

## A community of emotions: pastoral care meetings in Conservative Laestadianism

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### Introduction

This article studies Conservative Laestadianism, a conservative Lutheran revival movement group which emerged in the nineteenth century, inspired by German pietism. Located mainly in Finland, the movement is the largest revival movement in Scandinavia and has some 100,000-120,000 adherents worldwide, with members in 17 countries, including the United States and some African states (Talonen 2000, 72, 75; Talonen 2001, 11–24; Vuollo 1999, 134–138). The movement has an exclusivist understanding of the congregation, claiming to be the only true Christians, the *Kingdom of God* on earth (see e.g. Huotari 1981, 120; Vuollo 1999, 212). Even though its actions and religious doctrines reflect a sectarian or cultic dogmatism, the group is not a sect or cult, but belongs to the Finnish Lutheran Church. In addition to their influence in the religious sphere, Conservative Laestadians have a strong social, political, and economic position in Finnish society (Nykänen 2012).

The religious and social life of the movement is centered in almost 200 local congregations, coordinated by *the Central Committee of Conservative Laestadian Congregations* (the SRK). Conservative Laestadians form a strongly normative community, maintaining strict guidelines for religious issues and for daily life as well (see Linjakumpu 2012). This normative focus and an elitist self-understanding of religious communality has caused much dispersion within the movement and various external struggles in Finnish society at large. In addition, in recent years, there has been a great deal of discussion about child abuse among the Laestadian community (see e.g. Hurtig & Leppänen 2012).

The focus of this article is what are known as *pastoral care meetings*. The meetings were internal examinations of members' belief with the intention of correcting spiritual errors and missteps of the members of the community and guiding them in the right direction. One important implicit purpose of the meetings was also to maintain the unanimous nature of the community, which could be defined as one of the main objectives of the movement. The meetings can be described as public

and coercive measures of pastoral care. They were not ordinary instances of pastoral care; rather, they involved public confessions of sins in which the community intervened in the religious and social autonomy of individuals and in which people's lives, social relationships and possibilities for an afterlife were determined for them by the congregation.

The meetings strongly disturbed and interfered with the personal religious lives of those subjected to them, since the practice of pastoral care as a form of public confession was exceptionally intimidating and traumatizing. The gatherings also introduced and emphasized arbitrary religious norms and practices. Norms are an integral part of any religious or social group, but in the 1960s and 1970s Conservative Laestadianism unexpectedly adopted new norms and doctrines that radically obscured the traditional social structures of the movement. In many cases, the weakest members of the community – the oldest, youngest or somehow vulnerable ones – experienced the meetings as being particularly intense and brutal, which caused them long-term social consequences. The meetings have widely been interpreted as a form of spiritual violence, even by the movement itself (see *Kotimaa24*, 10<sup>th</sup> of October 2011).

This article analyzes the emotional responses to the pastoral care meetings. In this context, the emotional perspective is highly relevant, since emotional responses provide insights into the consequences of the meetings, that is, how they affected the lives of the people involved in them. Emotions are also a frame for interpreting political and power-related dimensions of the meetings. Three different emotional perspectives are examined: fear and the anguish; uncertainty and inadequacy; and hatred and bitterness. Empirically, the article draws on interviews of and material collected from people who have personally experienced pastoral care meetings or who have been somehow intimately affected by them.

### **Pastoral care meetings**

According to Conservative Laestadians, pastoral care meetings were based on what is known among the Laestadians as the *Church Code of Christ* (Matthew 18:15–20):

“If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector. ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.’” (Matt. 18: 15–18).

These verses from the Gospel according to Matthew recommend that if someone has committed a sin, he or she has to be privately reprimanded. If the offender does not show contrition, the reproach can be arranged in another encounter with one or two other people. If that is not successful either, pastoral care must continue in a congregation, among the community of believers. In the 1970s, the most intensive phase of pastoral care meetings, this multi-stage approach was used in some cases, but in many instances members of congregations were dealt with publicly without any intermediate steps or even without their needing pastoral care (Linjakumpu 2012, 76–77). It is these public and involuntary meetings which I examine in this article; voluntary pastoral conversations are not considered.

In the 1970s, public pastoral care meetings were organized by local congregations, in many cases with the help of the Central Committee. The meetings were held in local premises as well as in the homes of “healers”, “healed”, or other members of the congregation. The smallest meetings gathered less than ten persons, but in large congregations several hundred people might attend the meetings, in which very private issues of the members were publicly discussed by leaders of the movement. (Linjakumpu 2012, 77–80.) In these meetings, the lives and spiritual correctness of the people were assessed in relation to the rules and practices of the Conservative Laestadian movement.

The assessment of people’s personal lives and the accusations against them in the meetings were mainly based on two interconnected principles: what matters were deemed to be prohibited and what was known as the “doctrine of spirit”. Conservative Laestadianism often stresses that there is no list or index of sins or of the things that may not be done (see e.g. Kurvinen 1980, 86). While it

is true that no actual written list of acts classified as sins exists, it is clear that the movement has given its members to understand that certain things are not “fitting” for Christians. This category of actions has changed somewhat over the years. In the 1970s, the focal issues included television, contraception, consumption of alcohol, various forms of art and entertainment, and voting for “wrong” political parties (Kurvinen 1980, 43–44, 86; Ruokanen 1980; Linjakumpu 2012, 90–98).

Different wrong deeds, that is, matters related to a person’s lifestyle, were only some of the issues that were resolved in the pastoral care meetings. Wrong deeds were defined in terms of the “doctrine of spirit”, which referred to false spirits which were seen as affecting human life and actions in a negative way. One could not see the spirits, but according to the movement the “fruits express the wrong spirit” (Kopperoinen 1979, 4); that is, it was believed that a false spirit became concretized in the form of wrong deeds. It was understood that under the influence of false spirits, certain people would act sinfully and act against the community of believers. Thus, the doctrine of spirit emphasized specifically the individual's relationship to the community, not so much the individual's personal relationship with God.

The pastoral care meetings shaped the lives of people in a very concrete way. The meetings usually ended with some kind of conclusion regarding the person’s fate as well as his or her position in the congregation. There were primarily three types of outcomes: repentance and forgiveness; being “bound with one’s sins”; and expulsion (Linjakumpu 2012, 83–89). Repentance and the subsequent forgiveness of the “healers” and the congregation meant the normalization of the situation of a believer, even though sometimes the case was re-opened, and already resolved matters were re-evaluated. If the “healers” were not satisfied with the repentance, if it was considered implausible, or if the person did not ask for forgiveness, the person was “bound” with his or her sins. This meant that one’s sins were not forgiven, but remained on one’s conscience. The bound person was isolated from the congregation and the community of believers. Being bound lasted until the person apologized or the “healers” approved his or her repentance and apology. The most serious consequence of the pastoral care meetings was expulsion from the congregation and the entire community of believers. This could occur after being bound or directly, without being bound. Voluntary resignations also took place, with a large number of people leaving the movement at the time due to unfair or harsh treatment.

Conservative Laestadianism made use of pastoral care meetings already before the 1970s. They were held back in the late nineteenth century, but took on heightened importance for many internal and external reasons after the 1960s, with the most intensive period being the years 1978–1979. The social consequences of these meetings have been far-reaching, among not only the Conservative Laestadians but also non-Laestadian communities. Meetings with public confessions were very distressing and painful experiences, which expulsions and social isolation from the community. The meetings have had severe consequences, such as suicides, mental illnesses, individual and collective traumas, and the disintegration of families. The traumas have yet to be resolved, as many people are still suffering from the meetings even today, more than 30 years after the most intensive phase of the practice. (Linjakumpu 2012, 147–155)

### **Politics of emotions: pastoral care meetings and the exercise of power**

The political and power-related dimensions of pastoral care meetings could be analyzed in many different ways. In this article, humanly experienced emotions provide interpretative tools for examining the meetings. Emotions can be used to assess the character and intensity of the exercise of power in the meetings, that is, how in particular the objects – or victims – of the meetings experienced the events and what effects the meetings have had on them, their families and other people close to them. This is relevant also in relation to the Laestadian community as a whole: while the examination of emotional reactions focuses on individual experiences, it should, at the same time, be emphasized how individually experienced emotions are also related to the continuation of the community. It is essential to consider what kind of power was used at the meetings and what possibilities for counter power can be found (see Foucault 1984, 95–96).

Emotional experiences are not bound to a certain historical situation; many emotions are preserved over years and even decades. However, emotions do not need to be active all the time and control the life of an individual; rather, they can remain latent, even for a long time. (See Solomon 2007, 6) Through emotions, the past, present and future become connected to one single experience, with emotions linking different times and generations. (See Ahmed 2004, 202; Solomon 2007, 6)

Therefore, the emotions which were experienced during pastoral care meetings not only belong to that particular situation but have persisted, shaping the future of the people affected.

Emotions are not connected merely to the individuals. In order to understand the socio-political dimension of emotions, they should not be regarded merely as individual and somehow “internal” phenomena (see Burkitt 2005, 679). People's experiences and emotions connect them as individuals to the external experience-world and communities. Emotions are relative, requiring other people for their realization; they are created in the relations between people and at the same time they influence these relations. Our lives are shaped by emotions; emotions are not merely reactions to external stimuli. (See Ahmed 2004, 8–10; Solomon 2007, 3, 10, 22; Barbalet 2002, 4) Emotions are not passive reactions, but emerge as a part of the relationship between an individual and a physical, social, and cultural context; in other words, they are present in social relations.

In studying the political dimensions of emotions in the context of pastoral care meetings, it is not a priority to think what the emotional experiences *really* meant for the person in question (c.f. Solomon 2007, 179). Rather, the intention is to discern through his or her emotions the relevant social relations and mechanisms of power (see Boler 1999, 22). Through lived and experienced emotions history remains alive: even though certain difficult matters are not remembered constantly, they can move forward temporally through the emotions (Ahmed 2004, 202; Solomon 2007, 6). Consequently, the pastoral care meetings “still exist”; they have not disappeared from the minds of the people affected by them. The empirical examination of emotions gives the opportunity to understand the significance of the phenomenon, not only at the focal time but after it as well.

### **Material**

This study uses a variety of materials. The main body of material consists of stories collected from individuals who participated in pastoral care meetings or from persons whose relatives or close friends were subjected to meetings. This material comprises letters from 21 persons and emails from 32 persons. Many of those using email sent several messages related to the issue. The shortest stories were less than half a page, the longest more than ten pages of typewritten text. In addition, nine interviews were conducted. The average length of the interviews was around two hours. Most

of the informants have left the movement, but several are still members of the Laestadian community or live “on the edge” of the movement.

The emotional experiences of pastoral care meetings differ from person to person. A couple of informants found the meetings to be positive experiences and consider them valuable for their personal religious life or to the future prospects of their congregation. However, the vast majority of the material reflects negative experiences and it is these that are the focus of this article. The suffering of an individual person does not disappear even if others have had positive reactions to same event: The interpretation of the political and power-related dimensions of the pastoral care meetings – and, accordingly, those of the whole religious community – requires focusing on the experiences that still cause traumatic emotions among members and ex-members of the Laestadian community.

### **Fear and anguish**

The pastoral care meetings were emotionally charged situations. The principal emotion in the experiences which are manifested in them was fear. It was present in the meetings themselves but, at the same time, also before and after people were subjected to the meetings. In addition, the threat of pastoral care meetings and their consequences caused fear. The feeling of fear experienced at the pastoral care meetings could be very concrete:

“When I was at the meetings, I felt that I was suffocating. My vision got blurry and my heart pounded; I was frightened, thinking when they would come and take me there. It was really horrible and my hatred still rises to the maximum when I recall the experience.” (Letter 8)

Fear can be distorted or exaggerated but at the same time it is “genuine”; an experience cannot be distorted to the one who has gone through it (Solomon 2007, 30–31; Altheide 2006, 423–424). The fear related to the pastoral care meetings themselves was obvious: the meetings were humiliating and oppressive. At their largest, they involved an assembly of several hundred people where one had to open up possibly about very personal and delicate matters or sinful matters of which one

was not even conscious. On the other hand, even the smaller meetings may have been oppressive: intense pressure, sometimes lasting even for hours, was mentally difficult even if there were only a few people present. In any case, being publicly reproached has been a very devastating experience to the people in question:

“At the pastoral care meetings you felt like a small, helpless and humiliated human being. It would have been one thing if there had only been just a few people there - but mostly it was the leadership of the movement interrogating the accused in front of tens, even hundreds, of people. You did not know always how to choose your words right when the fear and the trembling cut you to the quick. I found the meetings to be extremely oppressive. You were mentally undressed and humiliated; due to the pressure which came from the leaders of the movement I lost a lot of sleep.” (Letter 5)

The emotion closest to fear is anguish. It resembles fear but has no clearly defined target. Common to the two is the prospect of danger or of possible injury. The threat can be a specific one or something more vague. (Svendsen 2008, 35) Fear is directed to a certain matter, situation or people, whereas anguish and distress are less clear and focused (Solomon 2007, 32). Indeed, at pastoral care meetings, fear was directed more distinctly towards concrete actions, whereas anguish was more comprehensive. Fear is directed to a certain matter, situation or people, whereas anguish and distress are less clear and focused (Solomon 2007, 32; Solomon 1993, 231). Anguish might cause a person to be apologetic and suspicious towards the community and, at the same time, make him or her try to hide and look for a feeling of security. In terms of power and governance, anguish is very effective, since an anguished person is not able to function, or at least not able to put up active resistance.

Fear is not connected merely to one's own self; one can also experience fear on behalf of others (c.f. Solomon 1993, 196). While many Conservative Laestadians had to participate in the pastoral care meetings in the 1970s, the effects of the fear engendered by the meetings spread to a much larger number of people, especially family members and relatives. In particular, one sees children's fear for their parents, as in one informant's description: "I was horrified and prayed in the sauna on my knees that my parents would know enough to atone for their sins and would not end up in



Hell' (email 3<sup>rd</sup> of June 2010). A threat directed towards parents is also a threat to their children. As a consequence of the pastoral care meetings, there was a large group of people caught in a climate of fear, including those who were not direct targets of the meetings. Even though the meetings were difficult and anguishing situations for the adults, the children had even fewer opportunities to process the issues involved. The fear and anguish they experienced may have followed them in their minds for decades, until the present:

“... it still feels bad, like I was stabbed in the chest with a knife. One never gets rid of those emotions even though it is said that the time heals all wounds...it has not happened in my case.” (Email 26<sup>th</sup> of December 2010.)

The fear related to the pastoral care meetings was not merely individually experienced fear (such as that seen in the case of crime or domestic violence), nor was it generally experienced fear (such as that seen in the case of terrorism or war, which connects nations). It was a fear materializing inside the specific community: individual people experienced the fear but its context was collective. (Cf. Robin 2004, 96)

How does fear affect people's action and what kind of exercise of power is connected to it? How are people governed by fear? Whom does fear affect most and who is beyond its reach? Firstly, fear paralyzes a human being and diminishes his or her capacity for social action and for being an active participant in social relations. Moreover, fear prevents communication between people inside and outside a community. Due to these factors, resistance, or counterpower, is difficult. A fearful person is not able to question existing norms or practices but rather turns inward and starts censoring his or her own behavior and actions. Because of fear, people voluntarily give up their rights, habits and activities (Burt 2005, 35). These factors were clearly present in the pastoral care meetings: fear rendered people incapable of acting in a normal way in their own social life; their behavior became more cautious or they even became paralyzed.

The arbitrariness related to the pastoral care meetings affected the emergence of the fear they caused. One could not know beforehand who would end up at a meeting, for what reason or what the consequences would be. The members of congregations did not dare to question matters related

to the meetings or to present any proactive demands, because the outcomes were feared irrespective of whether one had committed any wrong deeds or not. In this context, the question of personal rights was also important: experiences of fear and anguish have been strong among those who have a negative or weakening conception of their rights and possibilities to affect their rights (see Burt 2005, 50). While there are cases of even strong persons becoming afraid and distressed, the impact of the meetings has proven to be more severe among those could not determine what their rights were in the difficult situation. There was no social or judicial guidance available that could have supported those being accused in the meetings. An individual was at the mercy of the “healers’ and leaders of his or her own congregation or the whole Conservative Laestadian movement.

People’s freedom and action were restricted in the pastoral care meetings. They did not have concrete or emotional possibilities to express themselves freely, let alone a possibility to rise up in resistance (cf. Burt 2005 37, 40). According to Lars Svendsen (2008, 31), a person who is afraid tries to escape or to avoid the things viewed as threatening his or her life, health or interests. The targets of the meetings did not have much in the way of methods for exerting counter power. Diverging from the community was one of the few possibilities for dealing with a difficult situation in practice. Evading the pastoral care meetings or withdrawing from other communal activities was not possible since, as long as a person belonged to the community, he or she was kept tightly bound to its activities, including the meetings. Some kind of mental withdrawal from, or “building of a wall” inside, the community was probably one way to deal with the fear and anguish associated with the meetings (interview 6).

Fear and anguish affect the existence of not only individuals but also communities. Fear severs the ties of mutual confidence and solidarity between people. At the same time, the communal feeling of security weakens. Even if there is ostensible unity among the Conservative Laestadians, the unity of the community at the time of the pastoral care meetings was mostly built on fear. The mutual suspicion between people and fear of possible false denunciations generated a very reserved attitude towards other members of the community. In the meetings, people were not able to rely on help from others, because helping or defending the victim would brought similar treatment on oneself (cf. Burt 2005, 34). In this kind of a situation, it is easier to endorse the accusations presented than to start to defend the accused.

Governance based on fear does not require concrete, actual violence or even a threat of violence; rather, the mere prospect of losing something can produce fear. Robin (2004, 100–101) refers to McCarthyism, which prevailed in the United States in the 1950s and in which the prospect of losing a job or career caused fear more so than an actual threat directed to a person. Similarly, in the case of pastoral care meetings, one cannot talk about concrete violence but about psychological pressure. According to Kapust, emphasizing fear which comes from the outside can foster unity and “moral energy” inside a community, but fear of powerful individuals from inside the community can bring disunity and a moral weakness (Kapust 2008, 373). Both processes were at work in the pastoral care meetings: On the one hand, the external threat brought some sense to the meetings; on the other, the internal fear eroded the confidence members had in the community.

### **Uncertainty and inadequacy**

The emotions close to fear are feelings of uncertainty and inadequacy. In regard to the pastoral care meetings, uncertainty arose from the fact that a person could not be sure about his or her position inside the Laestadian community. A risk of being subjected to the meetings existed and one could not really do anything to reduce that risk. The uncertainty experienced was first and foremost connected to the questions *whether* and *when* one would be subjected to a meeting. Another source of uncertainty was *why* one would become the object of a meeting, that is, what the grounds were for arranging a meeting for a particular person. The feeling of uncertainty was not connected merely to a certain moment; it could become a very pervasive experience in one’s life:

“As a result of these meetings which have taken place at our home and in our congregation. [...] I had somehow become a very shy child. Everything began to seem more or less like a sin or there was a feeling that if I dared to do this or that, I would be reprimanded for it soon. I had a feeling that I couldn’t possibly be a believer who is good enough. In order to fit into the group of believers, I should have been something other than I was; I was not suitable as I was.” (Email 19<sup>th</sup> of August 2011.)

Uncertainty is connected to a *threat*, a fear that it is impossible to anticipate the future as something unexpected can always happen. According to Dale Brashers (2001, 478), uncertainty will be manifested “when the details of situations are ambiguous, complex, unpredictable, or probabilistic; when information is unavailable or inconsistent; and when people feel insecure in their own state of knowledge or the state of knowledge in general.” The pastoral care meetings caused considerable bewilderment among members of the Conservative Laestadian movement, because the foundations of their belief were at stake and it was not possible to understand and adapt to the shifting doctrinal emphases. The emergence of uncertainty was a result of unpredictable and complex situations which the members of the congregation could not sufficiently understand.

A feeling of *inadequacy* is often connected to a feeling of uncertainty. Uncertainty reflects a feeling about what should be done or what would be the correct way of doing things. Inadequacy refers to an inability to respond to the requirements for being a proper believer in the community. The demands and expectations presented in the course of the pastoral care meetings were typically excessive. If one was not able to meet them, it quickly prompted an evaluation of one’s spiritual situation.

Inadequacy was connected not merely to abstract matters of faith but also, and more concretely, to the use of time, that is, what activities one was involved in, with whom and in what setting. The religious community was present in all the situations and events of its members; one could not withdraw from it. The abundant demands and feelings of inadequacy drove people to prove their religiousness. During the pastoral care meetings, the constantly changing doctrinal situation and the varying interpretation of religious and profane matters resulted a constant need to verify the belief and orthodoxy of the ordinary believers. “Ordinary’ or conventional believing was not sufficient; rather, one had to be a better believer, more present in the community and its activities. This all also caused feelings of inadequacy in regard to ordinary everyday matters.

Uncertainty and inadequacy accompanied by substantial social pressure affect how a person experiences the extent to which he or she controls his or her own life. The material shows how people’s control over their lives and understanding of themselves were broken over the course of the meetings, the control being outsourced to the community in a way; others were allowed to

define what was sufficient and what was correct. Individuals had serious difficulties in influencing the matters relating to or the status of their lives: they did not own a private or religious life. During the pastoral care meetings, the objectives and expectations related to belief and religious life were set very high. The exercise of power was based on the fact that the objectives could not be achieved or that a person's performance could at least always be interpreted as insufficient. At the meetings, correct believing was justified in terms of vague scholarly premises, and many new religious practices and doctrines came into use. The members of the Laestadian community were not able to anticipate the impetus for pastoral care meetings since almost any event or action could be interpreted as a sign of sin.

As regards the exercise of power, the emotion of uncertainty is different from that of fear: the exercise of power is more subtle. Uncertainty and a "desire for certainty" prompts a person to act in the prescribed way, and the exercise of power by authoritative members of the community seems natural. The control related to fear is more straightforward. In regard to uncertainty, power was used in defining whether a person was in the right belief or not and whether he or she could belong to the congregation of God or not. The correct way of believing could always be invalidated or questioned, and a person kept in uncertainty. Thus, the pastoral care meetings meant a continuous conditioning of the belief of the members of the community. Not only did this involve questioning a person's current situation, but his or her earlier life as a believer could be questioned at any time as well:

"When my parents came home, they said: "We have not believed in a right way until now". I was embarrassed because we had always been like all the other believers. Both my parents had been Conservative Laestadians from birth." (Email 4<sup>th</sup> of June 2010)

"Yesterday's belief" was not sufficient (Kopperoinen 1979, 8); one had to constantly renew one's belief, particularly in front of the congregation. Having a personal relation to God was an inadequate guarantee of belief, since one's belief was evaluated and defined by one's fellow believers and the leading members of the Laestadian congregation. This kind of belief did not create safety and security; if anything, it created insecurity. In a community based on uncertainty, members of the community do not trust each other or the community as a whole. When one's own

spiritual or social status in a religious community is unclear, it is difficult to assess the dominating practices and people in a critical way.

### **Hatred and bitterness**

People have had few means to confront and deal with the negative emotions related to the pastoral care meetings. As a rule, people directed the negative emotions – including shame and guilt – towards themselves and to their mistakes, regardless of whether these were real or not. One possible reaction to the exercise and abuse of power has been the feelings of hatred and anger. Hatred is often understood as an irrational or somehow negative feeling (see Solomon 2007, 13), but it has to be seen in broader terms. It can be seen as a defensive reaction in a situation where different approaches produce no result or are not possible. Hatred is a reaction through which one can try to confront the causes of the emotion. The emergence of hatred associated with the meetings can be connected with how family members or friends were treated:

“This tirade of my parents has left hatred, bitterness and contempt in me towards this Laestadianism. How can Christians do such things to their fellow human beings? I hope that with this writing my hatred would become smaller.” (Letter 13)

In the case of the meetings, hatred, or anger, is connected to feelings of mistreatment, that is, how the accusations presented at the meetings were felt to be unjustified. Typically – but not always – “the anger is directed another person, most often for a specific offence or, perhaps, a sequence of offences” (Solomon 2007, 18). A false accusation, which does not even need to be fully articulated, can cause feelings of anger (Solomon 2007, 19):

“I have felt hatred and bitterness for my children’s sake. How rudely and roughly even Laestadian relatives treated our still small, innocent children.” (Letter 5)

As in the case of other emotions, hatred and anger ‘move’ through time. According to Solomon (2007, 16) “anger is a cognitively and value-rich phenomenon, not just a momentary state or event, but a complex process that proceeds through time and can last a very long time”. The hatred

engendered in the case of the pastoral care meetings has not necessarily figured in the thoughts of individuals all the time but it can arise again in some stage of their lives. The meetings can live in the people's minds even if they do not consciously recall them:

“I forgot my experience for decades until when I was about a 30, I once woke up in a cold sweat in the morning and repeated the name of a civil servant who was at the meeting. I felt enormous hatred towards him, and I still do. Several times I have thought of calling him and really dressing him down.” (Email 3<sup>rd</sup> of June 2010)

Hatred is normally directed to another person. According to Ahmed, hatred is connected to the negotiation of boundaries between oneself and others in a situation where others threaten one's existence (Ahmed 2004, 51). Any “negotiation” related to the pastoral care meetings has been one-sided: the objects of hatred are the organizers of the meetings, as well as leaders of the local congregations and the whole movement, but the subjects and objects of the hatred have not necessarily ever met concretely:

“So, 35 years have passed and the last members of the board of directors of the movement are already very old and some of them are dead. With those persons who you can sometimes see on the street, horrible emotions always surface – on the one hand, infinite hatred, on the other, pity.” (Email 26<sup>th</sup> of December 2010)

Hatred is a moral feeling which gives a direction to action and resistance. It is not created in a state of weakness and strong humiliation (see Solomon 1993, 265–267), but when one has power or a feeling of power to at least some extent; weak persons cannot hate. Anger is an emotion that could be seen as a result of “an appraisal of some deliberate, negligent, or at least avoidable, slight or wrongdoing” (Power & Dalglish 2008, 261). According to Solomon, after being hurt, offended or humiliated, one can reposition oneself as superior or righteous (Solomon 2007, 24, 27).

Hatred indeed gives the opportunity to rise above a situation, an offence or insult, and to experience at least some kind of moral control over the situation – even if weak or insignificant in terms of the whole. With the help of the emotion of hatred – as well as feelings of anger, repulsion, and

bitterness – people can try to distance themselves from the pastoral care meetings, the people who were active in them or the movement as a whole. These are emotions which in spite of their negativity open up an opportunity to cope with situations without looking for guilt in oneself or one's own actions. They are an indication of an attempt to get rid of the subordination and to create an alternative understanding of the situations.

How are people governed by hatred? What kind of exercise of power is connected to this emotion? Even though hatred is an emotion that is directed outwards and challenges existing power relations, it nevertheless maintains the relation between hater and hated. Therefore, subjects of hatred are still users of power in relation to the hater himself. The opposite of hatred is unresponsiveness, because then no power relation exists. In this way, Conservative Laestadianism maintains a relation even to those who have left the movement for one reason or another. However, it is difficult to develop indifference if one has experienced the matters related to the pastoral care meetings as distressing in some way. Even though the hatred engendered by the meetings gives the opportunity to react, at the same time it is an indication of the continued influence of power.

If the hatred caused by the meeting is not taken seriously and is viewed as a psychological disturbance or merely as rude conduct, its effect is not significant as a source of social change. In regard to the pastoral care meetings, people's opportunities to vent their anger or hatred have been restricted. No public, collective discussion inside the Laestadian community has been possible, and therefore the resolution of negative emotions has taken place primarily through the Internet or private communication between the people involved. The outbursts of hatred have not had a sensible opponent. The position of the leaders of the movement has been central: they have not taken a role as objects of the emotions of hatred and therefore it has not been possible for victims to deal with their negative experiences related to the pastoral care meetings.

### **Concluding remarks**

The mental, personal and communal consequences of the Laestadian pastoral care meetings have been significant in Finnish society, which, especially after World War II, experienced rather stable and peaceful social development. In this context, the meetings in the 1970s represent a remarkable



exception: as many as tens of thousands of people were impacted by these meetings directly or indirectly. The meetings were thus a social and political issue, not only a religious one: the use of religiously articulated power in those meetings shaped the mutual relations between members of the community and between the community and society at large.

In broader scope, the way in which people were mistreated in the pastoral care meetings is not unknown in other Christian churches, especially in certain congregations among new religious movements in the United States (see e.g. Dawson 2003; Lewis 2011; Arterburn & Felton 2011; Lambert 2003). The Conservative Laestadian revival movement resembles in many ways new religious movements or some cult-like organizations in terms of adaptation of religious doctrines, form of community, and hierarchical structure of leadership.

Research on emotional responses shows how deeply the pastoral care meetings have influenced people's religious, social and everyday lives. For example, shunning by and expulsions from the community have deeply infringed and nullified people's right to a personal spiritual life. The meetings were a serious kind of humiliation intended to keep the community coherent. They represented a form of mental, collective and spiritual violence which has had a profound influence on the lives of a fairly large number of people.

Spiritual violence has for a long time been an invisible phenomenon in Finnish society, but, among other religion-related controversies, the aftermath and reconciliation of the pastoral care meetings (and child abuse) in the Conservative Laestadian movement have opened up discussions about the limits of religious groups: What can be done within religious communities and what are the possibilities of the state to interfere in their actions? Spiritual violence as a form of "hidden" violence represents a serious challenge for a state and systems of law enforcement, as it is very difficult to control and regulate.

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