. (Nuutti, I2i)

This final aspect of this category is partly overlapping with the next category: permanence, traditions, and stability.

8 | Permanence, Traditions, and Stability

The third category titled "Permanence, Traditions, and Stability" is also a large and frequently discussed theme in the interviews. It was mentioned by 21 interviewees. For young men, Christianity represented something unchanging in a chaotic world. Christianity was seen as a source of permanence and continuity in a rapidly changing world. Faith was described as a constant amid the chaos of modern life, school, or relationships.

> Everything else in the world is uncertain… Jesus is the one constant (Lasse, I8g3)

> When everything else feels unstable, God stays the same. (Valdemar, I17i)

> Christianity offers a solid ground, you can count on when I think, where to ground my opinion. (Matti, I15g4)

> Christianity provides something solid to build your life on. (Viljami, I8g3)

> You know what to expect — it's steady, it grounds you. (Jukka, I1g3)

Young men were drawn to Christianity because they felt it was offering a stable moral and cultural framework in a rapidly changing world and boundaries, responsibility, and purposeful living. Interviewees often contrasted the clarity of Christian values with the moral ambiguity of contemporary society. Young men were drawn to Christianity because it offers "*moral clarity in a confusing world*." For example, Nuutti (I2i) referred to how "*Christian values offer moral grounding*." Juhani (I5g4) emphasized that the Bible offers "*a compass*" for right and, wrong and Viljami (I8g3) said: "*The world doesn't have many clear rules anymore. In faith, I found something solid to hold on to*." Rules and boundaries that young men felt Christianity offered were seen as positive things. Religion was also seen as providing a sense of structure and self-discipline.

> You can't just do whatever you want all the time. Faith reminds me that actions have weight. (Matti, I5g4)

> The world lacks moral clarity – religion gives that. — Christianity offers boundaries and a sense of responsibility. — Christian values contrast with a modern, unanchored life. (Aleksi, I4i)

> When everything else is flexible, it's good to have something that doesn't bend to my own whims. (Theo, I3g2)

Some interviewees also pointed that is typical for men to hope for clear structures in life. Veikko (I5g4) noted: "*Men, perhaps in general, long for clear boundaries in life*."

Young men also highlighted responsibility. Patrik (I7g3) noted: "*Responsibility for family and society are missing from today's world. Christianity emphasizes them*." Joonas (I1g3) continued: "*It [Christianity] offers permanence and responsibility without rigidity*."

Family traditions during Christian holidays, especially Christmas, represented something stable. Christmas was by far the most frequently mentioned family-related tradition tied to faith. Christian holidays and family traditions linked to them were highlighted as comforting cultural anchors. "*Christmas at church is the only thing that hasn't changed since childhood*." (Lasse, I8g3) Interviewees also recalled childhood memories of church services at Christmas as spiritually meaningful.

This category also incorporated subthemes related to patriotism and national as well as cultural identity. Aleksi (I4i) points out: "*Respect for traditions and national pride matters to me*." Interviewees emphasized the importance of Christianity in maintaining cultural cohesion and historical continuity. Some explicitly linked Christian belief to Finnish identity, traditions, and roots. For example, Viljami (I8g3) expressed pride in "*being Finnish and*

Lutheran," tying faith to his cultural belonging. Christianity was not seen only as a part of being a Finn but also as part of European history and cultural identity: "*It's part of our Western identity, not just about faith—it's about who we are as a culture*." (Antero, I9i)

Some young men also referred to the increased presence of Islam in Finland and Europe and how it makes them more willing to identify themselves as Christians and emphasize Christianity's long historical roots in European and Finnish culture. Interviewees' reflections on Christianity as part of Finnish or European cultural heritage resonate with broader scholarly discussions on Christian nationalism, understood as the fusion of religious and national identities and the use of Christianity as a symbolic boundary in defining belonging (see Nyhagen 2018; Whitehead and Perry 2020). However, the accounts in this study do not reflect a fully articulated nationalist ideology. Rather, references to Christianity as part of national or cultural identity were typically framed in cultural, historical, or civilizational terms, emphasizing continuity, tradition, and belonging rather than political mobilization or exclusionary claims. Although a small number of participants explicitly contrasted Christianity with Islam, these references remained at the level of perceived cultural difference.

Interviewees also referred to history in general and the role Christianity had had in history. Nuutti (I2i) said: "*There's a search for comfort in history—what was before is seen as stable*." A sense that the church provides continuity in society and anchors their identity within a longer historical tradition is seen as supporting.

The church's role in society was also found to be supporting and providing a sense of continuity. Even those who were skeptical about faith found the Church's presence in Finnish society comforting. Joakim (13i) stated: "*Even if I'm not super religious, I want the Church to exist. It means something to people*."

Several young men, especially those linked to conservative religious movements, expressed deep respect for religious traditions. Veikko (I5g4) stated: "*I don't need the Church to be trendy. I need it to be rooted in something older than me*." Some interviewees also linked Christianity and conservative politics: "*Many young men support the Finns Party* [a conservative right-wing party]." (Mikael, I7g3)

However, it is important to point out that about an equal number of young men interviewed were liberal than conservative. Young men also mentioned that the fact that the church was seen as liberal was an important factor that attracted them. The data also show that the longing for permanence, traditions, and stability is not a matter that attracts only conservative young men but, to some extent, unites young men regardless of their value orientation.

9 | Faith and Theology of the Church and Rituals

Interviewees also referred to the specific theological content and ritual structure of Christianity as attractive. Altogether 20 young men reflected themes related to this category. Central elements included the concepts of grace, forgiveness, and divine love, as well as the emotional resonance of rituals, worship, music, and sacraments.

The strongest theme within this category was the theology of grace and forgiveness, coupled with the call to live responsibly for others. It was a powerful draw for young men. It contrasted with the performance-driven culture they felt outside the church.

> In church I realized God's love doesn't depend on my performance. That gave me peace. (Helmeri, I11i)

> Even though I had painful experiences, in the end I found freedom in God's grace — that I am loved as I am. (Kasper, I15i)

> One thing I particularly like about the Bible is grace… You can be forgiven if you repent. (Antero, I9i)

Young men also discussed how Christianity was seen as attractive because it offered an intellectually and morally serious framework that secular culture lacked. It provided clarity, order, and depth.

> Maybe this appeals especially to men, because there are these concepts like sin and hell. And that your actions have moral weight. (Aleksi, I4i)

Participants also appreciated that religious groups allowed room for theological questioning while still offering a coherent narrative of purpose and morality. They also valued that they were allowed to doubt, search, and still belong. Such space for questioning and seeking was seen as intellectually sustainable.

Young men also described the role of rituals such as communion, confirmation, baptism, liturgy, and shared worship. They were described as tangible, grounding, and communal—making faith embodied rather than abstract. These accounts resonate with scholarship that understands religion as embodied practice, emphasizing how religious meaning is experienced, enacted, and negotiated through bodily practices, emotions, and ritual participation rather than solely through belief or cognition (Csordas 1990; McGuire 2008).

> In communion, you meet God in a real way, not just in your thoughts. (Viljami, I8g3)

> Baptism [as an adult] was for me the turning point — something physical that changed my life. (Valdemar, I17i)

> The shared songs and prayers made me realize I wasn't alone. (Julius, I12i)

> The rituals make it communal. They give rhythm to life. (Joakim, I13i)

Young men described successful youth-oriented activities, especially confirmation preparation, volunteer training, youth evenings, and youth events. They described the importance of

music, how it strengthens and creates spiritual experiences, connects people, and helps express emotions. When reflecting on the meaning of worship, they especially pointed to the calming atmosphere of worship.

Faith was not only seen as communal but also intimate, described as an ongoing personal relationship with God. Several young men also recalled decisive turning points or experiences of God's presence that deepened or initiated their faith. Julius talked how "*depression started to lift when I experienced that God cares for me*." (I12i) Kasper on the other had described how "*in worship, I felt for the first time that my identity was part of something bigger*." (I15i)

10 | Religion as Counterforce and Counterculture

> Being Christian today is almost countercultural. It sets you apart. (Harri, I6g3)

The theme of religion as a counterforce and counterculture was mentioned by 17 interviewees (57%), making it also a strong attractor to Christianity. Participants framed Christianity as standing in contrast to dominant cultural currents, such as relativism, materialism, secularism, and individualism. For many, the appeal lay not only in the positive content of Christianity but also in its role as a resisting force against what they perceived as problematic features of modern life. Young men talked about how Christianity is in contrast to individualism and self-centeredness in the society.

Several participants argued that secular or nonreligious culture encourages people to live "only for themselves" and leaves everything relative and shaky. Christianity, by contrast, was perceived as demanding responsibility, service, and moral accountability. By doing so, faith shifts attention away from self-absorption toward shared values and responsibility.

> Christianity offers a big contrast to the idea that you live only for yourself. That's what secularism or atheism often leads to. (Samuli, I6g3)

> Atheism leaves everything relative, but Christianity offers responsibility and meaning. (Aleksi, I4i)

> In Finland, atheism or nonreligion is culturally dominant, but it feels shallow. Christianity stands out because it actually has depth. (Veikka, G6g3)

> Atheism can't really provide the same sense of community or safety. Faith brings hope when everything else is shaking. (Antero, I9i)

Several young men also referred to their nonreligious family background as a factor that has drawn them to Christianity and also as a factor that makes believing difficult:

> My parents haven't belonged to the church, and there has been something of an atheist atmosphere. (Nuutti, I2i)

> Believing still feels like a hard thing for me. I don't experience faith the same way many believers do. I come from an atheist family, so I don't have that background either. And I think a lot of young men might be in the same situation—Christianity and the Christian faith just haven't been part of their upbringing. (Veikka, I6g3)

In addition to direct criticism of atheism, interviewees voiced concerns about broader secular culture and modern unbelief. For some, the secular emphasis on individual freedom and relativism was perceived as unstable and unsatisfying. Mikael (I7g3) spoke about the emptiness of living without a higher purpose. Julius (I12i) linked nonreligious culture to anxiety and lack of meaning. Miikka (I16i) criticized achievement culture and anxiety tied to secular lifestyles. Nuutti (I2i) contrasted meaning in faith with the superficiality of a "*focus only on yourself*" culture and Mikael (I7g3) described how "*without faith, it's easy to fall into living only for your own goals — but faith keeps you grounded in something bigger*". Valdemar (I17i) pointed to feelings of emptiness in secular contexts before finding belonging.

Several participants described secular Finnish culture as "*materialistic*," "*superficial*," or "*rootless*." Christianity was thus positioned as a meaningful alternative to what was perceived as a spiritually barren landscape. Others suggested that contemporary unbelief focuses excessively on consumption and self-expression while neglecting community and deeper existential questions. Kuisma (I14i), Joonas (I1g3), and Matti (I5g4) described secular culture as lacking depth or moral grounding. In this context, Christianity, in contrast, was framed as a countercultural option offering coherence and responsibility.

Participants also described Christianity as a counterforce to moral relativism. Where secular culture was perceived as shifting, morally vague, unstable, and overly subjective, Christianity provided clarity and permanence (see more theme 3. Permanence, traditions, and stability).

Young men also saw Christianity as a way of resisting pressures of consumerism and achievement. Miikka (I16i), for example, criticized secular culture's fixation on performance and anxiety, whereas Julius (I12i) highlighted the link between nonreligious culture and mental health struggles: "*You can see anxiety already in everyday life*." Faith, for them, provided a counter-narrative that prioritized intrinsic worth and spiritual grounding over external success.

> World-weariness or anxiety, or this kind of culture of achievement, is stronger. Faith offers something else. (Miikka, I16i)

> In our society everything is about performance. In church, I can just be. (Helmeri, I11i)

For some, attraction to Christianity took the form of deliberate rebellion against secular hegemony. This was particularly evident among those who had a nonreligious background but found it unsatisfying. Christianity thus functioned as a countercultural

identity marker, setting them apart from family or peers. Viljami (I8g3) summarized: "*Atheism leaves a vacuum in values. Christianity provides something solid to build your life on*."

Even though some interviewees linked Christianity and conservative politics, participants did not frame Christianity as aligning with political or cultural extremes. Instead, they valued it for resisting both radical liberalism and radical conservatism. For many, Christianity represented a "third way" that transcended polarization, offering meaning and responsibility without the excesses of ideology.

This theme reveals how young men interpret Christianity not just as a personal or spiritual choice but as a cultural and ideological stance. Faith is attractive because it resists and challenges dominant narratives of autonomy, relativism, and consumption while offering a stable and meaningful alternative. They spoke about Christianity as a resisting force either directly against atheism, relativism, or secular culture or more broadly about Christianity as a counter to dominant values (materialism, selfishness, and cultural superficiality). For nearly half of interviewees, this countercultural dimension was somehow part of their religious identity.

11 | The Church as a Place for Self-Development

Fourteen interviewees emphasized the church as a space for self-development and personal growth. This included both psychological and social dimensions: developing self-confidence and leadership skills and gaining clarity about one's values and life direction. Faith itself was seen as something challenging and something that helps them to develop and become a better person.

> I think it's kind of nice that faith is so personal. I can work on it myself and develop. (Joakim, I13i)

> Faith helps me think about what kind of person I want to be. (Veikka, I6g3)

> Faith is part of my process of becoming a better person. (Matti I5g4)

> Through church work, I've found something to aim for in life. (Kuisma, I14i)

> I've learned to understand myself and others better through faith. (Valdemar, I17i)

Similarly, several participants highlighted the role of church-led discussions in fostering intellectual growth, including theological debate and existential reflection. Young men also often referred to confirmation time and volunteer training as something that offered them a space for self-development. These were commonly cited as transformative experiences.

> Confirmation time gave me confidence to speak in front of people, which I didn't have before. (Miikka, I16i)

> We got a lot of valuable leadership training after confirmation. (Theo, I3g2)

> Leading as a youth leader helped me come out of my shell. (Miikka, I16i)

> The team spirit and learning responsibility were really important. (Ville, I1g3)

Young men also told that church offers a space for intellectual discussion and reflection and also for doubting. Aleksi (I4i) described how he enjoys theological questions in church and Kuisma (I14i) how church is "*the only place where people of my age can discuss questions like evil, life, and purpose*." Julius (I12i) told how church is "*a safe place to doubt, ask questions and think*."

12 | Confirmation Time

Twelve participants identified confirmation time as a significant moment of awakening to religious and/or communal life. They emphasized the welcoming environment, the openness to questioning, and the quality of interpersonal connections with peers and leaders. Young men emphasized the important experience of having felt that the leaders and other people in confirmation time were genuinely present. It was a space where many of the aspects they found attractive in Christianity in general were present.

> It was like, this is a group where I can just be myself. That was the first time in a long time I felt that. (Valdemar, I17i)

> Confirmation camp was a really warm and accepting place. People genuinely cared. (Veikka, I6g3)

> The leaders were just there with us, not judging or distant, but fully present. (Julius, I12i)

> The people there really cared. You could see it in the way they listened. (Miikka, I16i)

For many, confirmation time provided the first positive exposure to faith communities and served as a gateway into further church involvement. It was both seen as a pathway to church life and a place to discover faith.

> It was through confirmation that I ended up being a youth leader and eventually getting involved in church more deeply. (Ville, I1g3)

> That camp opened the door for me. I wouldn't be involved without it. (Kuisma, I14i)

> Before confirmation, I didn't really think about faith. But during that camp, something clicked. (Julius. I12i)

> That's when I first really thought maybe God is real. (Theo, I3g2)

Young men discussed confirmation time as a place for genuine searching and the people in confirmation time being genuinely present. Possibility to ask and search was seen as important:

> I could ask all kinds of questions during confirmation time. No one pushed anything down my throat. (Theo, I3g2)

> It felt like the only place where spiritual questions were taken seriously. (Joakim, I13i)

For some, confirmation time was also a clear turning point in life: "*Confirmation time was a turning point for me in life*." (Antero, I9i)

13 | Faith in Public and Social Media

Twelve interviewees mentioned the increased role of digital media in shaping and supporting their religious identity. Young men discussed the ability to access spiritually meaningful content through the internet. Participants highlighted YouTube, podcasts, and Christian influencers as important sources of theological content and spiritual support.

> I listen to Christian podcasts and sermons on YouTube. It's an easy way to reflect and grow. (Theo, I3g2)

> There's a lot of good material online if you just know where to look. (Joakim, I13i)

Aleksi (I4i) told that he found his own religious community on YouTube: "*There I was able to find fellow believers who share the same kind of thinking*." Viljami (I8g3), on the other hand, told that his faith was activated by an American evangelist on the internet. Social media influencers and role models were mentioned in both a positive and negative light.

> There are both good and bad Christian influencers. Some show genuine faith; others seem fake. (Julius, I12i)

> Andrew Tate is popular, but I think he's dangerous for young men. I prefer Christian men who show humility. (Antero, I9i)

Young men also reflected on a cultural shift in Finland: Although attitudes toward Christian faith have been predominantly negative in past decades, they have recently become increasingly accepting. Several interviewees noted that the media now portrays young people's faith in a positive light. Nevertheless, openly expressing one's faith was still regarded as an act that requires courage. These and young people's increased openness—no need to be ashamed of being a believer—are encouraging.

> I used to hide my faith, but now I just say it. People are more accepting these days. (Theo, I3g2)

> Sometimes Christian topics are treated fairly in the media, which is encouraging. (Ville, I1g3)

> It's inspiring to see others talk openly about their faith online. That takes guts. (Simeon, I18i)

> My friend prayed in school — out loud — and I thought, wow, he really stands by what he believes. (Joakim, I13i)

Several interviewees noted the empowering effect of seeing others speak publicly about their beliefs, suggesting that online visibility of faith can normalize and encourage religious identity formation among peers. Young men also felt that the media and people in general are more accepting toward faith nowadays.

> It was surprising to see a newspaper article that portrayed a young believer in a respectful way. (Miikka, I16i)

> It's no longer shameful to be a believer. That's a change. (Joakim, I13i)

14 | Crisis of Masculinity and a Positive and Responsible Male Image

Finally, 11 young men explicitly reflected on masculinity in relation to faith. They described the crisis of masculinity and the positive male image the church and faith offer them. Their accounts suggest that Christianity becomes attractive because it provides an alternative to both toxic cultural ideals of manhood and the lack of stable models in contemporary society. The church and Christianity were seen as providing a framework of responsible masculinity, including moral integrity, service, and emotional openness, contrasting with stereotypical or toxic masculinity.

Some participants discussed the broader societal crisis in masculinity, arguing that male identity has become increasingly fragmented.

> I definitely think this phenomenon ties in with the crisis of masculinity. I feel that masculinity has narrowed rather than expanded (Aleksi, I4i)

> We hear a lot these days that masculinity is in crisis… Maybe it really is. I feel like a lot of young men don't know what being a man means anymore. (Veikka, I6g3)

> As if recklessness equals masculinity. (Aleksi, I4i)

> Young men are no longer held accountable for anything. (Antero, I9i)

These young men were critical of contemporary cultural representations of masculinity. They contrasted the "toxic" or "alpha" models of manhood with what they perceived as the absence of strong masculine ideals in secular contexts. In the context of Christianity, male voices felt to be still heard, and "*Christianity also gives value to being a man*" (Aleksi, I4i). Christianity, for them, appeared as a countercultural force (see more theme

5. Religion as a counterforce and counterculture) that offered balance, seriousness, and a sense of responsibility *"something that is no longer really appreciated in today's world."* (Aleksi, I4i). Aleksi continued: "*In secular culture, the extremes are either this Andrew Tate-type alpha male or no masculinity at all. — Christianity provides a third mode. — a model for being a decent man without having to turn into a stereotype or submit to everything imposed from outside.*"

Veikka (I6g3) was similarly critical to the ideals of masculinity in the society: "*The masculinity I see outside faith is often shallow. Faith makes you think about responsibility."* Harri (I6g3) highlighted that Christianity *"gives a stronger identity, especially as a man."*

Young men also expressed critical views toward what they referred to as feminism and extreme liberalism. When interviewees referred to these themes, they functioned as shorthand labels for broader cultural changes that the young men perceived as limiting men's social space, authority, or legitimacy. Aleksi (I4i), for example, described what he perceived as *contemporary feminism* as having *"become totally absurd."* Similarly, Valdemar (I17i) questioned whether men were *"needed anymore for anything,"* articulating a sense of marginalization in current gender discourse.

Amid strong polarization in society, the interviewed young men described Christianity as providing something steady in-between and providing a positive model of manhood rooted in responsibility, service, and moral steadiness. Rather than performance or dominance, they valued faith for shaping men into responsible and caring figures.

> I see Christianity as something steady in between extremes. It doesn't demand you pick a side like the world does. (Jukka, I1g3)

> Christianity provides a model for being a decent man without having to turn into a stereotype or submit to everything imposed from outside. (Aleksi, I4i)

> Christianity — calls you to responsibility. (Samuli, I6g3)

Young men also noted that within Christianity, there is space for multiple masculinities: "*church is a place where there is room for different ways of being a man.*" (Aleksi, I4i)

Beyond abstract ideals, interviewees also emphasized the importance of living examples of Christian men in their communities. Pastors, older male Christians, and peers in faith served as role models, showing them that masculinity could be caring, responsible, and spiritually strong.

> When I saw how men in church treated others, with respect and care, it was different from what I saw outside. That was convincing. (Viljami, I8g3)

> In the congregation I met men who took responsibility, but without arrogance. That influenced me. (Antero, I9i)

> I've seen that faith actually forms men into steady, responsible figures. That makes the community strong. (Jukka, I1g3)

> It's not only words. You see older men who live what they preach. That's a real example. (Theo; I3g2)

Young men also pointed to biblical figures like Jesus and Moses as aspirational role models of ethical masculinity.

> Jesus was an example of a perfect man. (Lasse, I8g3)

Overall, these young men were drawn to Christianity because it provided an alternative to the perceived crisis of masculinity. The attraction lay not only in abstract ideals but also in concrete positive male role models within the church who embodied responsibility, service, and faith. Christianity thus offered both a vision of manhood and a living community where that vision was practiced.

15 | Conclusion

Our analysis shows that young men are drawn to Christianity through multiple, overlapping reasons. It is not attractive to young men because of one single factor, but because it responds to different needs and longings, some of which might even seem opposing to each other. Saying that it is only about conservatism is by far simplifying the phenomenon.

In sum, the attraction of Christianity for young men appears multifaceted: It offers community and safety, stability through tradition, and hope in times of personal and global crises while also providing a countercultural identity and a responsible model of manhood. Rituals and theological depth give the faith both intellectual seriousness and embodied presence, making it more than an abstract worldview. Many of the interviewees highlighted how Christianity stands apart from secular culture by combining permanence with openness, responsibility with grace, and countercultural strength with care. Together, these findings suggest that Christianity appeals to young men not simply as a religion but as a holistic framework for identity, meaning, and growth in a fragmented and uncertain cultural landscape.

The results show that young men are partly attracted to Christianity due to factors that are common in previous studies. These include the search for meaning in times of crises and the feeling of community, safety, and acceptance they find within Christianity; and experiences related to confirmation time. A number of studies show that religious conversion or deepening of faith is often linked to crises (Rambo 1993; Paloutzian and Park 2005; Pargament 1997). Similarly, a number of studies show that the feeling of community and acceptance and confirmation time may serve as meaningful in turning to Christianity (Schweitzer et al. 2015; Niemelä 2010; Ilg et al. 2024).

In addition, our analysis identified new, more time-specific factors. These include as follows: the increased feeling of insecurity in an unstable world; the crisis of masculinity and lack in proper male ideals in a society young men see as strongly polarized; the role of the media; and the willingness to identify as a Finn and as a European and see Christianity as countercultural. Amid global instability and insecurity, for example, linked to the war in Ukraine and financial uncertainty, young men search for something stable and find that in Christianity. Christianity also provides them role models as a man that they feel they do not find elsewhere. Christianity provides them a counterbalance to toxic masculinity and weak male ideals, offering instead responsible, steady, and caring male role models. Social media and religion in the media more generally are also strengthening them by showing other men expressing faith openly and offering spiritual content that they would have not found otherwise. The role of the media can also be seen as a factor creating and strengthening the increase in faith among young men as such. When Christian young men are portrayed in the media as something positive and rising, it is possibly attracting new young men to Christianity. In the minds of young men, Christianity is no longer a majority culture but a minority, and as such, it can be seen as countercultural and attractive. Christianity differentiates them from the individualist, relativist, and rootless secular culture they experience elsewhere. Christianity also differentiates them from other religions, especially Islam, and makes them feel connected to Finnish and European culture.

The reasons for becoming interested in the Christian faith can also be discussed across different levels of analysis. At the micro level, themes, such as *personal crises and the search for meaning* (1), *church as a place for self-development* (6), and *the crisis of masculinity and a positive and responsible male image* (9), illustrate how young men engage with faith in deeply personal terms. Several interviewees reported being drawn to Christianity through personal hardships and crises that had marked their life courses. This dynamic is widely recognized in the literature, as religious conversion or spiritual transformation often follows a stage of conflict or personal difficulty (Paloutzian et al. 1999). Whether sudden or gradual, conversion may lead to a renewed sense of meaning, purpose, and direction—as was the case for many participants in this study (Paloutzian et al. 2013). In terms of masculinity, Christianity appeared to provide alternative moral values and identity models that supported their personal search for a healthier masculine identity (Connell 2005).

On the meso-level of communities and networks themes, such as *community and safety* (2), *faith and theology of the church and rituals* (4), and *confirmation time* (7), highlight the relational dimension of religious belonging. For these men, Christian faith provided a community of believers—whether physical or virtual—that offered positive experiences of support, fellowship, and belonging. Previous research has consistently shown that religious communities provide both social and spiritual support, as well as networks that enhance individual well-being (Putnam and Campbell 2010). From the perspective of social identity theory becoming engaged in a church or a Christian group offered participants not only a sense of belonging but also a valued social identity (Hannikainen 2020). These young men often positioned themselves in relation to an in-group (Christian community) that was contrasted with the out-group (secularized mainstream culture).

In relation to gender dynamics, the findings can also be interpreted through the theme of *crisis of masculinity and the search for a positive and responsible male image* (9). Religious affiliation provided not only spiritual community but also alternative ways of negotiating masculinity. Although dominant cultural narratives of masculinity often emphasize competition, independence, and aggression, participants described Christianity as offering models of responsibility, care, humility, and relationality. Beyond adopting a religious in-group identity, Christianity also allowed them to reconfigure their masculine identity in contrast to mainstream or "toxic" ideals of manhood (Connell 2005). Previous studies suggest that faith-based contexts can foster alternative masculinities that prioritize service, empathy, and community over dominance (Bartkowski 2004).

At the same time, our analysis identifies a productive tension in how masculinity is articulated. Although the young men emphasized vulnerability, humility, care, and emotional openness, these qualities were not framed as incompatible with responsibility, moral authority, or provider and protector roles. Rather, responsibility and care were understood as mutually reinforcing. This tension closely resembles what Nyhagen (2021) describes in her study of British Christian men, where values of humility, relationality, and emotional expressiveness coexist with expectations of leadership, responsibility, and moral guidance.

From the perspective of masculinity theory, these findings can be interpreted in terms of hybrid masculinity (Bridges and Pascoe 2014), in which elements associated with traditionally subordinated masculinities—such as care, emotional openness, and vulnerability—are selectively incorporated alongside more conventional masculine roles. For the young men in this study, Christianity appeared to offer a framework in which such combinations were not only permissible but normatively encouraged. Rather than rejecting responsibility or authority, they rearticulated these roles through ideals of service, care, and moral steadiness.

Finally, at the macro level that includes society and culture, themes such as *permanence, traditions, and stability (3), religion as a counterforce and counterculture (5), and the crisis of masculinity and a positive and responsible male image (9)* illustrate how Christianity was positioned against broader societal change. Beyond personal or communal motives, participants emphasized their perception that modern society fails to provide sufficient moral frameworks or sustainable models for healthy life and relationships. This perceived moral gap was identified as a key reason for their turn to Christianity, which was strongly perceived as a source of moral values and positive male roles. Thus, Christianity was framed both as a stabilizing anchor in a rapidly shifting cultural landscape and as a countercultural stance in relation to secular norms (Smith 2000). This interpretation resonates with broader trends among young people in Finland. According to the Youth Barometer 2025, young people's optimism about the future of the world has declined markedly: whereas 28% expressed pessimism about the future when the question was

last asked in 2021, the share had risen to approximately 50% in the most recent survey in 2025 (Happonen & Laine 2026). Such findings suggest that the search for stability and moral orientation described by the interviewees also reflect wider generational concerns about social and global uncertainty.

The findings raise important questions for further reflection and research. First, what are the multiple connections between masculinity and faith: To what extent is Christianity attractive specifically as a masculine identity project, and how does this differ from how women approach faith? Do churches risk reinforcing gender binaries, or do they offer a genuinely alternative, healthier model of manhood?

Young men are drawn to Christianity as a countercultural stance. How sustainable is this attraction when Christianity itself still carries cultural power in many contexts?

Openness about faith in social media and everyday life was seen as strengthening factor for young men and their faith. These channels can also be risky due to their uncontrolled nature. Anybody can stand out as an authority on social media. It would be important to study how these public expressions of Christianity will shape young men's religious identity in a secularizing environment.

In this article, we have analyzed young men's reasons for being drawn to Christianity using template analysis. This approach identified a range of factors that make Christianity attractive for young men, but it does not capture how these factors are interconnected or how young men differ in the configurations of reasons underlying their attraction to Christianity. The findings therefore point to the need for further research exploring typologies among young men.

In addition, this article has not employed concepts of masculinity as analytical categories or typologies. Rather, masculinity-related themes are examined as they emerge in young men's own accounts. The findings call for further research that more explicitly analyses different configurations of masculinity in young men's talk about Christianity.

Finally, it is important to note that the findings are based on a qualitative sample of 30 Finnish young men and are not intended to be statistically generalizable. Rather, the findings are specific to this sample and context, while offering analytical insights that may be transferable to similar sociocultural settings. Future research in other national and cultural contexts is needed to further assess the broader relevance of these findings.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The authors have nothing to report.

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