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## **Jouko Talonen**

### ***Three Prime Ministers of Finland with Laestadian background, 1919–2019***

#### **Abstract**

Laestadianism has long been an influential factor in Finnish society, especially in northern Finland. Since 1907, several Laestadians have been members of Parliament, and after 1925 some were government ministers. There have been three Prime Ministers of Finland with a Laestadian background. Kaarlo Castrén (1860–1938), who was Prime Minister in 1919, was a lawyer and a well-known progressive politician. Martti Miettunen (1907–2002) was one of the most famous Laestadian politicians in the Agrarian Party (since 1965, the Centre Party) in Finland. He was Prime Minister of Finland in 1961–1962 and in 1975–1977. Juha Sipilä (born in 1961) served as Prime minister of Finland from 2015 to 2019. He has his spiritual roots in the small Laestadian Rauhan Sana movement. He represented the political Centre.

#### **Introduction**

Laestadianism is the largest revival movement in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF). According to *Seppo Lohi*, 2.5 percent of the whole population of Finland were Laestadians in 1899.<sup>1</sup> In Lapland and northern Ostrobothnia, approximately 20–40 percent of the region's population were Laestadians in 1902.<sup>2</sup> Although the divisions that have occurred at various times have fragmented the Laestadian movement into many factions, the movement continues to have a remarkable religious and social impact, especially in northern Finland. Today, there are about 120,000 Laestadians in Finland. Because the Laestadian movement is one of the largest demographic groups in Finland, it also has an impact on people that are not a part of the religious caucus.<sup>3</sup>

Since 1907, several Laestadians have been Members of Parliament, and after 1925, some have been even government ministers.<sup>4</sup> This article deals with three Prime Ministers of Finland with a Laestadian background between 1919 and 2019. The article is based on archival and printed sources as well as my own observations starting in the 1970s. It will offer representative glimpses into Laestadian influence in Finnish politics starting with 1917. I will employ the historical method and include church history as well as political history in my article. My purpose is to describe these politicians as individuals with their religious and socio-political connections. The presentation is more or less biographical. I describe these Finnish politicians in terms of their Laestadian background and ask whether we can find Laestadian religious particularities in their public political role.

I want to emphasize that I am not studying the faith of the designated politicians; church-historical methods are not valid for that. My point of view is to study the Laestadian background of the politicians and, in particular, the movement's religious and societal impact. Scholars can end up

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<sup>1</sup> *Lohi* 1997.

<sup>2</sup> *Talonen* 1988, 40–41.

<sup>3</sup> *Talonen* 2019b.

<sup>4</sup> *Talonen* 1988; 2019.

reaching different conclusions on how solid a connection someone has or has had with Laestadianism. I have formed my own views based on my experience from long-term academic research on Laestadianism. During his/her lifespan one person can have different kinds of relationships with Laestadianism; at one point he/she can have a closer relationship with the movement and at another point he/she might have a more distant connection yet still maintain his/her Laestadian-based ethos. The reader should give due weight to the term *Laestadian background*.

Generally, Laestadians have not been extremists or radicals in their political behaviour. Laestadians promoted loyalty toward the authorities of their land and rejected the Social Democrats because they saw it as an “atheist” movement, contrary to the church. During the Finnish Civil War in 1918, Laestadians took up sides with the White Army, even though some individuals favoured the Reds. Since 1919, the majority of Laestadians have supported the political centre (Agrarian Union, later Centre Party, Centre). The Conservatives have also continuously had some support among Laestadians, as have some other smaller bourgeois parties. The support of the political left has remained limited.

As I said, the Agrarian Union has been a popular political party among Conservative Laestadians since 1919. There are several reasons for this political stance. This party supported the Freedom of Religion Act of 1922. It has been active in supporting agriculture and the activities of people living in the countryside as well as the economy and private enterprise. Laestadians have also been satisfied with the regional politics of the centre due to its many special activities in favour of northern Finland.

Laestadianism has its own religious features as a People’s movement, and many Laestadians have not been satisfied with the ELCF dogmatically. Generally speaking, Laestadians have been loyal to the church. The typical Old Laestadian way of thinking has been the two protective shells around so-called “living Christianity” (Laestadians). These shells are the authority of the state and the Lutheran Church.<sup>5</sup>

During the years from 1917 to 2019, there have been 31 parliamentary elections in Finland. In every election, at least two Laestadians have been elected to Parliament. The highest number of the selected Laestadians during 1917–2019, was eight members. A great majority of these elected Members of Parliament were Conservative Laestadians. Altogether, there have been 47 different Laestadian politicians as Members of Parliament between 1917 and 2019. About 81% of these members belong to the Conservative Laestadians, and 9% to the Rauhan Sana group. Of these 47 Members of Parliament, 66% represented the Agrarian Union / Centre Party / Centre, and 23% Conservatives. Only two (4%) of these elected members belonged to the political Left. That means that 96% represented a bourgeois party.<sup>6</sup>

At least eleven Finnish politicians with strong Laestadian background have had influence in the Council of State during the period from 1919 to 2019. K.A. Lohi (1872–1948) – a farmer and a lay-preacher from Ranua who was a Member of Parliament from 1909 to 1945 – also served as a

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<sup>5</sup> Talonen 1988; 2019a; Nykänen 2012.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.eduskunta.fi/FI/tiedotteet/Sivut/Eduskuntaan-valit...> (accessed 10 June 2019); *Eduskunnan Kalenterit 1917 II–1991; Eduskunta 1995–1999; Suomen eduskunta 2003–2015*.

Member of the Council of State (government) during the following years of his term in parliament: 1925, 1925–1926 and 1927–1928. Besides Lohi, the best-known politicians in this area were the members of the Agrarian Union/Centre Party/Centre: Antti Junes, Vihtori Vesterinen, Martti Miettunen, Eeli Erkkilä,<sup>7</sup> Kusti Eskola, Artturi Jämsen, Mikko Jokela, Tapani Tölli and Juha Sipilä. It is noteworthy that in the third administration of K.A. Fagerholm in 1958–1959, two out of the six Agrarian Party ministers had a Conservative Laestadian background – Kusti Eskola and Martti Miettunen. Kaarlo Castrén, the famous politician with a Laestadian background, represented the National Progressive Party, which was a liberal party functioning between 1918 and 1951.<sup>8</sup> As we can see, all these eleven top politicians with a Laestadian background represented the political centre. Three of these politicians served as Prime Minister of Finland.

### **Kaarlo Castrén**

Kaarlo Castrén (1860–1938), who was acting Prime Minister in 1919, was a lawyer and a well-known progressive politician of the Young Finnish Party, later known as the Progressive Party. His father J.R. Castrén (1828–1894) had acted as chaplain of Turtola from 1859 to 1874 and as vicar of Karunki from 1874 to 1894. J.R. Castrén was one of the few Laestadian priests in the 1800s. Clearly, the formative influence of his Laestadian childhood home proved abiding for Kaarlo Castrén.<sup>9</sup> During his school years, when he was living with the Heikel family in Oulu, he identified himself as a Laestadian in a religious sense.<sup>10</sup> Afterwards, he alienated himself from the movement and cannot be considered a Laestadian in the deep religious meaning of the term.

Kaarlo Castrén graduated as a Bachelor of Law from the University of Helsinki in 1887. He worked as an attorney-at-law in the Castrén & Snellman law office from 1888 to 1898. In 1916, he was elected as the director of the Kansallis-Osake Bank. In 1894 and 1905–1906 he attended the state board meetings as a representative of the bourgeoisie. Castrén also took part in politics, serving as a Senator from 1906 to 1909. He also served many years as chairman of the Young Finnish Party. After Finland gained its independence, Castrén served as Minister of Finance in 1918–1919, and four months as Prime Minister of Finland in 1919.<sup>11</sup>

In 1918, when the parties were reformulated, Castrén joined the National Progressive Party, but he cannot be considered as a particularly liberal politician. In his party, he belonged to the right-wing faction. After the active years of his political career, Castrén shifted politically more and more towards the Right. In the early part of the 1930s, he supported, inter alia, the anti-Communist Lapua Movement. He actively operated against Communism.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Mr. Eeli Erkkilä's background was in New Awakening Laestadianism; he returned to the movement religiously before he died in 1963. *Talonen* 2019a, 29.

<sup>8</sup> *Talonen* 1988; 2019a. Arthur Castrén (1866–1946), the brother of Kaarlo Castrén was also a famous politician representing the Young Finnish Party. I have not included him in this list because he did not profile himself with his Laestadian roots in public. [https://fi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur\\_Castr%C3%A9n](https://fi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur_Castr%C3%A9n) (accessed 5 June 2019); *Aska* 1997, 96. In any case, at the beginning of the 1930s his attitude towards the Laestadian spirit was amenable. Oskar Heikel to Kaarlo & Arthur Castrén on 31 Dec 1932. KA (*Kansallisarkisto*) KC (*Kaarlo Castrénin kokoelma*) Box 2.

<sup>9</sup> *Räyttä* 1967 no. 577; *Aska* 1997, 95–96, 101–103, 110.

<sup>10</sup> Oskar Heikel to Kaarlo & Arthur Castrén on 31 Dec 1932. KA KC Box 2.

<sup>11</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kaarlo\\_Castr%C3%A9n](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kaarlo_Castr%C3%A9n) (accessed 2 May 2019); *Aska* 1997, 95; *Vares* 2003, 151–152.

<sup>12</sup> *Vares* 2003, 152–153.

The older Kaarlo Castrén got, the more he was interested in his religious background in the Torne Valley Sub-region. When he got older, Castrén greatly valued the Laestadians of his childhood environment. He also understood well the emotions (“liikutukset”),<sup>13</sup> which appeared among the Laestadians and have been hard to understand for people outside the community. The sons of Dean Robert Castrén, who had been born and raised in the rectory of Turtola and ended up in influential and significant positions in society, donated a chandelier to the Turtola Church in July 1932. On that occasion they visited the Torne Valley Sub-region where they had spent their childhood.<sup>14</sup>

In 1932, Kaarlo Castrén published a biography of Lars Levi Laestadius (1800–1861). A new edition of the book was printed in 1934. This biography also reflects its author’s skills in researching church history. In the prologue, the author returns to the Torne River Valley Sub-region of his childhood. He also reminisces about the quickly spreading revival movement with a nostalgic tone:

From the early ages of my childhood – from the late 1860s or from the beginning of the 1870s – I can recall how a miraculous revival rushed down the hills of Torne Valley like an avalanche. Every now and then I think I can still hear the great rush of the revival’s wings. In my birthplace, the Turtola chapel congregation as it was called then, they have this legend about Pello, which was a large village a couple of miles north of the parish. It was said that the revival had caused a perfect upheaval of the conditions in Pello. Villagers, with few exceptions, had renounced their sinful lives, confessed their crimes, compensated for the harm they had done to their neighbours and started to follow the righteous path. From Pello, the revival bypassed the parish center and ate its way into the village of Juoksenki, which is located south of Pello. In Juoksenki, the revival caused as surprising and profound change. But soon, the parish centre was also under the same rapture. Sins were confessed and forgiven. Preachers and other brothers and sisters in faith vowed that in the name of the Saviour, and happiness and bliss glimmered in the eyes of the redeemed.<sup>15</sup>

Väinö Havas and Martti E. Miettinen had somewhat different views about Castrén’s biography of Laestadius. Havas and Miettinen were both Laestadian priests and well-known scholars who had focused on studying Laestadianism. In his review, which was published in *Vartija* in 1933, Havas, a Conservative Laestadian himself, stated that Castrén’s book pictured Laestadius in a more perfect way than any other comparable study before. According to Havas, of all the descriptions of Laestadius published hitherto, Castrén’s version was the best. Havas also noted that Senator Castrén could not have had “any more beautiful way of showing his respect for the memory of his devoted parents than writing this valuable book about Lars Levi Laestadius.”<sup>16</sup> In his critique, published in 1934 in *Historiallinen Aikakauskirja* (“Historical Journal”), Martti E. Miettinen was more critical. Miettinen was a scholar and a priest who belonged to the New Awakening faction of Laestadianism. He noted that Castrén covered Laestadius’s academic orientation and other “external parts” quite broadly. But when it came to Laestadius’s religious activities, Castrén’s analysis was quite narrow.<sup>17</sup> The editor-in-chief of *Huutavan Ääni* (“The Voice of One Crying”), Yrjö A. Nummi, who belonged to the New Awakening faction like Miettinen, stated in December 1932 that by writing the book Castrén had done “a great favour to the cause of the Kingdom of God.” For the public, the book

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<sup>13</sup> Castrén 1932, 12–13; Aska 1997, 101.

<sup>14</sup> Aska 1997, 95–96. Kaarlo Castrén visited the summer meeting of the New Awakening Laestadians in Hämeenlinna in 1931. Aleks. Hellman to Kaarlo Castrén on 22 Dec 1932. KA KC Box 2.

<sup>15</sup> Castrén 1932, 11–12; 1934; Aska 1997, 101; Vuollo 1999, 31.

<sup>16</sup> *Vartija* 1933, 44–47 (Väinö Havas). Book review also in *TA* 1934, 268–269 (Tor Krook).

<sup>17</sup> *HAik* 1934, 129–135.

offered new information about Laestadius as an academic scholar. According to Nummi, it was “the best apologia” written about Laestadianism up to then.<sup>18</sup>

Dean O.H. Jussila, who was the most significant Conservative Laestadian priest and the editor of the *Siionin Lähetyslehti* (*The Mission Paper of Zion*), was positively surprised in turn by Castrén’s biography of Laestadius. Jussila considered the biography a valuable Christmas present for the Finnish people in 1932. It also filled a void in the study of Finnish church history.<sup>19</sup>

In Finland, Castrén’s book has gained approval even among the Conservative Laestadians.<sup>20</sup> The book received exceptionally high coverage in the Finnish daily papers. Altogether 42 newspapers or journals published a book review of Castrén’s book. Even the *Suomen Sosialidemokraatti*, the party organ of the Social Democrats, wrote about the book.<sup>21</sup> Generally speaking, through this Laestadius biography Castrén made Laestadius and Laestadianism better-known in a positive way in Finnish society.

The book was also published in an Estonian edition in Tallinn in 1938. The translation task was carried out by Valve Kogamäki, the daughter of Heinrich Kogamäki. A Master of Theology, Karl Tiit, also read the manuscript before printing. The book was published by the Association of Peace in Narva. The book, *Põhjamaa suur ärataja Lars Levi Laestadius*, was almost a direct translation from Castrén’s Finnish edition.<sup>22</sup> In January 1939, a brief presentation of Castrén’s book’s Estonian edition was published in the magazine *Eesti Kirik*.<sup>23</sup>

Castrén’s book was planned to be published in Swedish as well, but the plan was never realized.<sup>24</sup> In any case, the author got his opportunity to present his findings to Swedish and Norwegian audiences in addition to the Finnish one. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of December 1932, Castrén personally donated the book to Erling Eidem, the Archbishop of Uppsala.<sup>25</sup> In April 1933, Castrén travelled to Sweden to lecture about his findings. He gave presentations in Stockholm, at an event organized by the *Samfundet Sverige-Finland* society, and in Uppsala, at an event organized by the Swedish-Finnish student union.<sup>26</sup> He also lectured about Laestadius at the University of Oslo on the 20th of January 1934.<sup>27</sup>

After the biography of Laestadius, Kaarlo Castrén published four brief articles about Laestadius’s literary activity in the yearbook of the Finnish Society of Church History. Three of these texts discussed *Dårhusjonet*, the *magnum opus* of Laestadius’s philosophy of religion.<sup>28</sup> In the article published in 1934, he was wondering what had happened to the study of Lappish mythology written by Laestadius. The whereabouts of the manuscript were unknown back then, and Castrén was hoping that it would appear somewhere.<sup>29</sup> In 1934, Castrén also published a brief article

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<sup>18</sup> Journal clippings (*Huutavan Ääni* 12 / 1932). KA KC Box 21.

<sup>19</sup> *SL* 1933, 7–9 (O.H. Jussila).

<sup>20</sup> *Talonen* 1989, 64.

<sup>21</sup> Newspaper and journal clippings. KA KC Box 21.

<sup>22</sup> *Castrén* 1932; 1938; *Talonen* 1989, 63–64; 2013, 52.

<sup>23</sup> *EK* 4 / 26 Jan 1939; *Talonen* 2013, 52.

<sup>24</sup> Manuscript “Ödemarkens store väckare Lars Levi Laestadius” (1936). KA KC Box 5. The manuscript is part of the book.

<sup>25</sup> Newspaper clippings (*Huvudstadsbladet* 6.12.1932). KA KC Box 21.

<sup>26</sup> Material on the trip to Sweden in 1933. KA KC Box 6.

<sup>27</sup> Material on the trip to Norway in 1934; newspaper clippings (*Aftenposten* 22.1.1934; *Morgonbladet* 22.11.1934). KA KC Box 7.

<sup>28</sup> *Castrén* 1934b; 1936; 1939; *Raittila* 1967, 280.

<sup>29</sup> *Castrén* 1934c. On the publications of Laestadius’s Lappish Mythology between 1960 and 2002, see *Talonen* 2019d, 109.

about how Laestadianism drew the attention of the authorities of the Russian Empire at the beginning of the 1850s.<sup>30</sup> These articles cannot be considered academic studies as such; they are more like reports and overviews. In any case, they show that the former Senator maintained his interest in his childhood's religious milieu until the end of his life.

## **Martti Miettunen**

Martti Miettunen (1907–2002) was one of the most famous Laestadian politicians in the Agrarian Party (since 1965, the Centre Party) in Finland. He was born in Simo, Lapland, as the son of a smallholder. He studied at the Christian folk high school in Ylitornio, which had been founded in 1923 by Conservative Laestadians. Back then, the school was run by teacher Paavo Ahlholm (Leppäsaajo). After two years spent at Ylitornio, Miettunen continued studying at agricultural trade schools. He graduated from the famous Mustiala agricultural trade school as an agrologist in 1932. After graduation, Miettunen worked as a farmer and an agricultural advisor before he went into politics.<sup>31</sup>

He served as Party Secretary of the Agrarian Party from 1946 to 1950, as a Member of Parliament from 1945 to 1958, and repeatedly as a minister in Finnish governments in the 1950s. He served as a Cabinet Minister for 4,300 days, one of the longest periods of service in Finnish political history. Miettunen served as Minister of Transport and Public Works in 1950–1951 and 1954–1956, as Minister of Agriculture in 1951–1953, 1956–1957, 1958, and 1968–1970, and as Minister of Finance in 1957.<sup>32</sup>

Miettunen was Prime Minister of Finland from 1961 to 1962 and again from 1975 to 1977. He also served as Governor of Lapland from 1958 to 1973. In Finnish politics, he was known as “the right-hand man” of President Urho Kekkonen (1900–1986), to whom he was very loyal.<sup>33</sup> In 1977, Miettunen was awarded the honorary title of ‘*valtioneuvos*’ (Counsellor of State), one of the highest-ranking titles there is to give as public recognition of someone’s service to the country.

In his childhood and early youth, Martti Miettunen was intensely influenced by his Laestadian home and environment. His family actively took part in the spiritual meetings of the Laestadians in their home village. In a spiritual sense, Antti Miettunen, the blind grandfather of Martti Miettunen, was a prominent figure for him. On the one hand, Miettunen described him as a hard-working man who knew his Bible. On the other hand, Miettunen described his grandfather as an ascetic and rigoristic old-school-man from Peräpohjola. The faith of his parents also meant a great deal to Miettunen as he grew up. In 1981, Miettunen described the spiritual influence of his childhood home as follows:

I can truly say that the spiritual influence, which was based on religious ethos, remained remarkably strong,

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<sup>30</sup> *Castrén* 1934d.

<sup>31</sup> [https://fi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martti\\_Miettunen](https://fi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martti_Miettunen); [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martti\\_Miettunen](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martti_Miettunen) (accessed 2 April 2019); *Itse asiassa kulttuna* 1979, 9–12,15; *Arvola* 1981, 11–26; *Miettunen* 1983, 32–63, 67; *Virolainen* 1994, 176–177; *Mustakallio* 1994, 52; *Uola* 2005, 701.

<sup>32</sup> [https://fi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martti\\_Miettunen](https://fi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martti_Miettunen); [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martti\\_Miettunen](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martti_Miettunen) (accessed 2 April 2019); *Arvola* 1981, 28–29; *Miettunen* 1983, 83, 125–127, 136–182, 223–232; *Uola* 2005, 701–702.

<sup>33</sup> <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/government/history/governments-an...> (accessed 2 April 2019); *Itse asiassa kulttuna* 1979, 55; *Miettunen* 1983, 182, 205, 211, 233–253; *Virolainen* 1994, 179–190; *Uola* 2005, 702–703.

thanks to my grandfather. It was supported by the religious atmosphere of our home, where our mother and father were willing to apologize to the children for the faults and weaknesses of the journey.<sup>34</sup>

Martti Miettunen started to follow politics at quite a young age, actually at the same age he received his confirmation. K.A. Lohi, a politician and a preacher in the Conservative Laestadian branch, had solid political support in Simo, the home village of Miettunen. Lohi, along with Antti Junes and Janne Koivuranta, two other politicians who had a Conservative Laestadian background, were known as political speakers in the region. At these speech events, Miettunen got to know Lohi, who was one of the leading figures in the Agrarian League.<sup>35</sup>

When Miettunen decided to run as a candidate in the Parliamentary elections in 1945, K.A. Lohi publicly supported him. Lohi, who had decided not to run again in those elections, encouraged the citizens of Lapland to support Miettunen.<sup>36</sup> Along with his numerous public offices and active political occupation, Miettunen had time to participate in the activities of the Conservative Laestadians on some level. Every now and then he could be seen in the pages of *Päivämies*, the organ of the movement.<sup>37</sup>

Martti Miettunen was one of the board members of the relief association of Lestadiolaisten Ylioppilaskoti (“Student home for Laestadians”) in 1948 when the association was founded. This student home was opened in Helsinki in 1949. Miettunen served as a member of the board from 1948 to 1967.<sup>38</sup> Miettunen never preached publicly nor officially, unlike K.A. Lohi in his time. Yet he held an evening prayer on Suomen Yleisradio, the Finnish public service broadcasting company, and he performed as a religious and societal speaker on several occasions. In 1959, Miettunen participated in the winter event of the Conservative Laestadian youth, organized by the Christian folk high school in Ylitornio, and spoke about his memories of the time spent at the folk high school.<sup>39</sup>

When Minister Miettunen turned 50 years old on the 16<sup>th</sup> of April 1957, *Päivämies* newspaper characterized him as follows:

Martti Miettunen is known as a Christian who personally struggles in his faith and for whom the mercy of the atonement blood of Christ is everything. Frequently, has he confessed his faith when speaking evening prayers on the radio.<sup>40</sup>

The split within the Conservative Laestadian branch in 1960–1961 was some sort of turning point for Miettunen in his attitude towards his religious background. This first Prime Minister period of Miettunen includes a dramatic incident when the Soviet Union sent a diplomatic note to Finland in

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<sup>34</sup> *Sana* 1 / 1 Jan 1977 (Tapani Ruokanen); *Itse asiassa kuultuna* 1979, 12–13; *Arvola* 1981, 15–17; *Miettunen* 1983, 45–48.

<sup>35</sup> Interview of Martti Miettunen on 10 July 1978; *Miettunen* 1983, 66–67. On K.A. Lohi and his religious and socio-political activities, see *Talonen* 1979.

<sup>36</sup> *Pohjolan Sanomat* 39 / 17 Feb 1945; *Miettunen* 1983, 66.

<sup>37</sup> *Päivämies* 5 / 4 Nov 1954; 1 / 1 Jan 1959; *Rautiainen* 1986, 45–46; *Palola* 2010, 408–409.

<sup>38</sup> *Maitojyvä* 2009, 44.

<sup>39</sup> *Päivämies* 16 / 16 April 1957; 26 / 25 June 1959; 53 / 31 Dec 1959; *Sana* 1 / 1 Jan 1977 (Tapani Ruokanen); *Itse asiassa kuultuna* 1979, 12–13; *Mustakallio* 1994, 86; *Palola* 2011, 179–180. On K.A. Lohi as a Laestadian lay-preacher, see *Talonen* 1979, 171–210.

<sup>40</sup> *Päivämies* 16 / 16 April 1957.



November 1961. The common view nowadays is that by sending the note the Soviet Union wanted to ensure the re-election of Urho Kekkonen, as the voting of the presidential electors, who elected the President, was getting close. In the note, the Soviet Union demanded military consultation between the Soviet Union and Finland, as the Finno-Soviet Treaty from the year 1948 provided for. When the note arrived, Kekkonen was in the USA, so, as the Prime Minister, Miettunen was standing in for the President while Kekkonen was prevented from carrying out his duties. When Miettunen received the information about the note, he was in a board meeting of Lestadiolaisten ylioppilaskoti, and he was forced to leave in the middle of the meeting.<sup>41</sup>

Miettunen had distanced himself from Conservative Laestadianism after the split that took place in the revival movement in 1960–1961. In his own words, he had a hard time understanding why certain dogmatic differences had become such a big deal in the movement. During those years, Miettunen was going through a divorce in his personal life. The divorce and all the aspects related to it made those years a burden for him on a personal level as well. Despite distancing himself from Conservative Laestadianism, Miettunen continuously had a respectful and appreciative relationship with his Laestadian heritage. At the beginning of 1977, Miettunen gave a revealing statement to *Sana* magazine, which is a Christian weekly paper published by Kansan Raamattuseura, *Logos Ministries of Finland*, a society that strives to proclaim the Gospel:

The significance of Laestadianism continues to be vast in Lapland. Even though there are disagreements within the movement, in the big picture Laestadianism has a great and positive impact. It especially has an effect on the education given to children in their homes. In this sense, I hold the movement in very high esteem.<sup>42</sup>

Even though Miettunen appreciated Laestadianism, his attitude towards some norms and ways of life was critical. For example, in 1979 he stated that the ban on watching television was childish in his opinion.<sup>43</sup> In 1981, he gave an interview to an author, Oiva Arvola, in which Miettunen emphasized the meaning of the Lutheran righteousness of faith:

Nothing is earned by doing good deeds; it is through faith that we get our share of God's grace. Good deeds follow only after one has understood faith correctly.<sup>44</sup>

Elderly and sick, Miettunen returned to the Conservative Laestadian branch in 1995. He kept himself aware of the events and the development of his revival movement by reading the *Päivämies* newspaper. Among other things, Miettunen was interested in the missionary work done in Russia.<sup>45</sup> He spent the final years of his life absent from publicity and did not participate in political activities.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> *Sana* 1 / 1 Jan 1977 (Tapani Ruokanen); *Itse asiassa kulttuna* 1979, 35; *Arvola* 1981, 29–30; *Miettunen* 1983, 213–220; *Soisalon-Soininen* [1989], 6.

<sup>42</sup> *Sana* 1 / 1 Jan 1977 (Tapani Ruokanen); *Arvola* 1981, 49.

<sup>43</sup> *Itse asiassa kulttuna* 1979, 13.

<sup>44</sup> *Arvola* 1981, 50.

<sup>45</sup> E-mail of Juhani Alaranta to the author on 29 April 2019; *Päivämies* 12 / 20 March 2002 (Juhani Alaranta); *Palola* 2011, 180. Conservative Laestadian pastor and Member of Parliament Juhani Alaranta gave pastoral care to Martti Miettunen.

<sup>46</sup> *Uola* 2005, 703. Martti Miettunen's brother Eino Miettunen (1911–2008) was one of the best-known Laestadian lay-preachers in northern Finland. He belonged to the Rauhan Sana group (Word of Peace group). *Rauhan Sana* 2 / 2009, 18–19 (a necrology written by Paavo Korteniemi).

## Juha Sipilä

Juha Sipilä, (born in 1961), the Prime Minister of Finland from 2015 to 2019, has a successful background in business. In the 1990s he was one of the leading figures in the IT field in the Oulu region, and in 1996 he had the highest earned and investment income in Finland.<sup>47</sup> Sipilä joined politics from the business sector, and this can be seen in his political profile. He has been a Member of Parliament since 2011, and he served as Speaker of the Parliament in 2015. He was the Chairman of the Centre Party from 2012 to 2019. After the Parliamentary elections in 2015, he formed a centre-right coalition consisting of the Centre Party, the National Coalition Party and the Finns Party. After the period of government, the Centre Party suffered a massive election loss in 2019. Juha Sipilä withdrew from the position of chairman of the party and announced he was not interested in the ministerial position either.<sup>48</sup>

Sipilä has his spiritual roots in the small Laestadian group Rauhan Sana (“Word of Peace”) from his childhood. His wife Minna-Maaria Sipilä (née Juntunen) comes from a very famous Laestadian family in Oulu. Juha Sipilä’s uncle, Rauno Sipilä, has been a lay-preacher in the Rauhan Sana group, and he is well-known in the Ingria Church and Estonia as well. Minna-Maaria and Juha Sipilä’s foundation, *Minna-Maaria Juha Sipilä säätiö*, has financially supported various kinds of Christian and social projects, missionary work, and Christian preaching work. The Sipilä couple has frequently attended the movement’s summer revivals. In 2017, Juha Sipilä gave a speech at the annual meeting of Rauhan Sana in Kokkola together with two other politicians (Peter Östman, a Christian Democrat, and Jutta Urpilainen, a Social Democrat) at the event that celebrated Finland’s centenary of independence.<sup>49</sup>

When Juha Sipilä entered politics and was selected for the leadership position of the Centre Party, he enjoyed great support from the people. In the Parliamentary elections in 2015, the Centre Party was overwhelmingly the most popular party in the electoral district of Oulu. Over 40 percent of the voters gave their vote to the candidate from the Centre. Sipilä personally received 30,758 votes, which was 12.3 percent of the votes of the whole district and 28.9 percent of the votes given to the candidates from the Centre in his district. Sipilä was supported by people from the Rauhan Sana group, the Conservative Laestadians, and the citizens who supported the Centre on a general level.<sup>50</sup> The political support of Sipilä was strongly based on his role as the Chairman of the Centre Party, not on his background as a Christian from the Rauhan Sana group.

The political opposition, especially the left-wing parties, rigorously criticized the politics of Sipilä’s government, particularly the cuts made to the expenditures of the state. However, the government was able to improve the public finance significantly and reduce the rate of unemployment.

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<sup>47</sup> [https://fi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juha\\_Sipil%C3%A4](https://fi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juha_Sipil%C3%A4) (accessed 8 April 2019); [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juha\\_Sipil%C3%A4](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juha_Sipil%C3%A4) (accessed 8 April 2019); <https://yle.fi/aihe/Artikkeli/2015/09/17/juha-sipila-tienasi-eniten...> (accessed 8 April 2019); *Uimonen* 2015, 207–263, 281–293.

<sup>48</sup> [https://fi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juha\\_Sipil%C3%A4](https://fi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juha_Sipil%C3%A4) (accessed 8 April 2019); [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juha\\_Sipil%C3%A4](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juha_Sipil%C3%A4) (accessed 8 April 2019); *Suomenmaa* 15 / 18 April 2019.

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.iltalehti.fi/kotimaa/a/201707162200267944> (accessed 6 June 2019); *Rauhan sana* 6 / 2011, 14–15; *Uusi Tie* 29 / 20 July 2017; *Uimonen* 2015, 269–280; 2019, 467; *Talonen* 2019a, 44, 48–49.

<sup>50</sup> *Talonen* 2019a, 37, 48. In their later years, Juha Sipilä’s parents turned to Conservative Laestadianism (SRK).

When Juha Sipilä was elected to the chairmanship of the Centre Party in the summer of 2012, his religious background received extensive attention in public discussions. The same discourse continued in the Parliamentary elections of 2015. At the same time, the media focused its attention on the smaller and geographically minor branches of Conservative Laestadianism, the Finnish Lähetyshdistys Rauhan Sana and the Swedish Laestadian society, Laestadianernas Fridsföreningars Förbund (LFF) in Ostrobothnia. The biography *Juha Sipilä: Keskustajohtajan muotokuva* (Juha Sipilä: Portrait of the Leader of Centre), written by the well-known media influencer Risto Uimonen, was published right before the Parliamentary elections in spring 2015. At the release of the book in March 2015, Uimonen said that Sipilä's Conservative Laestadian background had been used against him.

Uimonen considered Sipilä to belong to the "liberal wing" of Rauhan Sana ("Word of Peace"). The author also emphasized the difference between the members of the Rauhan Sana group and the Conservative Laestadians (SRK) when it comes to questions about way of life.<sup>51</sup> In his book, Uimonen pictured Sipilä's religious community, the Rauhan Sana group, as a more liberal community than it really was. With this device, Uimonen probably aimed to tackle the religious prejudices against Sipilä and distance himself from the negative public image Laestadianism had gained in Finnish society, especially in the 2010s. The mainstream media had written pretty feisty articles about the sensitive spots of Laestadianism and its religious and social aspects. This ethos did not do justice to the big picture.

I want to give you one example that shows how some sort of Laestadian phobia had spread to Finnish society, media and social media. In the spring of 2015, the pseudonym *Ragge-velho* wrote in his comment on the website of *Aamulehti* that a Laestadian, Juha Sipilä, was probably going to be the next Prime Minister of Finland. According to the author, the appointment would have its consequences on the life of citizens.

The next four years, we must live under the watching eye of God. Watching television is prohibited, drinking alcohol is prohibited, wearing a rubber is prohibited, aborting is prohibited, this is prohibited and that is prohibited, you name it. One can only wear sackcloth and scatter ashes on them.<sup>52</sup>

The quotation is a good example of the image that the mainstream media had been repeatedly reproducing about Laestadianism, especially after 2005.

Sipilä's religious background also drew some overseas attention, at least in Estonia and the United States. Public debate about Sipilä's religious background was the most active in 2012 and 2015, but it cooled down in spring 2015. Beginning in the summer of 2015, the media's focus was more and more on the contemporary questions of politics and less on the convictions of the politicians.<sup>53</sup> On the other hand, before the Parliamentary elections of 2019, the media paid some attention to this subject.<sup>54</sup> The media attention was sparked by a study about Laestadianism that was published by

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<sup>51</sup> Uimonen 2015, 267–280; 2019, 466–467; Talonen 2019a, 44–46, 52–53. Uimonen (2019, 466) wrote about Sipilä that "He --- is quite liberal in his outlook."

<sup>52</sup> [http://aamulehdenblogit.ning.com/profiles/blogs/jos--sipil--st-\(accessed 24 April 2015\)](http://aamulehdenblogit.ning.com/profiles/blogs/jos--sipil--st-(accessed 24 April 2015)); Talonen 2019a, 47.

<sup>53</sup> Talonen 2019a, 49.

<sup>54</sup> See, for example, <https://www.ts.fi/uutiset/kotimaa/4489245/Juha+Sipilä+halusi...> (accessed 25 Feb 2019); Nurmi

Lapland University Press. In the study, several academic scholars studied the revival movement's political, societal and financial role in Finnish society.<sup>55</sup>

However, in politics, Sipilä has been careful to maintain a low profile in matters related to so-called Christian-ethical values, and especially when compared to two other leading contemporary confessional Christian politicians in Finland, Timo Soini (a Roman Catholic) and Päivi Räsänen (from the New Pietistic movement). Risto Uimonen's definition, in which he localizes Sipilä as belonging to the liberal part of the Rauhan Sana Group, rather holds true. As is widely known, Sipilä has publicly said that he accepts the ordaining of women as priests. At the end of November 2014, he voted against gender-neutral marriage as an MP, but for some reason he did vote in favour of the associated legislation related to gender-neutral marriage legislation on 17 February 2016.<sup>56</sup>

He also voted on 28 February 2018 in favour of the new law on motherhood that allows two women to be mothers of a baby.<sup>57</sup> On the other hand, Prime Minister Juha Sipilä never took part in the Pride march as his successor from 2019, the Social Democrat politician Antti Rinne did in the summer of 2019.<sup>58</sup>

On the whole, as a politician he has focused primarily on financial and contemporary politics. As a politician, Sipilä has tried to relegate faith strictly to the private sphere and concentrate on contemporary politics. In Finland, religious politicians have traditionally been seen as value-based leaders of the nation who strongly support Christian moral values. When it comes to the value questions the support base of the Centre in the countryside find important, Prime Minister Sipilä has kept a surprisingly low profile. So, in this sense, Sipilä may not have met the expectations of Christian circles, or at least not the expectations of all of them.<sup>59</sup>

## Conclusions

Altogether, there have been 47 different Laestadian politicians as Members of Parliament between 1917 and 2019. Of these 47 Members of Parliament, 66% represented the Agrarian Union / Centre Party / Centre, and 23% Conservatives. At least eleven Finnish politicians with a strong Laestadian background have had influence in the Council of State during the period from 1919 to 2019. One of them represented the Progressive Party, the others the Agrarian Union/Centre Party/Centre.

Of the three Prime Ministers of Finland with a Laestadian background, Kaarlo Castrén (PM in 1919) was also a well-known Laestadius scholar whose biography of Laestadius at the beginning of the 1930s aroused considerable interest in Finland and neighbouring Nordic countries. Through this Laestadius biography, Castrén made Laestadius and Laestadianism better-known in a positive way

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2019; Talonen 2019c.

<sup>55</sup> Linjakumpu & Nykänen & Harjuma & Wallenius-Korkalo 2019; Talonen 2019a.

<sup>56</sup> Talonen 2016, 144; 2019a, 49–50.

<sup>57</sup> [https://www.eduskunta.fi/FI/Vaski/sivut/aaanestys.aspx?aaanestys...\(Äitiyslaki\)](https://www.eduskunta.fi/FI/Vaski/sivut/aaanestys.aspx?aaanestys...(Äitiyslaki)) The session of the Parliament of Finland on 28 Feb 2018 (accessed 5 Sep 2019).

<sup>58</sup> <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-10851252> (accessed 15 Oct 2019).

<sup>59</sup> Uimonen 2015, 271, 273–275, 279; 2019, 466–469; Talonen 2016, 144; 2019a, 49–50; Bhose 2017, 28–29.

in Finnish society. His attitude towards Laestadianism was quite positive, even if he did not personally belong to the movement in the deep religious sense.

In his childhood and early youth Martti Miettunen (PM from 1961 to 1962 and from 1975 to 1977) was intensely influenced by his Laestadian home and environment. He served as a member of the board of the relief association of Lestadiolaisten Ylioppilaskoti (“Student home for Laestadians”) from 1948 to 1967. Miettunen distanced himself from Conservative Laestadianism after the split that took place in the revival movement in 1960–1961. Despite distancing himself from Conservative Laestadianism, Miettunen continuously had a respectful and appreciative attitude towards his Laestadian heritage. Elderly and sick, Miettunen returned to the Conservative Laestadian branch in 1995.

Juha Sipilä (PM from 2015 to 2019), has a successful background in business. He came from the small Laestadian group Rauhan Sana (“Word of Peace”), which had its spiritual roots in Conservative Laestadianism. When he was elected to the chairmanship of the Centre Party in the summer of 2012, his religious background received considerable attention in public discussions. The same discourse continued in the Parliamentary elections in 2015. Sipilä confessed his Christian faith, but in politics he was cautious in religious-ethical matters. On the whole, as a politician he has focused primarily on financial and contemporary politics.

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EK	Eesti Kirik 1939
HAik	Historiallinen Aikakauskirja 1934
	Maitojyvä 2009
	Pohjolan Sanomat 1945
	Päivämies 1954, 1957, 1959, 2002
	Rauhan Sana 2009, 2011
	Sana 1977
SL	Siionin Lähetyslehti 1933
	Suomenmaa 2019
TA	Teologinen Aikakauskirja 1934
	Vartija 1933
	Uusi Tie 2017

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## ABBREVIATIONS AND TERMS

ELCF	Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland
Hc	University Library of Helsinki
LFF	Laestadianernas fridsföreningars förbund
MP	Member of Parliament
PM	Prime Minister
SHS	Studia Historica Septentrionalia
SKB	Suomen Kansallisbiografia (National Biography of Finland)
SKHST	Suomen kirkkohistoriallisen seuran toimituksia (Publications of the Finnish Society of Church History)
SKHSV	Suomen kirkkohistoriallisen seuran Vuosikirja (Yearbook of the Finnish Society of Church History)
SRK	Suomen rauhanyhdistysten keskusyhdistys (the Central Association of the Finnish Associations of Peace)
SSKF	Skrifter utgivna av Svenska kyrkohistoriska föreningen

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## PICTURES

- 1. Kaarlo Castrén was the Prime Minister of Finland in 1919. Picture: Finnish National Board of Antiquities (Collection of historical pictures).**
- 2. Governor of Lapland Martti Miettunen on a fishing trip in 1963. Picture: Arvola 1981. (Original picture by Juhani Hausmann).**
- 3. Juha Sipilä, who served as Prime Minister of Finland from 2015 to 2019, has also been a successful businessman.  
Picture: <https://seura.fi/asiat/ajankohtiasta/seuran-selvitys-juha-sipilasta-tuli> ... (accessed 17 Oct 2019).**

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