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Recognition, Religious Identity, and Populism: Lessons from Finland

Risto Saarinen and Heikki J. Koskinen¹

The period from 1945 to 1990 has often been regarded as the time of universalism and ~~globalisation~~ ~~globalization~~. International ~~organisations~~ ~~organizations~~, such as the United Nations, and legal charters, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, were created to steer global developments in a coherent and responsible manner. Increasing travel, trade and communication opportunities brought about a new global awareness. For the first time in human history, not only political rulers but also educated citizens of very different countries were conscious of what is happening in the entire world. Within Christianity, the ~~E~~ ~~c~~ ~~u~~ ~~m~~ ~~e~~ ~~n~~ ~~i~~ ~~c~~ ~~a~~ ~~n~~ ~~i~~ ~~c~~ ~~a~~ ~~m~~ ~~e~~ ~~n~~ ~~t~~ ~~a~~ ~~l~~ ~~m~~ ~~o~~ ~~v~~ ~~e~~ ~~m~~ ~~e~~ ~~n~~ ~~t~~ ~~a~~ ~~n~~ ~~t~~ ~~the~~ ~~Second~~ ~~Vatican~~ ~~Council~~ contributed to this overall wave of ~~globalisation~~ ~~globalization~~.

After the end of the Cold War, however, new discussions on national and religious identities emerged. In many cases, for instance, in the rise of Islam in the Middle East and in the new prominence of the Orthodox church in Russia and the Catholic church in Poland, these national and religious identities replaced the earlier attitudes of universalism. In politics, this meant that the trend of increasing ~~globalisation~~ ~~globalization~~ came to be accompanied ~~with~~ ~~by~~ new trends of nationalism, separatism and regional self-interest. In addition, political, religious and ethnic minorities became visible in a new manner after 1990.²

1. Recognition and Identity – from Liberals to Populists

Charles Taylor's 1995 essay on the politics of recognition captured the new political and philosophical situation particularly well. Taylor argues that the so-called politics of universalism, in which equality and toleration are practiced, is not sufficient to guarantee the good life of minorities and neglected parties. In addition, minorities need conscious recognition by others. With the help of such recognition, they become visible members of the society and can in turn affirm others so that a mutual ~~recognition~~ ~~recognition~~ and a multicultural society can emerge. Sometimes such recognition also implies positive discrimination, that is, particular opportunities for the minority.³

Especially in American settings, the strong connection of recognition procedures with the civil rights of the African American ~~black~~ and the Native American people as well as of sexual minorities prompted the rise of so-called identity politics. In addition to the distribution of wealth and ~~promoting~~ ~~promotion of~~ tolerance and peace, politics can be employed to promote the rights of different minorities in the society at large.⁴ Through recognizing the rights of ~~the~~ ~~black~~ African Americans, ~~the~~ gays and ~~the~~ lesbians, the state can give a distinct identity to these groups. Due to such conscious identity politics, these groups

Kommentoinut [GW1]: I suggest African American here

¹ RS has written parts 1 and 2. Part 3 ~~is~~ ~~was~~ written jointly.

² For this periodization, see Risto Saarinen, "Ecumenism," in *Global Dictionary of Theology*, ed. William Dyrness and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen (Nottingham: IVP Press, 2008), 263-269.

³ Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," in *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 225-256.

⁴ Simon Thompson, *The Political Theory of Recognition: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006).

become equal to all others. In addition, they receive a distinct identity which characterizes them as a group. After twenty years of identity politics, two problems or worries (A and B) continue to appear in ~~its~~this context.

A. While ~~the~~ civil rights movements normally promote the creation of distinct identities, they are also aware that it implies a compromise with the democratic state. If gays and lesbians, for instance, let themselves become defined by the democratic majority, they may lose some of their original autonomy. Typically, this worry is formulated by theorists.⁵ In practice, most minorities and neglected parties seek recognition from the democratic majority, considering that their autonomy is not problematically at stake.

B. There is also an opposite worry which is the main theme of the present article. Given that we affirm and practice identity politics, which identities qualify as “good” or at least unproblematic in the eyes of a democratic multicultural state? After Charles Taylor’s essay, identity politics has become a tool of ~~the~~ progressive and liberal pressure groups, especially ~~in-on~~ the American scene. In Europe, however, the term “identity” has been adopted by the nationalist “identitarian” movements which claim their right to a homogenous identity and turn against multiculturalism.⁶

For ~~the~~ American liberals, such movements do not qualify as identity politics. After the 2016 American presidential election ~~in the U.S. in 2016~~, the theoretical discussion is nevertheless turning towards also using the phrase “identity politics” ~~also~~ with regard to conservative and populist movements. More importantly, these movements claim a recognition of their distinct identity in terms which resemble earlier discussions on multiculturalism.

The present article argues that recent developments in the Finnish conservative religious scene participate in the larger trend of conservative or “identitarian” politics. Through digital media, new ideas can be exchanged and new positions adopted very rapidly. Digital platforms and social media enable new rhetorical strategies which shape and reconstitute religious identities. Achieving recognition through social media is very important. However, bad publicity and liberal misrecognition may also bring new conservative supporters, if the public realm as a whole is polarized. We use ~~the~~ Finnish conservatives as a test case which helps to understand this complex dynamics of recognition in the digital era.

As the field of identity politics and identitarian movements is rather recent and keeps changing, we will first (1-) outline some new American and European discussions to show in which sense identity politics is shifting from liberalism towards conservatism and populism. With the help of this outline, we can then (2-) proceed to the Finnish religious conservatives and their relationship to populism. After giving-providing some introductory features, we focus our attention on one recent case. Finally (3), this case is compared with the theoretical concepts of recognition and identity.

⁵ Lois McNay, *Against Recognition* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008).

⁶ José Pedro Zuquete, *The Identitarians: The Movement against Globalism and Islam in Europe* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2018). This work contains uniquely rich documentation of the ideological developments until 2018.

In the American progressive camp, the recognition of otherness and identity politics are often seen as alternatives to such a universalist view which is unable to respect differences among different groups. This camp interprets identity politics as an instrument in the struggle for civil rights and multiculturalism which continues to emerge. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*'s entry "Identity Politics" can be regarded as an influential codification of this progressive variant in the U.S. The last update of the entry ~~from~~ (2016) defends the legacy of radical multiculturalism, although it also pays attention to the academic criticism presented to the politics of recognition.

In the entry, identity politics is described as "activity and theorizing founded in the shared experiences of injustice of members of certain social groups".⁷ As particular instances of this kind, gender and feminism, gay, lesbian and queer people, as well as different issues of race and ethnicity are discussed. According to the entry, identity politics emerged with new feminism and African American-Black civil rights debates in the second part of the twentieth century.

Kommentoinut [GW2]: Is this the term used in the entry?

The connection between identity politics and recognition theory is argued as follows:

What makes identity politics a significant departure from earlier, pre-identarian forms of the politics of recognition is its demand for recognition on the basis of the very grounds on which recognition has previously been denied: it is qua women, qua blacks, qua lesbians that groups demand recognition. The demand is not for inclusion within the fold of 'universal humankind' on the basis of shared human attributes; nor is it for respect 'in spite of' one's differences. Rather, what is demanded is respect for oneself as different.⁸

The word "identarian" is ~~in this quote~~ employed in this quote as a positive and progressive term that depicts the radically liberal politics of recognition. While such identity politics may be critical of some forms of universalism, the entry situates it firmly within progressive liberal democracy. A conventional liberal democracy may, however, need new forms of social inclusion and affirmation of minorities in order to enable a truly progressive multiculturalism. The different ethnic groups should therefore have a higher profile appear more profiled in order that their identity can be visible. Some examples will make rise the eyebrows of European readers raise their eyebrows. The Stanford Encyclopedia considers the issue of who counts as white as follows:

Kommentoinut [GW3]: Not clear what this means; does it mean that they should have a higher profile?

That a US citizen of both Norwegian and Ashkenazi Jewish heritage will check that they are white on a census form says relatively little ... about their experience of their identity, or indeed of their very different relationship to anti-Semitism.⁹

This quote is awkward already because of what it insinuates about the Norwegians. Even more awkward is the assumption that the Jews are very different from other people. Let it

⁷ Cressida Heyes, "Identity Politics," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Stanford University, 1997-. Article published Jul 16, 2002; last modified Mar 23, 2016, <https://plato.stanford.edu>.

⁸ Ibid., quoting Sonia Kruks, *Retrieving Experience: Subjectivity and Recognition in Feminist Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 85.

⁹ Ibid.

here only be stated that the quoted passage represents a variant of radically progressive multiculturalism which may lack some universalist values of liberalism.

When the *Stanford Encyclopedia* entry is compared with other recent texts dealing with identity politics, very different meanings can be gathered. The phrase “identity politics” has taken completely new dimensions in ~~the~~ newspaper use as well as in official documents. Already in 2014, the Finnish Foreign Ministry defined ~~s~~ identity politics as “political movement based on ethnic, racial or religious identity that is striving for power in the state”.¹⁰ Dictionary meanings of the phrase are often fairly close to this definition. While the definition may be technically compatible with the *Stanford Encyclopedia*, in the European scene it alludes more to the current nationalist politics in Poland or Hungary than to the liberal scene in the U.S.

A typical conversation reflecting this shift in the term “identity politics” is reported in ~~the~~ newspaper *The New Yorker*. Here, the ~~r~~ reporter David Remnick interviews the author Mark Lilla on the occasion of his new book on identity politics. They discuss the populist Steve Bannon’s remark that the Democratic Party lost the presidential election because they advocated progressive identity politics, thus chasing the majority ~~y~~ies away to the Republican camp.¹¹

Lilla is himself a liberal ~~democrate~~, but he agrees with Bannon’s remark. Identity politics can be a trend, but it can hardly win majority votes, since ~~it~~s mostly appeals to minorities ~~that~~ have ~~with~~ high academic awareness. To be successful with majorities ~~once~~ again, Lilla ~~considers that~~ the Democrats should abandon identity discourses and return to normal, more universal politics, ~~Lilla considers~~. In addition, the Republicans with Donald Trump developed a new version of identity politics which appeals to ~~the~~ ordinary people much better than the academic discourse of the liberals.¹²

In Europe, the word “identity” is currently prominently employed by the conservative and nationalist-populist movements. The French group *Bloc Identitaire* was established in 2003 and its German counterpart *Identitäre Bewegung* in 2014. The younger French identitarian group, *Génération Identitaire*, was founded ~~in~~ 2012 and the post-Trumpian Euroamerican fraternity, Identity Evrope (sic!), in 2016.¹³ While these movements remain fairly small in terms of their adherents, they offer ideological support for the ~~bigger-larger~~ political parties such as ~~the~~ *Front (Assemblée) Nationale* in France and *Alternative für Deutschland* in Germany. Identitarian movements also normally embrace the terms populist.¹⁴

The identitarian populists are not simply listening to the voice of ~~small-the~~ “little people.” Their ideology is based on considerable literary production which to a large extent has been

¹⁰ The original Finnish text (as of October 20, 2014) is quoted in Risto Saarinen, “Identiteettipolitiikka, toisen tunnustaminen ja teologia,” in *Uskonto ja identiteettipolitiikka*, ed. Elina Hellqvist, Minna Hietamäki, and Panu Pihkala. (Helsinki: STKS, 2015), 12-13.

¹¹ David Remnick, “A Conversation with Mark Lilla on His Critique of Identity Politics,” *New Yorker*, August 25, 2017; Mark Lilla, *The Once and Future Liberal: After Identity Politics* (New York: HarperCollins, 2017).

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Zuquete, *Identitarians*, 20-30, 307-308.

¹⁴ Zuquete, *Identitarians*, 127.

Kommentoinut [GW4]: Newspaper: The New Yorker is a magazine

Kommentoinut [GW5]: Democrat (i.e., member of the Democratic Party), or democrat?

Kommentoinut [GW6]: Not clear here what this means; does it mean that the minorities have high academic awareness, or that academics are highly aware of these minorities?

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written by the French intellectuals of so-called New Right (*Nouvelle Droite*). Alain de Benoist's and Jean-Claude Valla's writings on European civilization are formative for the New Right. Pierre Vial and his identitarian magazine *Terre et Peuple* define European identity in ethnic terms.¹⁵

Muotoiltu: Fontti: Kursivoitu

The New Right makes many claims regarding its own longer history, from the ancient city-state of Sparta to the nationalism of the nineteenth and the politically conservative movements of the twentieth century. Friedrich Nietzsche, Ezra Pound and Ernst Jünger are ~~not seldom~~~~often~~ quoted as intellectual allies of the identitarians.¹⁶ From our outsider perspective, however, the French (and to some extent Italian) New Right is the actual seedbed of identitarian thinking since the 1980s.

Guillaume Faye's *Why We Fight* (2001) establishes the identitarian turn of ~~the~~ New Right. Faye's *The New Jewish Question* (2007) claims that the struggle for white survival is necessary because of massive Muslim immigration to Europe. Renaud Camus's *The Great Replacement* (2011) argues that the entire European population ~~is being~~~~will be~~ replaced in two or three generations because ~~the~~ Muslim immigrants have so ~~much offspring~~~~many~~ ~~children~~. The historian Dominique Venner has provided an identitarian view of French and European civilization. After his ostentatious suicide ~~in 2013~~ at the altar of Notre Dame cathedral in Paris ~~in 2013~~ (imitating the seppuku of Japanese writer Yukio Mishima), Venner has become the martyr and saint of European identitarians.¹⁷

Through his Arktos Publishing, nowadays located in Budapest, the Swedish identitarian activist Daniel Friberg publishes English editions of the seminal French works, exercising a pan-European influence on the so-called "True Right". In Scandinavia, Friberg is also one of the founders of *Nordisk Alternativhöger* (Nordic Alt Right).¹⁸ While Friberg is the most influential North European identitarian, Kai Murros in Finland, Ruuben Kaalep in Estonia and Aurelija Anilyte in Denmark have received some fame in their international networks.¹⁹

Muotoiltu: Fontti: Kursivoitu

While people like Murros remain fairly unknown in their home countries, they ~~may~~~~can~~ exercise a considerable international influence in the digital world. Moreover, Sweden and Denmark are considered by some European identitarian authors to be the first actual battlefield between liberal multiculturalism and Islamic invasion.²⁰ For such reasons, ~~Northem~~ European countries play a distinctive role in various identitarian and populist visions.

Among the identitarians, the word "identity" means predominantly a homogenous cultural and national profile, closed borders and opposition to the European Union and other allegedly universalist political ventures. The origins of the identitarian movement can be expressed

¹⁵ Zuquete, *Identitarians*, 7-17.

¹⁶ Zuquete, *Identitarians* provides rich documentation of this.

¹⁷ Zuquete, *Identitarians*, 11-25, 145, 312.

¹⁸ Zuquete, *Identitarians*, 99-100, 301; Daniel Friberg, *The Real Right Returns*, (Budapest: Arktos, 2015).

¹⁹ Zuquete, *Identitarians*, 89, 249, 334.

²⁰ Zuquete, *Identitarians*, 333-334 (the international role of Murros), 354-356 (Sweden and Denmark in the texts of Julian Langness and Georges Feltrin-Tracol).

with the slogan: “In the beginning ... there was anti-universalism”²¹ The identitarian meaning is quickly becoming the new primary sense of identity politics also in the English-language media also. In the ~~newspaper~~ *Guardian newspaper*, Sheri Berman argues that identity politics benefits the right more than the left. Like Lilla, she maintains that the left needs to help citizens see what unites them, instead of focusing on their differences.²²

Berman argues that both progressives s and conservatives people have a predispositions towards intolerance. These predispositions take power when a sufficient external stimulus is given. Donald Trump’s presidency provides such a stimulus for the liberals, whereas increased immigration may be a stimulus for the conservatives. In both camps, or in all camps, this psychological dynamics creates intolerance rather than tolerance. For such reasons, identity politics should not operate with differences but rather with increased universalism. Berman quotes Karen Stenner’s psychological research, indicating that the exposure to difference aggravates intolerance instead of alleviating it. At the same time, “nothing inspires greater tolerance from the intolerant than an abundance of common and unifying beliefs, practices, rituals, institutions and processes.”²³ While the *Stanford Encyclopedia* defends a radically pluralist politics of recognition, Berman points to the benefits of actual uniformity.

Kommentoinut [GW7]: Given: or: applied

On the one hand, Christianity is ~~on the one hand~~ a universalist religion. On the other hand, it often relies on traditionalism s, with all kinds of particularities and differences. How does Christianity fit into the framework of identitarian developments? Initially, the French New Right was secularist, preferring ethnic traditions to Christian universalism. This preference changed considerably with the debates related to the new marriage law in France in 2012-2014. The identitarians opposed homosexual marriage and became allied with Christian conservatives in this venture. The so-called “*La Manif pour tous*” demonstrations against the new marriage law united Catholic traditionalists with the identitarians.²⁴

Muotoiltu: Fontti: Kursivoitu

After these events, there are diverse connections between the identitarian movement and the traditionalist Catholic programme of a “Christian comeback” after the liberal times of the Second Vatican Council. In many ways, Catholic identitarians are a minority in the church, opposing Pope Francis’s liberal stance towards asylum seekers. However, in France, Poland and Hungary the identitarians can also count on considerable support from traditionalist Catholic circles.²⁵ In Russia, the Orthodox church clearly supports nationalist causes and Russia is also seen as a positive model country in some identitarian circles.²⁶

The links between conservative Protestants and identitarians remain poorly studied. In the following, it is will be shown that such a link exists in today’s Finland. Recently, the liberal Nordic countries have seen an uprise of in populist and nationalist parties which oppose universalist and globalist values. As these countries have established Lutheran churches

²¹ Zuquete, *Identitarians*, 105.

²² Sheri Berman, “Why identity politics benefits the right more than the left,” *Guardian*, August 14, 2018.

²³ Ibid.; Karen Stenner, *The Authoritarian Dynamic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

²⁴ Zuquete, *Identitarians*, 220-222.

²⁵ Zuquete, *Identitarians*, 218-226.

²⁶ Zuquete, *Identitarians*, 231-232.

which are predominantly liberal, one may ask whether the conservative Christians in these churches see their anti-liberal stance also in political and even identitarian terms. In the following, ~~(This question is in the following will be~~ approached with the help of one particular case. It is too early to say whether it is symptomatic of ~~something a~~ more general phenomenon.

2. The Right Media: How Religious and Populist Causes Coincide in Finland

Some demographic background is necessary in order to describe the case at hand. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF) had four million members in 2017, making comprising about 70 % of the entire population of Finland. While the overall leadership and membership of this church represents liberal mainline Lutheranism, a considerable ~~amount~~ number of conservatives are also active within the church. For the most part, the conservatives stem from the traditional Pietistic movements ~~operating that have operated~~ in Finland since the nineteenth century. Nowadays they have strong ties with Anglo-American evangelicalism. At the same time, most Finnish conservatives emphasize their strongly confessional Lutheranism.

While in Sweden and Norway many conservative movements have left the established church, most Finnish conservatives remain members of the ELCF. They have links with Pentecostals and small free churches through the Christian Democratic Party (CDP) which is represented in the Parliament with an electorate of 4-5 % of all votes. The long-time leader of the CDP, Päivi Räsänen, was the Minister of the Interior from 2011 to 2015. She is a confessional Lutheran who is against women's ordination and criticizes the liberal abortion laws of Finland. The ELCF as a whole does not share the conservative interests of the CDP, which therefore remains a minor party of conservative evangelicals.

As key minister for immigration, Päivi Räsänen promoted fairly liberal policies. Thus, her political stance in this matter deviated significantly from the populist conservative party, the so-called Finns Party (perussuomalaiset), earlier also known as the "True Finns".²⁷ In the big major European refugee crisis of 2015-2016, the positions of liberal and conservative Christians in Finland were remarkably similar, advocating an increased responsibility and openness towards asylum seekers. This is important because Finns in general have restrictive attitudes towards immigrants and because the Finns Party has been victorious in two parliamentary elections (2011 and 2015) with its anti-immigrant and anti-EU agenda.

In many other respects, Finnish conservative Lutherans feel marginalized in religious and public life. Because they do not accept women's ordination, their young theologians cannot normally become ordained as pastors of the ELCF. This has led to complex double structures in church and worship life. On moral issues, the conservatives' positions often differ from Finnish liberal and permissive stances. They nowadays tacitly approve divorce but are against gay marriage, which has recently been approved by the state and is currently finding its way into the liberal church life as well.

²⁷ As the English name of the party, "The Finns" and "The Finns Party" are nowadays more official. The older translation "True Finns" can also be found in English sources.

Lutheranism is an interesting denomination from the perspective of recognition theory, because Lutheran identity is typically defined with a view to a ~~bigger-larger~~ party considered as problematic. Lutheran confessional writings define ~~the~~ church identity relationally, pointing out how Lutherans deviate from the Roman Catholic church. Confessional Lutherans in Finland typically construct their identity in terms of difference from the established church that is regarded as too liberal and accommodating. In this manner, Lutheran group identity is deeply heteronomous in its dependence on the point of comparison.²⁸

Finnish conservatives do not want to leave the established church, but say that they aim at renewing it in their own fashion. The dilemma of leaving or remaining is very complex and also connected to financial and social benefits. One practical consequence of this dilemma is that the conservatives are openly critical ~~to~~ of the bishops and other mainline church leaders. Leaving the church, however, would end this criticism and, as a consequence, end the process of creating identity in terms of relational heteronomy. As this process is the standard way of defining identity in Lutheranism, it is still ~~today~~ preferred today to other ways.

As our test case deals with the links between the Finns Party and religious conservatives, one needs to emphasize that before the digital era such links were not programmatic but accidental ~~before the digital era~~. While for a long time the Finns Party has ~~for a long time~~ included many committed Christians, one cannot ~~see-discern~~ any earlier institutional links between Finnish conservative Christians and the Finns Party. The CDP continues to be the political wing of conservative evangelicals.

This state of affairs resembles the relationship between Donald Trump and conservative evangelicals in America. On the one hand, the non-religious populism of Trump remains very different from Christian causes. On the other hand, political mechanisms can be created through which conservative evangelicals can support Trump. Is it possible to construct similar mechanisms in a Nordic country like Finland? If ~~the~~ evangelicals feel marginalized and cannot subscribe to the liberal values of the Finnish state and the established church, populist writers can develop a mechanism to channel conservative religious feelings towards populist political goals.

If conservative Christians feel that they are positively recognized by the populists, they can be made to support their causes as well. Our following test case considers this possibility. At the same time, the test case shows that nothing is clear and straightforward in the digital world. We are operating with ad hoc communities which give weak signals. As scholars, we should listen to these weak signals and consider their significance.

On July 27, 2018, a conservative evangelical professor of education at the University of Jyväskylä, Tapio Puolimatka, lamented in the populist digital media *Oikea Media* (oikeamedia.com, “the right media” in Finnish) that the recent increase in gay rights ~~means~~ meant that paedophilia, another trait of permissive society, ~~will-would~~ also soon be legalized.²⁹ When the Rector of the University, Keijo Hämäläinen, said that he ~~must-had to~~

²⁸ For a general introduction, see e.g. Eric Gritsch, *A History of Lutheranism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002).

²⁹ Tapio Puolimatka, “Kampanja pedofilian laillistamiseksi,” *Blogi, Oikea media*, July 27, 2018, <https://www.oikeamedia.com/o1-75907>.

discuss such statements with Puolimatka, on August 1 *Oikea Media* published a defense of Puolimatka on August 1, stating that “political persecution is happening at the University of Jyväskylä university.”³⁰

Päivi Räsänen rushed to defend Puolimatka’s academic freedom. On August 7, she presented in ~~the~~ Parliament an official question to the Finnish Government, stating that the freedom of speech of Professor Puolimatka had been jeopardized through the actions of Rector Hämäläinen. She urged the Finnish government to take action to secure the freedom of academic research.³¹

On August 13, *Oikea Media* published an extensive defense of Puolimatka with the headline “Does the University of Jyväskylä promote the legalization of paedophilia?” A byline punchline of the same article states that “the red-green sexual-radical campaigne is an open attack against true academic freedom”. In this article, Päivi Räsänen’s defense of Puolimatka was supported with-by the extensive comments of Juha Ahvio, a conservative pastor and Docent of-in Dogmatics at the University of Helsinki.³²

Kommentoanut [GW8]: I’m used to seeing this term applied to jokes – does this mean “byline”?

Oikea Media was established in January 2017 and has meanwhile in the meantime has become the leading alternative populist media in Finland. Looking at the stories, advertisements and blogs available in this webzine, one can see its proximity to the Finns Party. With regard to our topic, it is important to note that *Oikea Media* frequently deals with religious, moral and academic issues.

In Summer 2017, the Finns Party was split into two factions, the moderate ones leaving the party and establishing a new political group.³³ The most vocally Christian leaders were among those who left the party. The current leader of the Finns Party, Jussi Halla-aho, describes himself as non-religious agnostic. Because of his vehement criticism of Islam, Halla-aho has sometimes been regarded as hostile to all kinds of religious views. The populist nationalism of the Finns Party is thus fairly secular in its general outlook.

In the Puolimatka case, however, *Oikea Media* often emphasizes Christian values. Learned theologians contribute actively to *Oikea Media*, defending its positions. While Halla-aho’s Finns Party continues to be hostile to asylum seekers, it is remarkable that Päivi Räsänen from-of the CDP supports *Oikea Media*’s writings regarding the Puolimatka case. Obviously, Puolimatka does not speak of-about Islam, but of-about sexual ethics. In this manner, *Oikea Media* seeks support from those conservative Christians who do not oppose immigration but who are most certainly against paedophilia. With the help of the Puolimatka case, *Oikea Media* and the Finns Party can appear as defenders of traditional Christian values.

³⁰ Jukka Rahkonen, “Jyväskylän yliopistolla muhii poliittiset vainot,” *Oikea media*, August 1, 2018, <https://www.oikeamedia.com/o1-76812>.

³¹ Päivi Räsänen, “Kirjallinen kysymys korkeimman opetuksen ja tutkimuksen sananvapauden turvaamisesta,” accessed January 21, 2019, https://www.eduskunta.fi/Fl/vaski/Kysymys/Documents/KK_309+2018.pdf.

³² Tytti Salenius, “Onko Jyväskylän yliopistossa meneillään monitahoinen kampanja pedofilian laillistamiseksi?,” *Oikea media*, August 13, 2018, <https://www.oikeamedia.com/o1-78809>.

³³ For this and the following, see e.g. Lauri Nurmi, *Perussuomalaisten hajoamisen historia* (Helsinki: Into, 2017).

The Puolimatka case created a snowball effect in ~~bigger-larger~~ Finnish newspapers and television channels. The position of Rector Hämäläinen was supported, among others, by the University of Jyväskylä Students' Union, the Finnish Union of University Professors, the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters, and the Sexpo Foundation that attends to human sexual rights. Among numerous individual supporters of Hämäläinen were Björn Vikström, the ELCF Bishop of Porvoo, and Petri Luomanen, Vice-Dean for Research at the Faculty of Theology in the University of Helsinki. Puolimatka's rights to present his case were defended, in addition to *Oikea Media*, by ~~a few~~ ~~a couple of~~ professors and ~~pastors~~.³⁴

Reading this documentation, one cannot escape the impression that Puolimatka lost his case completely in the public sphere. Even Päivi Räsänen does not say that she agrees with him but states only that Puolimatka's freedom of speech must be respected. However, this complete misrecognition of Puolimatka meant an increased recognition of *Oikea Media* in the Finnish media scene and among conservative Christians. Through the Puolimatka case, this alternative media became much better known in Finland. ~~Thus, the~~ Puolimatka case is ~~thus~~ a model example of what is in the populist discourse called "liberal tears". In this strategy, you aim at creating negative reactions from people whom your own potential supporters count as their adversaries. If liberal academics shed tears over your opinions, they can ~~easier-more~~ ~~easily~~ be embraced by ~~the~~ conservatives.

Most importantly, the Puolimatka case displays conspicuous similarities with the above-mentioned French case of 2012-2014, referred to as "*La Manif pour tous*". In the French case, the New Right and the identitarians joined religious conservatives in their opposition ~~of to~~ the legalisation of homosexual marriage in France. ~~The~~ joint mass protests were called with the slogan "manifestation for everyone". The protests did not ~~stop-halt~~ the legislation, but they initiated a new "Christian populism" and "Catholic identitarianism".³⁵ Like in the Puolimatka case, sexual ethics was instrumental in creating this new alliance. Like in the Puolimatka case, the failure of the actual case was nevertheless a victory for those who intended to win Christians for the identitarian cause.

In Finland, ~~a~~ similar legislation took effect in 2017. It was opposed by a conservative Christian coalition, "*aito avioliitto*" (True Marriage). The Finnish *Aito avioliitto* employs the same logo as *La Manif pour tous* in France, depicting a husband, a wife, a son and a daughter holding each other's hands. *Aito avioliitto* was initiated by Jukka-Pekka Rahkonen. He is today the editor-in-chief of *Oikea Media*. Because of all these similarities, one can draw the conclusion that the Puolimatka case ~~is-was~~ not merely spontaneous. It repeats a pattern which was earlier employed in France. While one cannot find hard evidence of it having been politically steered ~~from-by~~ the Finns Party or the CDP (or both), the activism of *Oikea Media* was carefully planned.

³⁴ "Kohu kirjoituksesta 'Kampanja pedofilian laillistamiseksi'," *ApoWiki*, accessed January 2019, [https://apowiki.fi/wiki/Kohu kirjoituksesta %22Kampanja pedofilian laillistamiseksi%22](https://apowiki.fi/wiki/Kohu_kirjoituksesta_%22Kampanja_pedofilian_laillistamiseksi%22). This website collects the entire debate and presents it from the perspective of conservative Christians but recording also the non-conservative contributions fairly and in detail. For a large-scale overview of the entire Finnish debate, see also Petri Jääskeläinen, "Jumala, Trump ja Putin," *Kirkko ja kaupunki*, August 20, 2018, <https://www.kirkkojakaupunki.fi/-/jumala-trump-ja-putin-kristillisen-konservatiivioikeiston-toiminta-suomessa-kulkee-samoilla-raiteilla-kuin-yhdysvaltain-evankelikaaleilla>

³⁵ Zuquete, *Identitarians*, 220.

Komentoinut [GW9]: Does this mean "two" here? If not, I suggest "a few"

Komentoinut [GW10]: Footnote: check formatting of url

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Kentän koodi muuttunut

In sum, the snowball effect of liberal criticism gave *Oikea Media* the golden opportunity to present itself and the Finns Party as friends and supporters of conservative Christians. Neither Puolimatka nor Räsänen are known as the Finns Party adherents, but they are well-known religious conservatives who are often mocked by the liberals. As a skilled politician, the CDP's Päivi Räsänen immediately seized the opportunity to form a new kind of conservative coalition with the Finns Party in the field of sexual ethics and religion.

Among *Oikea Media* blog writers, the theologian Juha Ahvio in particular has been busy in creating this new constellation of values.³⁶ Ahvio uses the title Research Director of the Patmos Mission Foundation, a conservative evangelical association. In his blogs, Ahvio takes up political topics and gives them a Christian coloring. He praises the ~~Braslian~~Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, the Swedish populist party *Sverigedemokraterna* and the Dutch populist leader Geert Wilders. Like the European identitarians, Ahvio supports Donald Trump, connecting him with Christian values.³⁷

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In his blog of 21 December 2018, titled "What Is Permitted to Say about Islam and the European Union", Ahvio takes up the basic identitarian doctrine regarding the "great replacement". Mentioning Renaud Camus by name, Ahvio considers that the entire population of Europe is about to be replaced with Africans. The European Union is actually realizing a "politics of population replacement". Emanuel Macron has a positive expectation, according to Ahvio, that 200 Million Africans will come to Europe in next twenty years.³⁸

Some of Ahvio's blogs have devotional content, giving *Oikea Media* a distinctly religious flavor. In his Christmas blog of 2018, Ahvio describes the doctrines of the Trinity, the incarnation and the virgin birth. In the human nature of God-man Jesus, "the x-chromosome comes from Mary and the genes of the y-chromosome from God". While this blog is otherwise traditional and orthodox, it thus highlights the particular masculinity of God.³⁹ In Ahvio's Christianity, the y-chromosome has a-theological significance.

³⁶ For this and the following, see Juha Ahvio's "blogi" at *Oikea media*, accessed January 21, 2019, <https://www.oikeamedia.com/blogit>.

³⁷ Ahvio, "Kansalliskonservatiiviset Ruotsidemokraatit nousevat Ruotsissa," *Blogi, Oikea media*, September 1, 2018, https://oikeamedia.com/o1-80812?fbclid=IwAR2qjBIsDd6C9eXsIOEYJKaUBtTykUIo_GfNjiFH2dU5OXqMNWXqyzmDrDI; "Dosentti Markku Ruotsilan pätevä analyysi USA:n sydänmaiden konservatiivien kapinasta," *Blogi, Oikea media*, November 2, 2018, https://oikeamedia.com/o1-87716?fbclid=IwAR0mLDYfOVFFMLRCRF06vU2YKmDaq4_Sk8HL6C1HQLJdwdY7ndr0bmOjbc0; "Trump ja republikaanit saivat strategisen torjuntavoiton USA:n välivaleissa," *Blogi, Oikea media*, November 8, 2018, <https://oikeamedia.com/o1-88317>; "Presidentti Jair Bolsonaro ja Brasilian konservatiivinen vastavallankumous," *Blogi, Oikea media*, 25 November, 2018, <https://oikeamedia.com/o1-90006>; "GCM-sopimus edistää globalistista YK-radikalismia," *Blogi, Oikea media*, January 5, 2019, <https://oikeamedia.com/o1-94416>. For Trump and Identitarians, see Zuquete, *Identitarians*, 261-262.

³⁸ Ahvio, "Mitä islamista ja Euroopan unionista saa Suomessa sanoa?," *Blogi, Oikea media*, December 21, 2018, <https://www.oikeamedia.com/o1-92711>.

³⁹ Ahvio, "Jumalan Pojan inkarnaatio on joulun ydinsanoma myös vuonna 2018," *Blogi, Oikea media*, December 23, 2018, <https://www.oikeamedia.com/o1-92906>. This is my hermeneutical interpretation of Ahvio's intention. A biologist might remark that the divine origin of the y-chromosome would mean a lack of masculinity in Jesus.

Muotoiltu: Fontti: Kursivoitu

Kentän koodi muuttunut

The identitarians criticize ~~the~~ “effeminate Euro men” and see ~~the~~ feminine modernity in terms of problematic weakness. Their own Christian faith is regarded as “proud, combatant, chivalrous, sacral and aesthetic”, whereas modern liberal faith represents “effete Christianity, desacralized and soft.”⁴⁰ Western liberals suffer from “devirilization”, in which “feminist, xenophile, homophile, and humanitarian values” are exaggerated and “the idea of ~~the~~ war and the figure of the soldier” are neglected.⁴¹

Ahvio has a twofold mission. Ahvio proclaims an anti-liberal, masculine Christianity in this identitarian sense. At the same time, he attempts to persuade ~~the~~ atheist and secularist identitarians to see how Christianity can contribute to the anti-universalist cause of the Finns Party. ~~Ahvio has a twofold mission.~~

Another active theologian and ~~blogist-blogger in at~~ *Oikea Media* is Arto Luukkanen, Lecturer ~~of in~~ Russian and Eastern European Studies at the University of Helsinki.⁴² Luukkonen is also the Chair of the Executive Board of Suomen Perusta Foundation, a political think tank allied with the Finns Party. He does not proclaim conservative Christianity in the fashion of Ahvio but writes as an academic expert on history and values. Luukkanen appeared ~~in on~~ the television channel Alfa tv together with Puolimatka on August 8, 2018, defending ~~the~~ freedom of speech. At the same time, he appealed ~~eds~~ to common sense and moderation.⁴³ ~~In On~~ the pro-Christian spectrum of *Oikea Media*, one can find both moderate ~~d~~ academic expertise (Luukkanen) and ardent identitarianism (Ahvio), suiting to different electoral tastes.

Oikea Media blog writers like to use academic titles. Several professors, docents and ~~Ph.Ds~~ ~~doctors~~ write regular blogs. There is even an anonymous blog, “Professor’s Thoughts,” which gives expert opinions on many issues, often in an almost daily ~~rhytm~~ ~~basis~~.⁴⁴ An occasional reader of *Oikea Media* receives the impression that the webzine is predominantly run by academic experts. In this regard, *Oikea Media* displays a certain affinity to Pierre Vial, Dominique Venner and other prominent ideologists of the French New Right and identitarian movement. While the content of their message often remains populist ~~ie~~, their argumentation is based on the values of European civilization as understood by historians and other professional academics. Such values include freedom of speech and conservative-masculine family ethos.

Kommentoinut [GW11]: Does this mean “Ph.Ds”?

3. From Populism to Recognition Theories

Our interest ~~towards in~~ identitarian movements derives from our long-term research work in the project “Reason and Religious Recognition”, funded by the Academy of Finland at the

⁴⁰ Zuquete, *Identitarians*, 219, 342.

⁴¹ Zuquete, *Identitarians*, 341, referring to Guillaume Faye.

⁴² Arto Luukkanen, *Blogi, Oikea media*, accessed January 21, 2019, <https://www.oikeamedia.com/blogit>.

⁴³ *AlfaTV*, accessed January 21, 2019, <http://www.permanto.fi/fi/web/alfatv/player/vod?assetId=10763988%20>.

⁴⁴ Anonymous, “Professorin ajatuksia”, *Blogi, Oikea media*, accessed January 21, 2019, <https://www.oikeamedia.com/blogit>.

University of Helsinki. In this project, we focus on the significance of so-called recognition procedures in the history of ideas as well as in contemporary Western society.⁴⁵

Current recognition theory is often considered to have emerged after Charles Taylor's influential essay mentioned above. Recognition theory can thus be interpreted ~~to lend~~ as lending support to non-universalist views of society. The emergence of identitarian movements shows, however, that anti-universalism can also lead to significant problems. Therefore, we need to ask in this last part of our paper how recognition procedures, identity politics and universalism can coexist in social theory.

After dealing with the Finnish example in 2 above, let us think about the relationship between recognition procedures and identitarian politics more generally. While ~~the~~ liberal U.S. identity politics employs recognition theory, no such historical connection can be observed with regard to French identitarian writers. Alain de Benoist often mentions ~~often~~ Charles Taylor and the communitarian philosophers⁴⁶, and, obviously, a generally anti-universalist thinking can make such connections. Nevertheless, ~~the~~ French origins of the movement are ~~nevertheless~~ historically independent of Taylor's recognition theory.

Since the 1990s, Axel Honneth has developed a theory of recognition which can cope with different social phenomena in greater detail than Taylor's rather general outline. Honneth considers, for instance, that the so-called "respect" dimension of recognition is universal and concerns all citizens alike. The dimensions of "love" and "esteem" are more individual and distinct but they are not everything in recognition. Universal and distinctive variants of interhuman recognition coexist in different spheres of human life.⁴⁷

Kommentout [GW12]: Not clear what this means here

In his ~~new~~ 2018 book ~~of 2018~~, Honneth reflects on ~~the~~ so-called pathologies of recognition. In his Hegelian terminology, "pathology" means ~~such~~ false or problematic psychological and social reactions in which one can nevertheless see traces of that "healthy" interaction which establishes social recognition.⁴⁸ While Honneth advocates Hegel's view of recognition, he is ready to admit that this view also includes certain pathologies. He treats Hegel's view of family, marriage and women as an example. Honneth grants that the Hegelian tradition does not take the equality of women seriously enough,⁴⁹ and that a male-centered societal recognition is a blind spot of this tradition.⁴⁹

To some extent, ~~the~~ strong connection between recognition, identity politics, and multiculturalism may ~~to some extent~~ have been prompted by Charles Taylor's above-mentioned considerations on the politics of recognition. Honneth's social and political thought, on the other hand, is not restricted to distinctive identities.⁵⁰ His version of recognition theory, ~~in particular~~ where ~~the dimension of~~ "respect" ~~dimension~~ is concerned, is compatible with universalism. Thus, in a conceptual sense, Taylor's move from

⁴⁵ For this work, see Risto Saarinen, *Recognition and Religion: A Historical and Systematic Study* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016) and Maijastina Kahlos, Heikki Koskinen & Ritva Palmén, eds., *Recognition and Religion: Contemporary and Historical Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2019).

⁴⁶ So Zuquete, *Identitarians*, 11.

⁴⁷ Axel Honneth, *Kampf um Anerkennung* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1992).

⁴⁸ Axel Honneth, *Anerkennung: eine europäische Ideengeschichte* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2018), 214-215.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 219-223.

⁵⁰ For comparisons between Taylor and Honneth, see Thompson, *Political Theory*.

the politics of universalism to a politics of recognition is not a necessary one. In particular, the radical variant of such a move available in recent identity politics is only one very specific option available within the larger theory of recognition.

In our view, the identitarian developments discussed above clearly manifest a “pathological” variant of identity formation. While they apply a non-universalist politics of recognition, this application does not enhance social cohesion, but rather evokes reactions that create polarization and exclusion in a democratic society. For recognition theory and identity politics based on such theory, this means a certain vulnerability. One cannot easily separate healthy identities from pathological ones. Very different people can construct very different identities through-by applying procedures of recognition and misrecognition. For such reasons, identity politics can also take identitarian and populist shapes/forms. Several problems must be avoided here. On the one hand, we cannot simply distinguish between “good” and “bad” identities. On the other hand, some procedures are arguably more harmful and manipulative than others.

Kommentoinut [GW13]: Does this mean “the identitarian developments discussed above”?

If universal and unproblematic recognition is not content-determined, can it produce any kind of identity? Let us distinguish between generic and qualitative identity. Generic identity has to do with what we fundamentally are; namely human beings, persons and autonomous agents. Qualitative identity has to do with who we are in the sense of the more specific qualities, features and properties that we happen to instantiate.

When universalist policies and our universal sameness are being discussed under discussion, it is the generic sense of identity that is in play. When distinctive cultural, ethnic, religious or sexual identities are at stake, it is rather the qualitative sense of identity that is meant. Such forms of qualitative identity can also be seen as contingent in nature, and as something historically, socially and psychologically constructed. Thus, there is no necessary connection with their-a supposed “metaphysical givenness”. If any such givenness is assumed for qualitative identities, then this is an additional assumption, and should be treated accordingly. With “given” differences, we easily end up with problematic identitarian stances.

Let us briefly focus on the structural functions of distinctive qualitative identities. They are important for us because they provide an understanding of who we are and of our defining characteristics as human beings. With their help, we construct our lives as men and as women, as Christians and as Muslims, as religious persons and as non-religious persons, as liberals and as conservatives, as Democrats and as Republicans. To thus speak of living-as-something is precisely to talk about identities in a qualitative sense. The narrative of “living-as-something” need not be metaphysically given, but it has the risk to-become-of becoming such.

Collective identities that equip us with this sense of “living as something”, provide norms or models which play a role in shaping our plans of our lives/life. They effectively function as kinds of narratives that individual persons (and in an extended sense also groups and institutions) can use in shaping their projects and in telling their life stories. The identitarian movement is: a warning case of a “metaphysically given” narrative which becomes outwardly hostile and creates its identity through strict exclusion. In socially pathological cases,

Kommentoinut [GW14]: Plans of life: does this mean “plans for our lives”?

Kommentoinut [GW15]: Warning: or, “cautionary”

homogenous identity profiles can become outwardly hostile and inwardly too tightly scripted, which connects the topic of identity with the themes of social oppression and political power.

The theoretical lesson to be learned from this case is that our identity narratives, our “living-as-something,” need to avoid both shapeless universalism and exclusively given identity profiles. Within a pluralistic global context as well as within multicultural societies defined by narrower national borders, the empirical reality of “living-as-something” gives rise to the need for human beings to somehow coexist despite their differences of opinion and regardless of their conflicts over various beliefs and practices. This reality does not call for identitarian solutions but ~~to~~ rather for attitudes in which both sameness and difference can coexist. How ~~can~~ might this be possible?

Building on the theoretical work of Honneth and Rainer Forst,⁵¹ let us claim that the attitude and dimension of *respect*, on the one hand, is related to the universal sameness of all humans as members of the same community, fellow citizens and legal subjects. The dimension of *esteem*, on the other hand, is related to qualitative identity. Although esteem is important for individuals’ self-relations and communities of expertise, it is a more demanding conception of recognition than respect. This is because it may be challenging or impossible to directly esteem identities that one takes to be somehow bad or false.

Moreover, recognizing our differences or distinctive identities instead of our commonalities or universal sameness may not always be a good idea, as this would mean an esteem that we are not ready to grant. This does not mean, however, that granting esteem to views different from one’s own ~~would be~~ impossible. A universalist way of providing positive recognition for different “living-as-something” identities can be based on taking the right to identity-formation as a universal right in itself, without incorporating any requirements for esteeming some given particular identities. Other chapters in this book, dealing ~~for instance~~ with group rights and minority rights, can provide legal models of recognition to achieve this moderately universalist end.

In concrete terms, we may find it valuable that there are conservative religious persons although we do not agree with them. Or, from a different perspective, we may find the ~~so-called~~ “red-green” liberals valuable discussion partners even when we want to remain traditionalists ourselves. Granting such “content-~~u~~ndetermined” esteem to others means that we avoid polarizations and affirm both ~~of~~ “living-as-something” and some kind of a multicultural democratic setting. In terms of our above-mentioned examples, this means that the Puolimatka case manifests a problematic identitarian way of constructing “given” enemies. The contrast between Norwegians and Jews in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* can also lead to harmfully polarized “given” identities. While ~~the~~ identitarians manifest the problem of “given” pathological identities particularly well, ~~the~~ liberals are not immune to ~~this-the~~ problem of exaggerated polarization.

For Lutherans in particular, ~~such polarization~~ ~~this~~ may also mean that the Lutheran concept of confessional identity cannot be merely heteronomous and relational. One needs to esteem some qualitative features not because they are for “us” and against “them” but since they

⁵¹ Honneth, *Kampf um Anerkennung* and Rainer Forst, *Toleranz im Konflikt* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2003). For interactions between respect and esteem, ~~cf. also~~ Thompson, *Political Theory*.

Kommentoinut [GW16]: Note 51: “cf. also”: does this mean “see also” or “compare” (“cf.”)

Kommentoinut [GW17]: I think “undetermined” would be better here

Kommentoinut [GW18]: Not clear to what “this” here refers

Muotoiltu: Korosta

instantiate the universal right to identity-formation. What Honneth calls the primacy of the individual⁵² may offer a way of granting esteem also to such others whose views we do not share. The trick is to avoid **polarizations** between us and them. In this manner, universalism and recognition can be meaningfully combined.

Kommentoinut [GW19]: Might “polarization” be better here?

We have not employed the phrase “reconfessionalization” in our analysis. As the populist movements often represent somewhat extreme versions of the late modern fragmentation and polarization of opinions, this phrase may have more adequate uses in some other contexts. As the identitarian movement is currently extending its influence to religious and theological matters, we nevertheless need to **be** aware of this influence when different variants of reconfessionalisation are being discussed.

A striking example of **this kind of influence** is provided by Juha Ahvio’s **blog-March 17, 2019 blog in Oikea Media in March 17, 2019**. In this blog, titled “Why does a Christian need to be a patriot with nationalist spirit?”, Ahvio argues that “our Protestant evangelical faith gives us a duty to have nationalist spirit”. He also says that the Bible obliges us to nationalism.⁵³ Such rhetorics could be labeled as religious renationalization, an idea that would have been unthinkable in Northern European countries before the most recent identitarian turn.

Kommentoinut [GW20]: This kind: “this kind of influence”?

⁵² Honneth, *Anerkennung*, 70-71, 226-227.

⁵³ Ahvio, “Vuosi 2019 totuuden valossa: Miksi kristityn tulee olla kansallismielisen isänmaallinen?” *Blogi, Oikea media*, March 17, 2019, <https://www.oikeamedia.com/o1-102312>. During the Spring of 2019, the connection between nationalism and Christian conservatism was discussed in Finland. For this, see Risto Saarinen, “Finnish New Right and Religious Right Converge,” University of Helsinki, last modified April 15, 2019, <https://www.helsinki.fi/en/news/nordic-welfare-news/finnish-new-right-and-religious-right-converge>.

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