

## A Shared Pre-Christian Past?

### Contemporary Finnish Baptism in Light of Greenlandic Naming Rituals

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*This article will employ examinations of baptism ritual in Finland and Greenland to argue that it may be fruitful to orient discussions of Finnish religiosity, and possibly even culture more broadly, towards the Greenlandic Inuit rather than Finland's Scandinavian neighbours, as often occurs. The article will demonstrate that the pre-Christian world-view of both cultures was shamanistic and that this was not shared to the same extent in the Scandinavian countries. The article will show that this comparable shamanistic world-view can be observed in contemporary attitudes to Lutheran baptism in both countries which, as life changing rituals or Rites of Passage, would be most likely to preserve traditional perspectives. The article will examine the possible consequences of this for future anthropological discussion of Finnish religion and cultural dynamics and suggest that comparison to Greenland may be helpful in furthering our understanding of Finnish religiosity.*

#### **Introduction**

A great deal has been written on the way in which Finnish culture is 'unique' or uniquely 'between east and west' and thus distinct from that of its Scandinavian neighbours. The tourist book *Portraying Finland* (Otava 2005) summarises its discussion of Finland's 'unique' culture with the question, 'An Eastern or Western Identity?' and proceeds to argue that Finland has aspects of both. Aini Rajanen (1984) has produced a book aiming to introduce Finnish culture to interested foreigners. She asks 'Why are (the Finns) so different, so individual, so fiercely independent? The answer lies in the country's history' (1984: 11). She then proceeds to explain that the history has

involved being dominated by both East (Russia) and West (Sweden).<sup>1</sup> Even some academic literature has used this 'between-ness' as an explanation, implicitly or explicitly, for this supposed cultural 'uniqueness.' Finnish anthropologist Juha Pentikäinen (1995) argues that Finland is 'Between East and West' while Russian sociologist Anatole Mazour (1975) titles his study *Finland Between East and West*. However, Finnish Christianity – because the country is predominantly 'Lutheran' – is normally placed alongside that of other 'Scandinavian countries' (e.g Davie 2000).

This article will take issue with this categorisation. It will argue that, in certain highly significant rituals, the Finnish Lutheran Church still noticeably reflects a form of pre-Christian, shamanistic religiosity which has more in common with the Greenlandic Inuit practice of Lutheranism – which has been described as a Christian 'veneer' – than it does with that of other Scandinavian countries. In demonstrating this point, the article will concentrate on the ritual of baptism. It will draw upon my own fieldwork at Finnish baptisms and also that of Greenland expert Mark Nuttall (1992) with regard to those in Greenland. In making a comparison, this article will first criticise the Cultural Relativist model and submit that it is indeed possible to compare cultures and dimensions of culture. The article will argue that the pre-Christian religions of the two countries have a great deal in common with each other and we may be able to further our understanding of both contemporary Finnish religiosity and Finland's past religiosity through a comparison to Greenland. It will then demonstrate how this comparable world-view, and shamanistic religiosity, can be noted in baptisms in both countries. Finally, it will suggest that this salient difference may assist in explaining the ways in which some aspects of Finnish religion might be seen to differ from its immediate neighbours. From an 'anthropology of religion' perspective, it may be that Finnish religion – and even aspects of contemporary Lutheranism – should be compared to Greenland rather than to its former colonial master Sweden and this comparison might allow us to learn more about Finnish religion and its historical development.<sup>2</sup>

### **Cultural Relativism**

The problem with terming something such as a culture 'unique' is that it effectively implies that it cannot be understood or even that it is futile to attempt to understand it. If something is 'unique' or uniquely 'between' two other things then it cannot, in itself, really be compared to anything else and nor is it possible to even argue that it has observably different results – according to a shared standard – than another system. This is, therefore, the kind of cultural relativism that has been promoted first by American anthropologist Franz Boas (1858-1942) and then by his student at New York's Columbia University in the 1920s Margaret Mead (1901-1978). In brief summary, the argument runs that any anthropologist's cultural analysis will be heavily influenced by his own

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<sup>1</sup> Finland was ruled by Sweden from the 1100s until 1809 and then Russia from 1809 to independence in 1917. From the end of World War II until 1991 it maintained strong links with the Soviet Union in a policy known as 'Finlandization.' However, it was not officially part of the Communist Block. Some scholars (e.g. James 1994) have implied that it was effectively a dictatorship for much of this period especially under President Urho Kekkonen (1956 – 1981). However, it was still a multi-party democracy even if it was, as James argues, heavily managed.

<sup>2</sup> There has been some interesting research, however, on the supposedly austere culture that Lutheran countries, especially in Scandinavia, might be seen to share. See Ehenreich (2007).

culture meaning that he is himself a subject of analysis as much as the analysed. Secondly, the view that the anthropologist is from a somehow more developed culture studying a more primitive culture is criticised as 'racist' and ethnocentric as it is to suggest that there are measurable differences between the achievements of different cultures that are differently structured. Rather, all cultures are 'unique,' equal and 'equally valuable' and should be examined within the terms of the culture itself because to do otherwise is to imply some kind of cultural hierarchy or to express ones own cultural inculcation. Tribal and non-tribal cultures are assessed as broadly as possible to emphasise that all cultures are broadly equal (e.g. Sandall 2001: Ch. 4).

New Zealand anthropologist Roger Sandall (2001: 65) argues that to suggest that a culture – or even 'all cultures' – are unique and thus simply describe them within their own terms turns anthropology into little more than 'writing.' It also produces 'ego-centric naval-gazing' whereby 'so called anthropologists' analyse 'their own reactions to their own reactions' (67). The science of anthropology becomes little more than a form of intellectualised travel writing and self-analysis. More importantly Cultural Relativism wilfully ignores substantial structural and qualitative differences between cultures and idealises tribes. Tribal cultures are understood to simply be 'different' but Sandall argues that there is a 'Big Ditch' separating the tribe from the civilisation which involves 'huge political, economic and cognitive differences' including a very different understanding of truth and falsehood (viii) which relativists euphemistically term 'tribal knowledge' or 'culturally justified belief' (11). These relativist perspectives, Sandall argues, can be found in Romantic ideas that 'each culture is a semi-sacred creation, all cultures are equal and must not be compared and any attempt at assimilation is wicked' (89). Critiquing what he calls the 'Culture Cult,' Sandall demonstrates that different cultures lead to very different results in terms of the culturally shared desires such as survival. This is why, he suggests, people come from Africa travel to Europe for heart operations and not the other around. This is why the Western standard of living – in terms of shared desires such as to survive serious illness – is so much higher than is the case in much of Africa. Secondly, he argues that relativism brings about a kind of neo-racism amongst those whom it influences, though it is connected with the assumption that all races are 'equal' in the sense that it tends to emphasise culture over issues of heredity. The West reached its own position by gradually discarding traditions that were not conducive to progress. However, tribal cultures are encouraged to preserve less than successful traditions because they are distinctive parts of their culture. This has led, Sandall argues, to Australian Aborigines, for example, going backwards through the generations in terms of literacy (Ch 2.) because their tribal culture does not perceive 'education' as particularly important. Sandall notes that observing this is often dismissed as 'racism' in Australia.

Thirdly, he submits that relativism is inconsistent. He observes that cultural relativism developed as a response to the principle that human differences were mainly a matter of racial difference, including racial differences in intelligence.<sup>3</sup> Some relativist writers accuse hereditarians of being 'racist', often assuming that only 'racism' can underpin their examination of perceived

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<sup>3</sup> See Lynn (2006) for a contemporary exposition of this perspective.

racial difference or differences in cultural success.<sup>4</sup> Yet relativists should surely respect the culture even of a racist group (or any group at all) as a unique culture just as it does the many tribal cultures that employ bloody initiation rituals or bury disabled babies alive, such as is the case in some Amazonian tribes. Indeed, he argues that relativism has led to discussing the perhaps rather negative aspects of many tribal cultures becoming taboo. Fourthly, many prominent relativists have often based their research around a kind of idealised 'de-fanged' tribalism, where many of the less palatable traditions have been lost. Sandall argues that Margaret Mead 'projected her idealised fantasies' onto the Zuri of Samoa, completely ignoring the fact that until missionaries arrived they had been warring cannibals and overlooking numerous cultural dimensions.

Following this critique, I would argue that it is possible to compare different cultures and different forms of religiosity. The critique of so doing is sufficiently unconvincing that it is possible to proceed and anyway there is a reasonable case for suggesting that cultures can be compared. Though, as Edmund Leach (1973) argues in criticising Claude Levi-Strauss' structuralist analysis of Burmese tribes, it is important to have carried out – or to draw upon – sufficiently detailed fieldwork with those groups under analysis and to be clear about what units of a given concept one is comparing. An examination of structuralism is perhaps beyond the scope of this article but I would point the reader in the direction of Leach (1973) for a useful summary of structuralism and neo-structuralism.

### **Theological Contextualization**

In comparing Finnish and Greenlandic Paganism, the article will demonstrate that as both forms of religiosity appear to be of a similar kind – shamanistic – the process of theological contextualisation has occurred in a similar manner. David Chidester has conducted a detailed historical analysis of the spread of Christianity and has noted the way in which pre-Christian rituals and even ideas are integrated into non-Christian cultures when they are converted. Thus, in many cultures Goddess worship was replaced by the Cult of the Virgin Mary (Chidester 2000). To give another example, in England, Easter – commemorating Jesus' death and supposed resurrection – was able to supersede the Pagan celebration of the same name which celebrated the myth of 'John Barleycorn' being murdered but coming back to life in the form of the Spring corn.

In this context, I will argue that baptism in Finland and Greenland has come to replace a pre-Christian 'Naming Ceremony.' Moreover, I will suggest that in the context of a shamanistic worldview where there was a belief in a name-soul – a belief that remains in Greenland – this ceremony would be particularly important and would be likely to involve considerable taboo and heterodoxy.

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<sup>4</sup> It might be argued that levelling this accusation against academic argument might be seen as a kind of fallacious 'appeal to emotion' in Aristotle's terms.

## The Finnish Lutheran Church

But before examining Paganism and Rites of Passage, it would be useful to conduct a brief overview of both Lutheran churches. Christianity was introduced into Finland through a series of crusades from Sweden from the 1100s onwards and until 1809 Finland was a component part of Sweden. More than eighty-four percent of Finns are members of the Lutheran Church (Anttonen 2005: 127) and even more were baptised and confirmed into it but have left. Though church membership is gradually declining, there is a culture of attending church services – such as at Christmas, Easter or even Independence Day – in a way that is not seen in England, for example. Weekly church attendance is only four per cent (Davie 2000) but this, I would suggest, reflects historical living arrangements in which many Finns lived in isolated communities and did not attend church weekly. Still, the vast majority of Finns are baptised, confirmed, married and buried in the Lutheran church. It is thus highly influential in Finland.

Awakening groups are very influential within the Lutheran Church but perhaps more so in Finland than in other Lutheran churches. There is a case for claiming that Finland is more religiously conservative than its neighbours and has more in the way of pietist movements. Of course, there is conservative religiosity in Sweden (see, for example, Coleman 2000) but the Lutheran Church in Finland is more conservative than its established neighbours – evidenced, for example, in its relative lateness in ordaining women – and this may be at least in part due to the influence of Pietist revival movements within it. Certainly, Finland has more revival movements than its Nordic neighbours and a considerably higher involvement in these movements (e.g. Holm 1987). Former National Awakening Youth Leader Jussi Miettinen argued that revival movements were significant in Finland than in neighbouring countries claiming they are, ‘the heart of the church’ in Finland (Interview with author).<sup>5</sup>

It may be useful to take a brief overview of Finland’s revival movements, most of which began in the nineteenth century. There are four main revival movements in Finland, some with various sub-groups or schisms but all are within the Lutheran Church. Each movement has its own central organisation, a newspaper or magazine and even a summer convention which can attract thousands of attendees. The original ‘Pietist Movement’ was founded by a ‘peasant’ called Paavo Ruotsalainen (1778 – 1852). The core emphasis of this group was on humanity’s insignificance compared to God and the group also emphasises human sinfulness. The Evangelical Movement was founded by Frederik Hedberg (1811 – 1893). It split from the Pietists and tends to stress the importance of gaining salvation, most crucially through baptism. Henrik Renqvist (1789 – 1866) was leading figure in the ‘Praying Movement.’ Members of this small group, mainly found in the south west, may pray up to twenty times a day and some prayers may last for hours. They also emphasise private confession (Stoddard *et al*, 1973: 77-78). The largest revival movement in Finland is the Laestadians which was founded in Lapland by Swedish priest Rev’d Lars Laestadius (1800 – 1861). His was a highly conservative interpretation of Lutheranism, returning to traditional belief and rejecting liberal strains of thought. Many of these movements – and most notably the Laestadians –

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<sup>5</sup> For a history of the Finnish Lutheran Church prior to the nineteenth century see Jutikkala and Pirinen (1996).

tend towards teetotalism.<sup>6</sup> It should be emphasised that all these groups are part of the Finnish Lutheran Church. In the case of Laestadians, members would be likely to attend Laestadian meetings as well as well as a broader Lutheran service, though usually conducted by a Laestadian priest.

The most salient current debate within the Lutheran Church is over the position of women priests as certain male priests have refused to work with their female colleagues. This has focussed on the Diocese of Oulu and particularly the city of Oulu, in the north of the country, and has been reported in the national press with the Archbishop of Turku (the head of the church) requesting that priests who feel they cannot work with female colleagues seek other employment within the church (*Helsingin Sanomat*, 2007-05-08).<sup>7</sup>

### **The Danish Lutheran Church in Greenland**

Greenland was Christianised between 1721 and 1922, by which time the population was deemed to be acceptably 'Lutheran.'<sup>8</sup> The mission was through a combination of Danish Missionaries and a number of smaller Protestant groups such as the Herrnhutians. During this period, certain Inuit were educated in Danish which meant that, as in Finland under colonialism, the church services took place in the vernacular and the Bible was translated into that language. Greenland gained home rule from Denmark in 1979. Laugrand argues that 'missionary trends no longer dominate' within Denmark (2005) and Nuttall observes, as we shall see in more depth, that Greenlandic Lutheranism has preserved such practices and beliefs as the 'name soul' and certain attitudes to animals and the environment. Though the pietist groups seen in Finland are not observed, Nuttall points out that most Greenlandic are confirmed church members and church services are important to many people (Nuttall 1992: 31) while Langgard (1986) observes that, as in Finland, being 'piously religious' is defined by ones attitude to alcohol. In general, one either drinks very heavily or drinks nothing or very little, in which case one may involved in Christian-based temperance movements such as 'Blue Cross.'

There is very little research on the Greenlandic branch of the Danish Lutheran Church. However, according to a relatively recent interview with the current Bishop of Greenland, Rt. Rev'd Sofie Petersen, the main issues in the church are combating 'abortion,' which Nuttall argues was,

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<sup>6</sup> Finland's relatively strict alcohol laws might also be seen to reflect the influence of such movements. Finland had prohibition from 1919 to 1932. Levine (1993) argues that Finland's 'Temperance Culture' is related to such Protestant movements. He equally argues that Sweden, Norway and Iceland – though not Denmark – are 'Temperance Cultures' and this is related to a combination of Protestantism and the style and kind of alcohol consumption.

<sup>7</sup> Rev'd Satu Saarinen (2005) has produced an examination of 'discrimination' against women priests in the Diocese of Oulu. Until 2000, the Bishop of Oulu (who was replaced that year by a more liberal bishop) was a member of a small Laestadian group and he would not ordain women. Female priests who took jobs in the Diocese had to be ordained elsewhere. The thesis might be accused of bias because it was produced by a Lutheran priestess in the Oulu Diocese and begins each chapter with prominent pro-female Biblical quotes. The entire book begins with the quote 'As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him' (Luke 10:38). However, it summarizes its findings in English for interested international readers.

<sup>8</sup> There were a number of Inuit-led and often idiosyncratic revivals during this period. For further discussion see Kleivan (1986) or Guløv (1986). For a useful history of Greenland see Nuttall (1992).

and remains, a common and accepted practice amongst the Inuit, especially if a child is illegitimate or the mother is financially poorly off (*Agence France Press*, 2002-04-05). Equally, the overwhelming majority of Greenlandic priests are now women, which she sees as a possible problem (*An Indigenous Communion*, 2006-09-24). Much church activity is conducted by lay catechists in the place of priests, especially in remote villages (Nuttall 1992: 162).

### **Finnish Paganism**

Before examining the fieldwork issues and notes from the field, it would be germane to examine Paganism in both cultures as well as the issue of Rites of Passage. Relatively little is known about Finnish paganism because much of Finland was Christianised by the thirteenth century, leaving relatively few written records of either the practices or ideas (Jutikkala and Pirinen 1996). Superficially, however, it does seem to have a number of points of commonality with Arctic religion which it lacks in relation to Norse belief, possibly because of the different form of societal organisation.

Ilmar Talve argues that Finnish paganism involved the belief that animals, trees, forests, seas, the weather and even cowsheds and saunas had guardian spirits which needed to be appeased, thanked and generally respected. Each person was believed to have a soul that was independent of them and could move outside the body. The ancestors were believed to continue to live – in the underworld – roughly as they had done in life and, as such, demanded sacrifices (Talve 1997: 223-224). Equally, Pentikäinen (2002) notes that:

Finnish folk belief refers to many local guardian spirits called *haltijat*. The word denotes male or female guardian spirits in the role of occupants, owners or rulers. Every guardian spirit normally possessed a special domain over which it had command and from which it also took its name, such as forest spirit. The guardian spirits of the various buildings and localities watched over their domain and the economic or other activities conducted here.

The loss of your guardian spirit would result in your wondering outside your body (Pentikäinen 1999: 178) and a shaman would be required to ensure that you were returned to your body.

Pentikäinen further observes that as part of the Finnish bear-hunting ritual – which persisted into the twentieth century in some areas – hunters would pray to the ‘guardian spirit of the bear’ before hunting it (Pentikäinen 2007a). This seems to parallel similar behaviour in Greenlandic hunting ritual, implying at least a structural connection to the Shaman-based religions of the Arctic which also believed in guardian-spirits and spirit wandering outside the body (Jakobsen: 1999) and there may be similar behaviour in other shamanistic societies. Pentikäinen also observes the importance of ancestor worship in Finnish pre-Christian religion:

The worship of dead ancestors was a fundamental part of Finnish folk religion. Its basic features were also evident in many other traditional acts, in the calendar rites, the *Kekri* festival celebrated on around November 1st, and in the various rites of passage.

*The Encyclopedia of Religion* summarises these points arguing that 'the north' is 'crucial' in Finnish religion and it is connected to other 'Arctic religions' such as those of the Canadian Inuit. The entry also notes that Finnish religion was Shamanistic with a very similar cosmology and world-view to other 'more Arctic' religions (*Encyclopaedia of Religion* 2001). So, there would appear to be noticeable connection between the Finnish and Inuit systems of Pagan religious thought.

V. V. Napolskokh (1992) has attempted to construct a hypothetical Finno-Uralic world-view by means of analysing the languages and the etymology of the words. In relation to Finland, he argues that there seems to be a cold underworld in the north, a mountainous world with a river in the south with earth positioned in the middle. He finds evidence that there is a 'Mother of the Water' in the south which might be seen as comparable to the Greenlandic 'Mother of the Sea' (11). Equally, both Proto-Finnic religion and that of Greenland are shamanistic in a quite literal sense of the term. Certainly, Proto-Finnic is likely to have been Shamanistic as Napolskokh demonstrates that he has reconstructed the religion is almost identical with that of the Sami who we are certain to have employed Shamans (11). Thus, there seems to be something very important that the Arctic and Finnish systems share: the spiritual leader who communicates with the spirits by entering their alternate world in a relatively undifferentiated society. However, Pentikäinen emphasises the Finnish mythology, unlike that of the Inuit, is dualistic, at least according to *The Kalevala*, with a creator and his enemy (Pentikäinen 1999: 194). He also argues that *The Kalevala* can be taken as a fairly accurate representation of the Finnish folk poems of which it purports to be a collection with Elias Lönnrot having created a very small percentage of it himself (2).

### **Why Greenland?**

Before examining the dynamics of Greenlandic Paganism I think it would be worth responding to the potential question of why Greenland has been chosen as a comparison. It might be argued that the Sami also employed a Shamanistic form of religion and as this is culturally, linguistically and geographically closer to Finland this comparison would be more salient.

I would counter that it is precisely because the two groups are so similar in these respects that Greenland is a more useful comparison. Greenland is geographically separate from Finland, has had little discernable cultural contact with it and employs a language which is not generally understood to be related to it – though both languages are polysynthetic. This considerable difference means that – when comparing Finnish and Greenlandic religiosity – we can have a greater degree of certainty that we are focussing on an issue of structure – the nature of the pre-Christian form of religiosity – rather than other factors relating to cultural contact. Thus, a comparison to Greenland allows us to concentrate on an issue of what we might call a religious type, the way that this type may synthesise with a new religion (specifically Lutheran Christianity) and how it may be perceptible through the practice of the synthesised religion. A comparison to the Sami would introduce other issues of cultural contact, fascinating though such a comparison would be. We might therefore expect Finnish pre-Christian religion – and current Lutheran practice – to be relatively similar to that of the Lutheran Sami (though some Finnish Sami are Orthodox) due to contact, though possibly also due to a previous similar culture. However, we would not necessarily



expect this to be the case in Greenland, meaning that such a comparison could potentially provide useful new insights into the nature of Finnish religion.

### **Greenlandic Paganism**

More is known about Greenlandic Paganism as the last Greenlandic Shamans were Christianised only in 1922 (Laugrand 2005b: 1312). The Greenlandic were Christianised from around 1721 onwards by a combination of Danish Lutheran and Moravian Missionaries, the latter leaving the country in 1922. It has been argued, as noted, that Greenlandic Lutheranism is a 'vener' (Laugrand 2005a) and that the new faith has developed as a mixture, where certain important aspects of Inuit thought have been preserved.

In summary, rocks, animals, vegetation and even abstract moods have 'souls' which have to be respected and sometimes tamed by the Shaman. Each person had a number of souls – including a 'name soul' – which could leave their body and had to be persuaded to return by the Shaman. However, the Shaman could also steal people's souls and bring illness upon them. During hunting, the animal's soul is asked for permission to kill the animal for which the soul would then be thanked (Jakobsen 1999). The ancestors also had to be kept content through sacrifice and the child was considered to be a gift from the ancestors. It was reincarnation of an ancestor which it would be named after and this ancestor was perceived to relate to its destiny. Often, it would be named after an ancestor that had recently died. The child was not considered to be 'complete' until it had been named in a ceremony by a shaman and it might be called by a different name until that point (Alia 2005: 1352). Moreover, the Inuit held that after a death a soul was passed onto a new child that would inherit some of its characteristics. Hence there is a strong element of ancestor worship.

Hansen argues that the world-view of Greenlandic religion involved all of nature being balanced equally as opposed to the subject-object idea implicit in Christianity – that one obeys the will of God (Hansen 1992: 86). Thus, to give an example, the Mother of Sea (who lives on the seabed) decides if there will be seals to catch, the seals (or seals' spirits) decide who will catch them but man decides if the Mother of Sea will have seals to distribute (Hansen 86). The Shaman was particularly important in controlling the spirits that related to aspects of the weather and the sea such as 'the Mother of Sea.' Following the general archetype of Shaman, the Angakoq would have the ability to enter a trance where he would go in a spiritual journey – to Greenland's icy 'underworld' for example – and collect spirits in order to assist the tribe. Thus, nature is subject-object-subject and Hansen notes that there is no Greenlandic world for 'culture' because man is not considered distinct from nature (87). Jakobsen argues that Greenlandic Angakoq were often relative outcasts as children (Jakobsen 1999) which would be congruous with the idea of the Shaman as a 'wounded healer' which Lewis (1989) discusses. Individual Greenlanders held many talismans and amulets and conformed to complex taboos in order to protect themselves. There are 'Worlds of the Dead' – the sky which resembles the Inland Ice and where the dead hunt caribou and the Underworld where the dead hunt marine mammals and are united with their ancestors. The latter is preferred and your afterlife depends on the manner of your dying.

## Shamanistic Religion

Also, it is argued that both forms of Paganism were Shamanistic. Shamanistic religiosity is generally found amongst relatively undeveloped tribes whereby no distinct priestly class – or distinct social classes of any prominent kind – has yet developed. Hence, in anthropological terms, it is a form of religiosity that is found in relatively undeveloped tribes, often but not exclusively those which have not yet developed agriculture. Sandall (2001) argues that it is developments of this kind that ultimately leads to a more stratified society with a separate social class of highly trained priests. A tribal society, by contrast, has not yet crossed the ‘Big Ditch’ into complex social organisation whereby individual group members have specialised professions and thus most members would either farm or hunt. The shaman, unlike a priest, is – though highly respected and even feared for his magical powers – merely a select person within a relatively un-stratified social organisation, though he or she may often undergo an apprenticeship to another shaman. This would have been the Finnish form of organisation prior to being incorporated into Sweden and even then it has been argued that social stratification amongst Finns was minimal with the middle and upper classes being Swedish-speaking and thus, in a sense, from a different ethnic group (Jutikkala and Pirinen 1996). Indeed, more recently many members of this group have begun to term themselves Finland-Swedes to emphasise the supposed ethnic rather than merely linguistic difference (e.g. Wolf-Knuts 2000).

The word Shaman derives from Siberian tribes and was used by Romanian anthropologist Mircea Eliade to describe one who is able to control the spirits and, in a trance, enter the world of the spirits through an *axis mundi* in order to manipulate them for the good of the tribe. The shaman would thus descend into the world of the spirits – the underworld – in order to make contact them, negotiate with them and assist his tribe. The term has been extended metaphorically to all kinds of other societies where, for example, there is belief in Gods or one God to refer, essentially, to priests who engage in sacrifices or rituals of various kinds. For Eliade, however, these are not *bona fide* shamans (Eliade 2004). The Shaman figure, for Eliade, is only relevant to the Arctic and Pentikäinen notes that the form religiosity is popular in the polar region. But certainly, even if one does extend the use of the term, Pentikäinen emphasises that the Shamans relate to a relatively undifferentiated form of social organisation based around spirit manipulation to which shamans are initiated. They are therefore distinct from the trained ‘priests’ of more complex societies (Pentikäinen 2007b). It is this form of pre-Christian paganism that is found in countries such as Finland and Greenland but not in more complex Norse societies which had developed high social stratification – including kings, priests and even slaves – immediately prior to Christianisation. As such, it might be suggested, there was little comparable to the Shaman in Norse religion but rather a priest who conducted rituals in order that the Gods be pleased with the community (e.g. Branston 1980). It might be argued that the stories in *The Kalevala* are comparable to many Nordic myths. Certainly Pentikäinen points out that both Finnish and Greenlandic Paganism were influenced by Norse incursions, especially in relation to the tradition of being haunted by dead children who had been killed for being too supposedly weak at birth (Pentikäinen 1968: II:2, II:4). But the religions are still organisationally very different from the Norse. The point I will further elaborate below is that

aspects of Finland's religiosity are not 'unique' but rather reflect the influence of a certain form of development, something that it shares with Greenland.

As an aside in relation to the traditionally un-stratified nature of Finnish society, the nature of the Finnish priest is at least interesting. In England, becoming a 'vicar' is a very complex and exacting Rite of Passage involving numerous interviews to 'test vocation,' a long history of church involvement including weekly mass attendance, your own parish priest recommending your ordination to higher authorities and, in addition to a theology degree, at least two years at Theological College, where many 'ordinands' live on site rather like at an English university such as Oxford. Indeed, certain colleges in Oxford and Cambridge are exclusively for ordinands.<sup>9</sup> To become a priest in the Lutheran Church of Finland, by contrast, you must have a Masters Degree or higher in Theology according to Finnish standards (at least five years at university and completion of certain modules such as Biblical languages), a successful hour long interview with the Bishop and you must have 'worked' for the church in some capacity, normally as an undergraduate assisting at 'Confirmation Camps' where you are a 'Summer Theologian.'<sup>10</sup> However, Lutheran priests that I spoke to claimed that the system was similar in Sweden, so this may be a matter of a Lutheran perception that only God can judge a person's calling, as one Lutheran priest suggested to me. The Church of England, perhaps, remains more influenced by Catholic ideas of church authority judging such issues.

### **Rites of Passage**

Hence, I think it is relatively safe to argue that the pre-Christian forms of Paganism in Finland and Greenland have a great deal in common and we may, indeed, be able to further our understanding – at least in theory – of certain Finnish religious rituals by means of a comparison to Greenland. In understanding why these practices have remained where there have, I would argue that it is important to understand the nature of the Rite of Passage. Belgian anthropologist Arnold van Gennep undertook one of the earliest explorations of Rites of Passage. Gennep argues that the world is divided into different social classes and different nations (Gennep 1960: 1) and that every individual life has in common the fact that it is a 'series of passages from one age to another and from one occupation to another.' These changes are generally marked by 'special acts:' perhaps some kind of ritual, for example, which is sometimes protracted. Transitions from one social situation to the next are understood to be 'implicit in the very fact of existence' so that life becomes composed of a series of stages each with 'similar ends and beginnings' (2). Gennep further argues that, as such, the human life reflects nature as the repercussions in nature are likewise marked with ceremonies or rites (4).

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<sup>9</sup> See Douglas Davies (1994) in the section on 'Ordination.' Davies himself underwent the ordination process to become a Church of England priest.

<sup>10</sup> There is a popular tradition in Finland whereby teenagers – normally aged around fifteen – go away for around a week on a Confirmation Camp, normally at a retreat centre in the countryside. This is the culmination of their 'confirmation classes.'

Victor Turner developed Gennep's examination of Rites of Passage. When one passes between one stage and next – such as by going from being a child to being an adult – then a ritual is necessary to mark this passing. This, Turner argues, is found across numerous societies. This ritual is called a Rite of Passage because one is in the passage between one clearly defined phase of life and another. Rites of Passage, however, involve a “passenger” passing through a gap between two clearly defined existential phases. Turner terms this “betwixt and between” a “liminal phase.” The word “liminal” is drawn from the Latin “limen,” meaning “corridor,” a passage between one room and another. (Turner 1969: 94) The fellow-passengers tend to experience a strong sense of togetherness in which social distinctions and structure become less relevant as they experience an often traumatic rite in which they are symbolically made of equal status. Turner terms this feeling *communitas* (95). For Turner “*Communitas* is where structure is not” (126). He earlier defines *communitas* less starkly, admitting that it can involve “rudimentary structure” (Turner 96). In essence, *communitas*, for Turner, occurs within a broader structural apparatus. Other anthropologists such as Eade and Sallnow (1991) have argued that the liminal phase actually involves strong boundary making procedures or ‘contestation,’ while Dutton (2006) has argued that it involves levels of *communitas* and structure with each *communitas* leading to a reaction of a further structure. Thus, the *communitas* of the tribal initiation in the forest leads to the ‘structure’ of clique formation. Turner notes (1982: 46) that this lack of structure is ‘psychologically difficult’ which would make this reaction understandable.

This model, I would suggest, is congruous with Mary Douglas' (1966) concept of the taboo. Douglas argues that ritual is frequently invoked as an antidote to the presence or influence of the ‘taboo’ which she defines as ‘matter out of place’ or something which is incongruous with a system of clear categories. Hence, a graveyard is ‘taboo’ because it is between the worlds of the living and dead, for example. In response to taboo, Douglas submits, ‘ritual reconciles disorder’ (Douglas 95). To demonstrate this point, Douglas draws upon her previous study of tribal groups. She submits that puberty is essentially a time of dirt. It is a liminal phase and consequently a time of disorder. Thus, some kind of ritual is required in order to confront it (97). Such thinking would appear to be congruous with Turner's study of tribal groups. Turner notes that ‘Rites of Passage’ are mainly employed during stages of existential transition (Turner 1969: 94.) Assessing Turner's analysis in the context of Douglas' model, we might submit that phases of transition, by virtue of the way in which they blur structural borders, are liminal and consequently unclean. Hence ‘Rites of Passage,’ which often involve some kind of ritualistic dimension, are perceived to be employed in similar contexts to those noted by Douglas. She also observes the ceremony of the newly wed English bridegroom carrying his bride over the threshold when they enter their new abode upon return from their honeymoon. This, she submits, is symbolic of the movement from one phase into another (114) but it is a ritual in the sense that it allows the liminality of that phase between marriage and starting ones new life together to be dealt with properly. Talve (1997) points out that precisely because such times of change are taboo they attract, in Pagan religion, numerous practices to deal with taboo – hence the many heteropraxy surrounding weddings and other times of social change. As such, this article will focus on baptisms as evidence of Pagan influence in both

religions because, as times of change, there is generally a movement towards passed-on rituals that create order – and thus, perhaps, a return to the pre-Christian past.<sup>11</sup>

### **Fieldwork Issues and Notes from the Field**

The fieldwork for this article was conducted over the years 2005 to 2006. During this time I attended baptisms and funerals with two Lutheran priests in the Diocese of Oulu, specifically in the City of Oulu itself. Through this attendance, I was able to interview in an unstructured way baptism families – that is to say families who were having a baby baptised – in particular about their practices and ideas. I was also able to talk to other guests who had had their children baptised in the past. I think that this method of unstructured interview was useful because it allowed respondents to relax, often in their own homes, as this is where baptisms generally take place in Finland, and with their own food and drink. All of them were very enthusiastic to talk to me. Depending on the person to whom I was speaking, I made use of an interpreter.<sup>12</sup> I conducted the interviews because I was trying to understand – and assess the extent of – differences between the Finnish Lutheran Church and the Church of England, with which I am more familiar and, in this regard, differences in popular practice and tradition. Roy Wagner (1981) suggests that a great deal of research is caused by a kind of ‘Culture Shock’ which the researcher experiences in relation to their own prior experience. This was, I think, the case to some extent and I was especially interested in understanding a tradition that I had come across whereby the baby’s name remains secret prior to baptism.

During the same period I was also able to interview a number of other priests working in Oulu and also a former priest working in Kokkola, which is also part of the broader Oulu Diocese. Oulu, in the north of the country, is Finland’s sixth largest city (with a population of about 120,000) and is overwhelmingly Finnish speaking. There is a small Orthodox population in the area and there is an Orthodox Cathedral in the city. Kokkola, in the centre of the country on the west coast, has a population of around 30,000, eighteen percent of whom are Swedish-speaking, making it officially bilingual.<sup>13</sup> Both are generally characterised as being religiously conservative and part of Finland’s west coast ‘Bible Belt.’ I would suggest that this is especially important as it is an area of Finland with strong pietist influence so we might expect Pagan practices to be less obvious here than elsewhere in the country. Around a quarter of people in Oulu are Laestadians, a group that we have already noted to be highly conservative. It should also be mentioned that Finland has a Swedish-speaking minority of around five percent, which was historically the country’s middle and upper class as all education was in Swedish until the late nineteenth century (Jutikkala and Pirinen 1996). As already noted, many Swedish-speakers prefer the term ‘Finland-Swedes’.

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<sup>11</sup> For an examination of the pagan dimensions to the Finnish Vappu Eve (Walpurgis Night) ritual see Dutton (2006).

<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of fieldwork method see Hammersley and Atkinson (1995).

<sup>13</sup> For an interesting article discussing the history of the ‘Finland-Swedes’ see Wolf-Knuts (2000).

For the information on Greenlandic religion, I will draw upon the fieldwork of noted Greenland scholar Mark Nuttall (1992), who spent two years living amongst the Greenlandic and was able to observe their rituals and religion in considerable depth.

### **Notes from the Field: Baptism**

Contemporary Finnish baptism involves a number of Pagan relics which it shares with the Greenlandic situation, though in Finland people are not aware of the traditions' origins in my experience. All whom I spoke to said it was 'just tradition' though some were aware that it was a 'Pagan tradition.' One woman I spoke to seemed amazed that her 'Christian mother' was so adamant that she should not learn her grand-daughter's name prior to the baptism. It should also be stated that priests I spoke to noted that the 'secret name' tradition was not always followed but certainly did retain a following in their experience.

During my research, I have spoken to many Lutheran priests. All recalled anecdotes in relation to the 'naming' of the child. The Finnish baptism process involves two meetings with the priest. Firstly, the priest goes to the family's home about two days before the baptism to discuss the arrangements and the name of the child. Then there is the baptism itself, normally on a Saturday or Sunday. This usually occurs at the 'baptism family's' home; close family and the God Parents are invited, and there is some kind of meal which the priest is generally invited to attend.

One priest recalled how, during the baptism, a mother said to her, 'Thank you so much for baptising our baby. Now she has a name. Thank you for giving her a name. You've given her a name.' Other priests recalled how some couples would not even decide upon a name for their child until a matter of days before the baptism when they met with them. Also, there is a tradition of keeping the name secret. Even the Grandparents are, traditionally, not told the name until the baptism actually happens and the priest says, 'By what name will this child be known?' The only person who is told is the priest when he visits the couple's house to arrange the baptism a few days beforehand. A number of couples to whom I spoke said that they had 'accidentally let slip the name to mum,' as one Kokkola mother put it, 'because we always refer to her by her name.' As such, this couple proceeded to jealously guard the secrecy of their daughter's 'middle name.' Most families I spoke to held to this tradition in some form though some did not. Baptism also generally occurs relatively young; usually when the baby is about two months old which is younger than in England for example. Talve (189) observes that as recently as the nineteenth century babies were baptised when between one and three days old, however he does not record the age of baptism before the seventeenth century. I would suggest that the notion of name giving, the secrecy and the time of baptism can all be argued to be associated with Finland's pre-Christian beliefs.

In Finnish Pagan tradition, a child's life was not believed to truly begin – and they could not have a 'name' – until the 'birth ritual' occurred (Talve 189). Once they had a name they had a 'guardian spirit' and Pentikäinen observes that in Eastern Finland people lose their name after death and the elderly will not refer to them by it (Pentikäinen 1999: 202). There was also a folk belief that a child did not have a self until it grew its first tooth so it was not 'named' in a ritual until then as the tooth marked the entry of the child's guardian spirit. Effectively, there was a belief in a kind of 'name spirit.' Following these traditions, some Lutheran priests to whom I spoke observed

that parents would insistently refer to the child as 'the baby' or 'the child,' considering it unlucky to call it by its name prior to its baptism. In traditional belief, the child – and the child's name – had to be 'protected' from evil spirits which it was not as susceptible to once it had been 'named.' Hence, there was an incentive for the Shaman to 'name' the child quickly. It is unlucky to reveal the name, it might be argued, because the child was literally not perceived to have a 'self' until it had undergone the ritual of naming in which its guardian spirit had been blessed and controlled by the Shaman. Without the naming ritual, the name was not protected from malevolent spirits and thus had to be protected through secrecy. It should be emphasised, however, that almost all Finns I spoke to about this simply said, 'It's just a tradition'. This might imply that they saw nothing especially important in it and nor did they understand its origins – perhaps a little bit like the well-known English tradition that the bride and groom should not see each other on the day of the wedding until the bride 'walks up the aisle.' But these traditions – even if they are 'just traditions' – have a certain amount of residual power, I would suggest, at times of change or they would be unlikely to be maintained. As we noted in our discussion of Rites of Passage, they structure the relatively disordered in some respect. We might even speculate that it might traditionally have been the Shaman who decided on the child's name, introducing a further heteroprax element. Moreover, it is perhaps in the nature of Pagan influence that people do not know where the traditions come from. Paganism was suppressed in Finland, as elsewhere, and the cults continued in certain rituals and even phrases (e.g: Morris 1992)

Equally, it is noteworthy that, in Finland, one does not register the birth of a child separately from it being baptised. The priest – by baptising the child – also registers the birth. Now, I must emphasise that there could be many historical reasons for this other than some residual Pagan influence but, that said, it is at least congruous with the Pagan tradition in an important way. During my research I interviewed both the deputy registrar of the Oulu Registry Office and Oulu's church registrar, who was himself a priest and both confirmed that in the case of baptism the priest baptises the child and then registers the birth with the church registrar who in turn registers it with the broader registry. The secular registrar also confirmed that a child is issued with a social security number – and thus a kind of identity – prior to the baptism and this is done without knowledge of the name which is entered by the church registrar or by the parents – if the child is not baptised – later on. Thus, Finns are not forced to reveal the 'secret' name to the state prior to baptism – other than to the priest who, we might suggest, fulfils a latter day shamanistic role in this context. For most Finns – as around eighty percent of Finns still have their children baptised – it is the modern version of the Shaman (the priest) who engages in a kind of broader societal naming-ceremony as it is through him that the child is registered and thus begins to 'exist' in Finnish society as a named person.

Indeed, I would suggest that the Lutheran church provides evidence of a broader emphasis on the importance of 'the name' which would also be congruous with a culture or religious culture that has remnants of belief in a kind of name-spirit. According to the church registrar, parents that wish to have their child baptised must essentially choose from a list of acceptable names. This was, he claimed, a 'tradition' that was made into a law in 1945. The priest who will conduct the baptism decides whether or not a suggested name is acceptable and if he or she cannot decide then the

church registrar – also a priest – makes the final decision. According to the law, the name must not be ‘against Finnish tradition.’ This means that it must be a recognised Finnish name which would prevent any kind of name innovation. Also, a boy cannot be given a girl’s name and vice versa, you cannot use a surname as a Christian name, you cannot give two children in a family the same Christian name and you cannot give a child a name that might be perceived as a name that you would give an animal.<sup>14</sup> The church registrar emphasised that they are ‘less strict’ than they were and are prepared to allow the name ‘Michael’ – spelt in the English fashion – because it has become so common. But, in theory, the church registrar could veto that name as he could any name that is not Finnish and not spelt in a Finnish way. He informed me that another church registrar had vetoed the name ‘Axl’ (as in the rock star Axl Rose from ‘Guns and Roses’). The parents had appealed to the secular registrar. He vetoed it so the parents successfully had his decision overturned in the European Court of Human Rights (Mäkinen, 2007 – 09.07). As I say, there could be many reasons for a law of this kind such as a small country preserving its culture from outside influence by preserving its names. However, in that regard, the majority of Finnish names are actually manifestly Swedish or Biblical in origin. As the law extends from a much older tradition of certain ‘acceptable’ names, it may be connected in some way to deeper aspects of history. Certainly in England – even historically – you could call children whatever you wished and there are historic cases of people being called by surnames or named ‘Christmas’ and so forth. In this regard, we will see parallels with Greenland. But it is also interesting that in Sami tradition a child was named after the ancestors in order to appease them and this is likely to be close to Finnish Pagan tradition (Grundström 1951) if we follow the view, propounded in our discussion of Finnish paganism, that Finno-Uralic language reflects a similar Pagan world-view. I think it can be argued that in modern Finland the priest – who is performing a kind of naming ceremony as with a Shaman – has the ultimate decision on ‘the name’ in the sense that he or she (or his or her ordained superior) can veto a name and, indeed, they have, and use, a certain amount of discretion in this regard as in the name ‘Michael.’ Other priests mentioned to me that names such as ‘Jasmine’ and ‘Jessica’ have also been passed. But there certainly appears to be a particular interest in ‘the name.’

Also a number of Finnish priests commented that they have conducted baptisms where one partner is Finnish, the other is not and the couple do not live in Finland. Yet, they have returned to Finland to baptise their children. This would seem to imply that the ‘naming ceremony’ is extremely important for many Finns as is the Lutheran Church more broadly. It is a potent pre-Christian relic – the child does not exist without a naming a ritual conducted by a Finnish shaman figure.<sup>15</sup> It is insufficient to have the child baptised a Lutheran in Germany or Denmark, to give examples I came across where the family – living in that country – had come to Finland for the baptism with the non-Finnish relatives with them.

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<sup>14</sup> This is detailed in a pamphlet published by Oulu’s Lutheran Church called ‘Kasteopas’ – ‘Baptism Guide.’

<sup>15</sup> Finns also celebrate All Hallows – the pre-Christian celebration of the ancestors – by placing candles on family graves. This might be seen to reflect ancestor worship and this also occurs in Sweden.



## **Baptism in Greenland**

Nuttall analyses baptism in a West Greenlandic village and centres his discussion on the importance of 'becoming a person'. Essentially, in baptism, animist beliefs are glossed over with a Christian veneer. Nuttall argues that certain Lutheran concepts such as 'the Two Kingdom's (Heaven and Earth) and a belief in immortality and even in two after-lives have been accepted, as they are congruous with Inuit thought. The individualist emphasis of Lutheranism has been less successful in the kinship based, effectively relatively un-stratified and co-operative society of Greenland.

As with the Finnish idea, a child reached personhood once it is given a name in a ritual, which is usually at the hands of Lutheran catechist (Nuttall 1992: 67) but not necessarily be so. The ritual could be performed by a relative and the child baptised later. The Inuit still believe, Nuttall explains, that before the child is born it is merely a potential person and at this stage abortion is generally socially acceptable should the mother desire it. The foetus is, in direct translation from Greenlandic, 'waiting to become a person.' Once it is born it must receive its 'name' from a 'name giver' and after this it is a person and infanticide is not socially acceptable (64). During the name ceremony, it receives its 'name soul' which it inherits from the world of dead. According to Nuttall, the Greenlandic traditionally believe that everyone has three souls – a personal soul (self), a breath soul (comparable to mind) and 'name soul' whereby one is a reincarnation of an ancestor. Thus, a father might refer to his son as 'grandfather' if he is given his late grandfather's name. The child receives the 'name' when it is baptised by a catechist. It is never referred to by its name, Nuttall argues. This is protected so it would be referred to by the relevant relational term that the family member would use to the person of whom the child is a reincarnation.

Thus, in modern baptism ritual, I would argue that we can see a connection between Greenlandic and Finnish religious attitudes towards baptism, even if these might not concord with the orthodox Lutheran beliefs of the priests or catechists. As religious ritual is employed at psychologically difficult times of liminality and life change, this would seem to indicate that there is a connection, even now, between Finnish and Greenlandic religious thought, just as there was structurally when both peoples lived by shamanistic religiosity. This would seem to imply that we might be able to understand more about the distinctive aspects of Finnish religion – and even culture more broadly – by means of further comparison to that of the Greenlandic.

## **Conclusion**

Finnish culture remains entwined with that of the Finnish Lutheran Church in many respects and this church has many connections to the Lutheran Church of Sweden. Equally, though its own diocese, the Greenlandic church is part of the Lutheran Church of Denmark. However, there is case for arguing that the religiosity of these two countries is more comparable to each other than to Sweden or Denmark respectively. Both ethnic groups had, prior to conversion, a very similar form of Pagan thought – reflecting a similar form of un-stratified societal organisation – that was not found, immediately prior to conversion, in Sweden or Denmark. Most significantly, it is this comparable pre-Christian religiosity that can still be observed during – or as a broad part of – Lutheran baptism. In both cases, the child's name is not generally employed – effectively a secret – prior to baptism and in both cases the priest or catechist takes the role of a name-giver. The

remnants of Finland's shamanistic religion can be most observed prior to baptisms. Prior to the baptism – and in keeping with a religion that is based around the Shaman taming certain spirits and protecting the name spirit – the name of the child is kept secret from everybody apart from the priest and some parents will not call the child by its name until the 'naming ritual' occurs. The name is even kept secret from Finland's social security system though this may be for other reasons. But certainly, Finland's system of baptism shows a notable interest in 'the name' with the priest ultimately deciding on whether a name should be allowed according to a law which appears to be an extension of a tradition. In Greenland there are sometimes separate naming ceremonies but the name is not used before the ritual. In general, as in Finland, the naming ceremony has been merged with Lutheran baptism.

This raises important questions about how we should understand the dynamics of Finnish Lutheranism. Traditionally, it has been compared to other Nordic Lutheran cultures but, as we have seen, there are underlying differences in Pagan influence which mean that, on some levels, it is perhaps more comparable to the Greenlandic situation. It also raises broader anthropological questions about our understanding of Finnish culture itself. Anttonen (2005) points out that Finland has gradually moved, throughout the twentieth century, from emphasising that it is racially, linguistically and culturally 'eastern' to emphasising that it is 'western' (apart from in language terms, where the language is related to Estonian and Sami). Perhaps this change is unhelpful when one considers the religious dimensions it seems to share with Greenland and, for the matter, the Sami. Indeed, Lewis (2005) observes that the Finnish language is structurally similar to languages like Greenlandic in that it is polysynthetic. He suggests that this will affect thought patterns and that this is also true of Finland's communication culture. Laine (2006) argues that Finland, like many 'eastern' cultures, is a 'shame culture' in contrast to western 'guilt cultures' and in many ways the Greenlandic are 'eastern' in origin. Perhaps, then, Finland's popularly termed 'unique' culture would be better understood if compared to 'Northern cultures' – such as the Greenlandic and even Siberian groups – rather than its obvious Scandinavian neighbours. In terms of religion, I think there is evidence to claim that comparison with Greenlandic – and shamanistic past – may help us to deepen our understanding of some of the aspects of Finnish religiosity which may not accord with Finland's immediate Lutheran neighbours. There is a case for arguing that to compare Finland, in religious terms, simply to Sweden, for example, may be over-looking some important religious differences.

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