In recent years, research on Conservative Laestadianism has become quite visible and multifold in Finland. This research interest has increased together with lively discussions in the mass media and the emergence of various artistic representations. In the Finnish sphere, there is a truly huge boom of different topics and stories related to Conservative Laestadianism. This interest is especially significant when a growing secularization and religious disaffiliation within the Finnish common space is kept in mind.

When it comes to the research field, it is important to notice how different scholarly presentations of Conservative Laestadianism are not solely limited to the field of religious scholarship (theology, comparative religion), but also other research disciplines have been actively involved.

The anthology Politiikka, talous ja työ. Lestadiolaisuus maailmassa (Politics, economics and work: Laestadianism in the world) is a new contribution, which extends a new wave of Finnish scholarship charting different aspects of Laestadianism. Several Finnish scholars with expertise in Laestadianism have contributed their own articles to the book. In some cases, it maybe would have been interesting to find out more about the positions of the authors in relation to the movement (even though this also came up in at least one of the articles). This question, as an important issue in all research, has become actual
for myself, but it is of course possible that
my own background as a researcher has
coloured my own understanding, which
I necessarily do not share with other
research traditions. Nevertheless, for me as
a theologian it was very rewarding to read
this anthology, which was concentrated on
inspiration from research in the fields of
history and the social sciences. In any case,
questions of research ethics are reflected on
and opened up in several articles, which
can be seen as a means of increasing the
credibility of the texts.

The overall aim for the book is to chart
and analyse the relationships between
Laestadianism and the world. The foreword
reminds the reader of how religious com-
munities are much more than merely reli-
gious communities; they also have many
kinds of ties with the society around them.
As the title already indicates, the theme
of the book is answered by focusing on
three bigger issues – politics, economics
and work. The book consists of three main
sections. In the first part Laestadianism
is approached with politics as a starting
point. The subsequent section is focused
on the diverse economic aspects of two
distinct Laestadian movements. The third
and the last outlines issues related to work.
The articles in these sections are focused on
many different aspects within these three
fields – cases from a local form of charity
work motivated by Ostrobothnian Word of
Peace Laestadianism (LFF) and the polit-
cal impacts of different Laestadianisms on
the production of the Sami artist and activ-
ist Nils-Aslak Valkeapää are analysed.

Different forms of Laestadianism –
most often Conservative Laestadianism,
but in some cases, even other branches
of the movement (LFF and Firstborn
Laestadianism) – are analysed as power-
ful and relevant frameworks, which in
many ways can be seen in relation to the
surrounding society. I see this selection of
many branches of Laestadianism as one of
the most relevant points of the anthology.
This approach can also be motivated by the
common Finnish knowledge considering
the different branches of the movement.
The discussion around the Laestadian roots
of the former Finnish Prime Minister Juha
Sipilä, which is analysed in one of the art-
icles, is one concrete example of this. It
seems that many Finns have strong opin-
ions about Laestadianism, but in many
cases, a more nuanced understanding is
missing. Therefore this kind of research
definitely has its place.

Methodologically speaking, the articles
in the anthology are written in a variety
of ways. The range of different readings
and approaches used in analysis do provide
a rich flora of explorations, and diverse
theories are also present. This richness can
be seen in connection with the wealth of
the materials used. Many different kinds
of texts – from blogs and various kinds of
media texts (both religious and secular)
to poetry, business communication and
official statements – are visible as sources.
In some cases, the textual approaches
are enriched with interviews, art ana-
lysis and even with the deployment of
ethnographical methods. The richness of
these different approaches does justice to
the multiple realities and questions which
are being analysed in the book.

The anthology shows how religion is a
phenomenon which currently is far from
being insignificant. Strong and even con-
servative religious groups have influence
within the religious sphere, but also within
other spheres, which in many cases work as
shared arenas with non-believers and dif-
fferent values. The anthology reminds us
of the other side of the coin in the Finnish
situation, where different processes of secu-
larization are present in a visible way. The
Anthology reminds the reader of how religion and different kinds of practices and manifestations connected with it are existing in many forms in Finnish society.

The examples presented in the anthology tell the story of how religion manifests itself as a collection of deep-rooted meanings, values and principles, which in various situations can be implemented on personal level. As a theologian, I have in mind how these kinds of concrete cases, which can be seen as encounters between different personal solutions, concrete societal and cultural situations and the collective tradition, could easily be seen from the perspective of lived religion. In other words, even theology and religious studies could be useful in these kinds of examinations which are rooted in concrete cases. However, the viewpoints and fields of study presented in the book are fruitful and convincing: religion and its different practical and lived forms of expression can be studied with the help of various perspectives. A certain balance and maybe even a cooperation between different approaches and research traditions would certainly be useful in future researches.

The eye of the anthology is mostly focused on the present and in some cases towards the past. This raises questions about the future. The future will show how different kinds of new challenges and societal and cultural processes may be integrated with the Laestadian tradition, which has been known for its Pietistic Lutheran moral ideals and strong collective practices. This is of course a constant challenge for all religious groups – what and how to preserve, what and how to reform? In the Finnish context, Laestadianism forms an interesting example of this.

This diverse and convincing collection of well-written texts can open some windows to these processes by showing how in many cases conservative religious convictions and the outside world can interact in ways which are at the same time contextual, but also have strong roots in the tradition. The book is a topical contribution to research on Laestadianism, but it surely can also contribute to other fields of research, especially those related to different kinds of religious studies. In addition, people outside the research sphere, but with an interest in Laestadianism, or even more generally in different manifestations of religion in (contemporary) society can surely see this collection of texts as a useful one.

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