

Newcomers Learning Religious Ritual

Legitimate Peripheral Participation in an Orthodox Worshipping Community

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30664/ar.136236>

 Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0)



In this article, we explore the learning of newcomers in a religious community through a micro-sociological approach, making use of Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger's (1991) notion of "legitimate peripheral participation" to conceptualize initial stages of inclusion and involvement in social practice. Our case study concerns Orthodox Christianity and is based on material gathered through fieldwork in a course targeting potential new members organized by a Finnish Orthodox parish. In the analysis, we inquire into how beginners learn skilful participation in Orthodox liturgical life, and specifically embodied ritual conduct. This learning takes place primarily through participation in real-life divine services. The article highlights challenges faced by beginners in acquiring the embodied repertoire of Orthodox ritual, including adapting to the artistic use of ritual gestures, and negotiating the meanings produced through them. Furthermore, it also illustrates how nuanced dynamics between newcomers and old-timers influence the learning process.

Introduction¹

After the service, I exited the church together with Laura,² and we ended

- 1 Helena Kupari has been responsible for data-gathering and analysis, as well as for writing the first draft of the article. Subsequent drafts and the overall research design have been developed together by Kupari and Terhi Utraiainen, the principal investigator of the research project "Learning from New Religion and Spirituality", of which this study forms a part.
- 2 This is a pseudonym. See footnote 10 for more details.

up walking together for a while. In group meetings, Laura has always been very quiet, but now she was surprisingly talkative. As we walked side by side on the icy pavement, she spoke about her own religious background and her decision to become Orthodox. She mentioned that while her previous experiences with other Christian groups had left her disillusioned, she missed being part of a community. Moreover, what she found particularly appealing in Orthodox Christianity was the ritual nature of collective worship. ... After a while Laura once more took up the topic of liturgical life. First, she wondered at the length of Orthodox services. In the beginning, she related, she had been shocked by how long the services were, but now she felt that "time somehow went by quicker". "How do you manage?", she asked me, to which I noted that even though the services are long I have found them less tiring than I had expected. "I just go into this state and listen." Next, she commented on the difficulty and awkwardness of church etiquette, and especially making the sign of the cross. "What if you do something wrong and someone notices and disapproves?", she fretted.

I admitted that making the sign of the cross is difficult to me as well, which is why I have decided that I can replace it with a bow. I continued that what troubles me especially is that if you make the sign of the cross for the wrong reasons, namely, to fit in, is it in fact disrespectful? Laura responded by reasoning that making the sign of the cross “cannot come naturally to you, if you haven’t gone to church since a child”. Nevertheless, “if you make it in a good and respectful spirit, it cannot be wrong, even if you don’t quite know what you should think about it and how it should feel”. ... We talked non-stop until we reached Laura’s bus stop, where I left her to wait for the bus. (Field diary, 2 March 2022)³

This excerpt from Helena Kupari’s field diary recounts an interaction that took place after an Orthodox Christian Great Compline service celebrated at an urban Finnish church during Lent 2022. The exchange involved a scholar doing fieldwork and her interlocutor, two people with differing motives for taking part in collective worship.⁴ Nevertheless, it also incorporated features of a discussion between two newcomers to a religious community, bonding over challenges of adapting to the community’s style of worship. Today, conversations of the latter kind are common. They take place in cloakrooms and doorsteps of places of worship, in coffee bars and at kitchen tables, as well as on the internet.

3 Helena Kupari has translated all excerpts of the interview data from Finnish to English.

4 Laura knew that her companion was a scholar; in fact, one of their talking points was the latter’s previous and current research on Orthodoxy.

This, at least, can be assumed based on the popularity of religious and spiritual seeking in contemporary societies. Many adults, with motives ranging from a desire to convert to casual curiosity, embark on projects of familiarizing themselves with a religious or spiritual tradition previously unknown to them. Often, this includes taking part in the activities of some community or other – and learning its ways from scratch.

In this article, we explore the learning of newcomers in a religious community through a micro-sociological approach, with a focus on ritualized practices (cf. e.g. Pagis 2019; Di Placido 2023). Depending on the community, learning expectations and orientations differ. Our case study concerns Orthodox Christianity. In the Orthodox tradition, collective worship holds centre-stage both in terms of the community and – at least ideally – individual religiosity. For beginners, acquiring the basic skills for participating in this essential ritual therefore forms a central learning objective. We inquire into some of the activities involved and ask how newcomers learn skilful participation in Orthodox liturgical life. An important theme in our analysis is the performance of ritual gestures, which, as the above vignette illustrates, is a cause of concern for many newcomers. The study is based on ethnographic material gathered through fieldwork in a catechumen course, a form of group instruction targeting people interested in Orthodoxy, organized by one Finnish Orthodox parish.

Even though religious experimentation and secondary socialization are common enough phenomena in today’s world (see Klingenberg, Sjö and Broo 2019), there is not much research focusing specifically on learning among beginners. Since all learners are beginners at some point, the theme is implicit in many discussions of religion and learning (e.g. Berliner and Sarró

2007), but is less often directly addressed.⁵ Two classic anthropological research fields in which beginner learning is heavily involved are training for specialist roles such as a medium, witch, or religious, and initiation or recruitment into closed groups such as esoteric or extremist organizations (Cejvan 2023; Kenney 2017; Lester 2005; Luhrmann 1989; Merriam, Courtenay and Baumgartner 2003). Religious converts are another prototypical example of beginners. Research on religious conversion is bountiful; nevertheless, learning has rarely provided an explicit analytical framework for this scholarship (see, however, Galonnier and de los Rios 2016; Long and Hadden 1983; Luhrmann 2012; Shanneik 2018).

Our study follows established pathways in that it concerns people in the process of converting to Orthodox Christianity. Nevertheless, we do not frame our study as a study of religious conversion. On the one hand, our focus is more limited. Learning to rightly appreciate and conduct oneself in collective worship is arguably an important step in becoming an Orthodox Christian (see Carroll 2018, 90; Naumescu 2019, 395; Slagle 2011, 111), but it does not in itself amount to conversion. On the other hand, our interest is broader, for the kind of learning that we examine does not only take place as part of religious conversion. Familiarizing oneself with Orthodox liturgical life does not necessarily result in or even aim at change in religious affiliation. Not everyone who attends a catechumen course ends up converting. Furthermore, also people who do not pursue membership

5 For many religious communities, children and teenagers constitute the most important group of beginner learners. Children's religious socialization has received a lot of scholarly attention, but our focus here is squarely on adults.

in the Orthodox Church can frequent Orthodox services.⁶

In this study, we approach beginners' experiences of and perspectives on Orthodox collective worship through theorizations of social and situational learning by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998). These two scholars have conceptualized beginner learning as taking place through modified participation in interactional contexts they refer to as communities of practice. A number of previous studies (Stausberg 2001; Merriam, Courtenay and Baumgartner 2003; Csinos 2010; Courduff 2018; Shanneik 2018; Cejvan 2023) suggest that their concept of "legitimate peripheral participation" (Lave and Wenger 1991) provides a promising perspective for understanding learning processes of newcomers to a religious community. In this study, we use this theoretical vantage point to interpret our ethnographic material, testing the concept's usefulness for deciphering how beginners learn in and about collective ritual. Given our top-down approach, the article does not follow all conventions of ethnographic writing.

Beginner learning in religious and spiritual communities

Lave and Wenger start from the premise that learning is an intrinsically participatory phenomenon. In fact, "learning is an integral part of generative social practice in the lived-in world" (Lave and Wenger 1991, 35). Lave and Wenger anchor this interpretation in a theoretical understanding of the mutually constitutive relationship between social subjects and social world mediated

6 In Finland, these people are mainly Lutherans with an ecumenical mindset or with Orthodox family members.

through practice (Lave and Wenger 1991, 50–51; Wenger 1998, 12–15). Here, practice refers to doing attuned to the historical and social context, through which this context can be experienced as meaningful (Wenger 1998, 51–54).

Lave and Wenger focus on specific sites of learning called communities of practice. Wenger (1998, 72–73) defines communities of practice as contexts of interaction characterized by participants' "mutual engagement" in a "joint enterprise" using a "shared repertoire". Communities of practice depend on concrete collaboration between members. They are not intrinsically homogeneous or harmonious, for different parties often harbour differing views of and interests regarding the practice. Yet, through their history of co-participation, members come to negotiate a collective response to their situation and take responsibility for carrying it out (pp. 73–74, 77–79). In pursuing their goal, they develop and adopt resources that come in many forms (pp. 82–83).

Communities of practice can be seen to form out of the "shared histories of learning" of their members (Wenger 1998, 86). In established communities, the most intense learning takes place among newcomers. According to Lave and Wenger, beginners integrate into communities of practice through a process of "legitimate peripheral participation" (Lave and Wenger 1991, 29; Wenger 1998, 100). Peripherality refers to facilitated participation through which beginners are nevertheless exposed to and involved in the practice of the community. Legitimacy is needed for their presence to be accepted even though they do not yet have the competence of full members. Over the course of their involvement, newcomers gradually gain knowledge and skill in both embodied and linguistic aspects of the practice and come to take a more active

part in the pursuits of the community (Lave and Wenger 1991, 95; Wenger 1998, 136–37). Changing forms of participation and belonging also contribute to the development of their identities (Lave and Wenger 1991, 110–11, 115; Wenger 1998, 152–56).⁷

The concept of community of practice has been highly influential in late-twentieth and early-twenty-first-century research on informal and workplace learning and adult education (Hughes, Jewson and Unwin 2007, 1–2). It has also been applied to investigating learning in a variety of religious and spiritual contexts: ritual magic users (Cejvan 2023; Merriam, Courteney and Baumgartner 2003), parish organs and small groups (Otero and Cottrell 2013; Anderson 2018; Regan 2016; Robinson, Cranley and O'Connell 2023), medieval monasteries (Long 2017; Long and Vanderputten 2019; Snijders 2019), extremist religious groups (Kenney 2017; Knott and Lee 2022), and faith-based collective housing (Murphy 2018), as well as among Jesus's disciples (Csinos 2010; Courduff 2018), meditation practitioners (Lomas et al. 2016), Jain ritualists (Stausberg 2001), and Muslim communities (Olson 2017; Shanneik 2018). Only a minority of the studies target newcomers' experiences.

7 This outline is drawn from the seminal works of Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998). Of these two volumes, the first targets the phenomenon of beginner learning, whereas the second elaborates on communities of practice as sites of learning (Lave and Wenger 1991, 42; Wenger 1998, 12–13). Wenger later published a third book centred on communities of practice (Wenger, McDermott and Snyder 2002), which diverges from the other two in its approach. In this book, communities of practice are redefined as informal groups that are assembled for the specific purpose of knowledge-sharing (Cox 2005, 527–28, 533–34; Hughes 2007, 36–37).

The concept of legitimate peripheral participation has not held quite as much appeal among scholars studying religion or spirituality. However, several scholars have made use of it to investigate power issues related to newcomer integration into communities. Michael Stausberg (2001), studying Jain *pūjā* rituals, has observed that newcomers' gradual movement towards full participation is not only dependent on their increasing competence in the practice of the community, but social, political, economic, ethnic, and national factors as well (see also Shanneik 2018, 134). Similarly, Yafa Shanneik (2018) has explored the power dynamics between beginners and old-timers that limit the options of the former. She argues that, while being nominally recognized as legitimate participants in their new communities, women converts to Shi'a Islam in the UK have a hard time shedding their status as peripheral members.

Regarding Wicca covens in the US, Sharan Merriam and her colleagues (2003) also highlight the gatekeeper role of community elders in granting newcomers legitimacy, monitoring their progress, and controlling their access to different aspects of the practice. Their main focus, however, is on beginner learning as such. In these communities, Merriam and her colleagues note, movement from periphery to centre combines formal study with situational learning. Interaction with more experienced community members constitutes one important facet of the learning process, and hands-on experimentation with the practice another. Similar elements have also been found to play a part in newcomers' integration into radical religious groups (Kenney 2017; Knott and Lee 2022). In one Islamist activist network, for example, beginners learn by accompanying and observing more experienced members at

their work, by getting involved in the activities early on, by participating in discussion groups, and by developing relationships with peers and mentors (Kenney 2017). Depending on the organization of the community of practice in question, beginners' advancement towards fuller membership can also involve various stages. This is illustrated by Olivia Cejvan's (2023) ethnographic study, which meticulously analyses learners' centripetal progress in a Swedish initiatory society of ritual magic users.

In this article, we approach Orthodox Christian worshipping communities as communities of practice. Our particular concern is newcomer participation in the practice of one such community, and what it tells about the learning involved in being able to skilfully participate in Orthodox liturgical life. The study contributes to the scholarly discussion on learning in religious and spiritual communities by articulating a beginner's perspective on the construction of legitimate peripherality in the context of collective ritual.

Catechumen courses and a beginner's perspective on Orthodoxy

The Orthodox Church of Finland (OCF) is an autonomous Eastern Orthodox archbishopric under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.⁸ It separated from the Russian Orthodox Church in 1918, after Finland had gained independence from Russia. During the first fifty years of its existence, conversion to the OCF was rare. Around the turn of the 1970s, however, the number of new adult members started to grow significantly (Nguyen 2010, 70–72). The annual number of people joining the OCF grew

8 For a concise introduction to Orthodox Christianity in Finland, see e.g. Martikainen and Laitila 2014.

pronouncedly for several decades, before levelling off in the 2010s. Since the turn of the millennium, the Church has welcomed between 700 and 1000 new members every year (Nguyen 2010; Suomen ortodoksinen kirkko 2023). Most newcomers hail from a Lutheran background. In 2022, one per cent of the population of Finland (around 56,000 people) belonged to the OCF (Statistics Finland 2023).

According to Riina Nguyen (2010, 43–52), prior to the 1970s, conversions to Orthodoxy were such uncommon occurrences that priests were not necessarily even aware of the proper sacramental procedure involved. When the number of newcomers increased, the organization of teaching of potential members became an issue. Larger parishes started to experiment with group instruction (Nguyen 2010, 80–81). This gave the impetus for contemporary catechumen courses. More recently, the OCF has tried to ensure greater uniformity in the education of newcomers. To this end, it has published a curriculum of adult education as well as an adult education textbook to be used in catechetical work (Piiroinen-Backman 2008; Aikonen and Okulov 2016).⁹ No church-wide programme has been put in place, however, allowing individual parishes to organize instruction as they see fit. In rural areas where newcomers are rare, group instruction is not organized. Even where catechumen courses are available, they are not mandatory, for priests assess each potential member's needs individually

9 This article is concerned with Finnish-speaking converts. The systematization of catechetical teaching for other language groups in the OCF has lagged behind that of the Finnish-speaking majority (Koponen and Hattunen 2011; Piiroinen-Backman 2008).

(Koponen and Hattunen 2011). Overall, formal instruction has not replaced other forms of familiarization with the Orthodox faith, such as involvement in liturgical life, private conversations with a priest, and spiritual literature.

This article builds on Helena Kupari's fieldwork in a catechumen course of one OCF parish. The parish in question covers the area of several major Finnish cities, and at the time of the study catechumen groups were organized in all of them.¹⁰ The groups followed their own schedules but made use of the same online material. Between September 2021 and May 2022 – that is, for the duration of the course – Kupari took part in group meetings in one urban church. Here, we refer to it as the Church of the Transfiguration. The group met once every few weeks in the nave of the church after a divine service. The meetings were presided over by a priest we call Father Pekka. Some meetings began with his lecture on a particular theme, while others consisted of participants interrogating him on different topics occupying their minds. In addition to meetings, Kupari took part in the preceding services and engaged in informal discussions with group members. She also went through the material disseminated electronically.

Furthermore, between May and June 2022, Kupari gathered experiences and

10 The parish is the basic administrative unit in the OCF. At present, the whole of Finland is divided into ten parishes. The parishes are geographically large and include both rural and urban areas. Each parish has several churches and chapels located in several municipal centres. We provide limited information on the parish and church under study, because the small size of the OCF would render it easy for connoisseurs to identify the location of the fieldwork based on very few details.

reflections from participants in different catechumen groups of the parish. The interlocutors were selected based on their response to a call sent to everyone who had signed up for the catechumen course between autumn 2021 and spring 2022. They were eleven in total. Six had joined the church in April 2022, while the other five intended on joining later.¹¹ The interlocutors had the option of either participating in an interview or submitting their reflections in writing. The interview frame and writing assignment both contained open-ended questions regarding respondents' interest in Orthodox Christianity, experiences of the catechumen course, and adoption of different Orthodox practices.

Permission for the research was sought from and granted by the priest of the parish, Father Pekka, as well as priests presiding over other catechumen groups in the parish. In the first meeting of the catechumen group that Kupari attended, Father Pekka presented her to the rest of the group with the words: "we are being studied, and that is a good thing". After this initial introduction, Kupari regularly reminded the participants of her status as a researcher.¹² During the fieldwork, her

- 11 To protect the privacy of research participants, identifiable information presented in this article has been minimized. This includes the participants' genders. Approximately three-quarters of the catechumen group members were female, as were all but two of the people taking part in the collection of personal reflections. To minimize the risk of identification of our male interlocutors, we have given all the people quoted in this article a female pseudonym.
- 12 Kupari informed her catechumen group members of the data-gathering both verbally and in writing. The people who took part in the collection of interview and written material were provided with a detailed information package about the research

interlocutors interacted with her in different ways. She could be treated either as another newcomer or as an expert on Orthodoxy – or both.

Fieldwork in a catechumen course provided us with unique access to people who were presently in the process of familiarizing themselves with Orthodox liturgical life. Moreover, we also make use of Kupari's personal impressions concerning the performance of ritual gestures as an additional point of reference. As a scholar engaged in participant observation, her motives for attending collective worship differed from those of her interlocutors. Nevertheless, as someone who is not Orthodox Christian, she shared with them the status and experience of legitimate peripherality resulting from having limited knowledge and skill in the practice of the community.

The legitimacy of peripheral participation

Communities of practice form where people regularly spend time cooperating with each other: in homes, workplaces, schools, associations, and recreational activities (Wenger 1998, 6). Most people belong to various communities of practice over the course of their lives. Not all social networks or aggregates of people constitute communities of practice, however. Members do not merely share a common characteristic, nor do they come together to do their own thing. They assemble to pursue a joint activity, in the process creating sustained reciprocal relations and a culture of their own (Wenger 1998, 73–74; see also Fuller 2007, 20–21).

Based on these criteria, Finnish Orthodox parishes are too large and scattered to

project, data management, and the voluntary nature of participation, and signed a consent form regarding the use of their data.

constitute communities of practice. Rather, they potentially contain many such communities, formed around churches and chapels, clubs, organs, occupational groups, and so on. In this article, we approach the worshipping community of the Church of the Transfiguration as a community of practice.¹³ The church is one of the oldest in the parish. Several services are held there every week, officiated by two or more priests, assisted by lay employees and volunteers. The church also has a lay choir and a team in charge of catering. By worshipping community, we refer to people regularly participating in services in this church. The joint enterprise of this community of practice centres on the observance of services of the Byzantine rite common to Eastern Orthodox churches worldwide. Additional activities include coffee hours after Divine Liturgy and other occasional events, such as the gathering organized on Lazarus Saturday 2022 to decorate the church for Easter.

The Church of the Transfiguration is a large urban church with a worshipping community of heterogeneous membership, including many converts and some immigrants. As part of the fieldwork, Kupari participated in the services celebrated in the church on the days of catechumen group meetings. Most of the meetings were held on Sundays, after the Divine Liturgy, which brought together several dozen worshippers. During much of the fieldwork, Covid-19 restrictions obliged participants to wear face masks and practise social

distancing. Nevertheless, after a few visits, Kupari could easily identify many regular worshippers. These people, and indeed most participants, appeared comfortable in the service, immersed in their experience, knowledgeable of the progress of the liturgy, adept at the code of conduct of this specific church. Nevertheless, not all participants expressed the same level of ease and familiarity. There were also people who stayed back, reacted with hesitation, or simply observed from the sidelines. These included most of the catechumens.¹⁴

The presence of non-members is accepted in the liturgical life of the OCF. You don't have to be Orthodox, or even in the process of becoming Orthodox, to take part. Furthermore, with the notable exception of partaking in the Eucharist, there are no limits to non-member participation in the Divine Liturgy. In most Finnish churches, they can even join the choir. In theory, the worshipping community thus provides beginners with wide access to its practice.¹⁵ For newcomers, the experience can nevertheless be ambivalent. Consider the following:

13 The catechumen group itself did not in our opinion constitute a community of practice. The group met for the first time in September 2021 and dispersed in May 2022. Communities of practice need time to develop, and the meetings failed to mould the participants into a tight-knit group, by our judgement or their own.

14 In this article, we refer to members of the catechumen group as catechumens. This corresponds with everyday parlance in the OCF (Father Teemu Toivonen, personal correspondence to Helena Kupari, 21 August 2023). Officially, however, group members become catechumens only after an initiatory ritual at the beginning of Lent, where they publicly declare their desire to become Orthodox.

15 From a theological standpoint, the legitimacy of newcomer participation is ingrained in the very core of Eastern Orthodox collective worship, for the first section of the Divine Liturgy originally focused on the instruction of catechumens and still contains prayers read on their behalf (field diary, 9 January 2022).

Marja: Going to church is an awfully big step, interestingly. You feel embarrassed. You feel ashamed and wonder whether you are worthy and can function. ... So that you don't make a fool of yourself. After going [once], it took me a long time to go again. I really had to struggle and pray to have the courage to go there. ... What has made it easier and more comfortable is the presence of other catechumens. It is pretty significant, to be able to discuss with others and hear their stories. I find it an important part of socialization to church.

Helena: Have you interacted with other parishioners yet, or mainly with the catechumen group?

Marja: There was a colleague of mine there. I saw her at a glance and later she asked me whether I had been there. It meant a lot, being seen. Otherwise, and this might be my own experience, but I have the feeling that it is not very open. ... They do not actively make contact. They don't drive you away either. But anyway.

For our interlocutor Marja, participating in Orthodox services had involved profound spiritual experiences of “a strong connection”. At the same time, it had been hindered by a fear of making mistakes and an experience of a closed group. Her description of how she “had to struggle and pray” to be able to enter the church opens a different perspective on the theme of legitimacy. Even though Marja knew she had the right to be there, she appears not to have felt completely accepted. Similar descriptions of the worshipping community initially appearing as inaccessible were also provided by other interlocutors. Piia, for

example, stated: “I feel that some church communities can be very close-knit and therefore maybe a bit cliquy. ... When you join the Orthodox Church as an adult, it can be very challenging to get included in circles where everyone knows each other already.”

Based on the fieldwork, old-timers of the worshipping community of the Church of the Transfiguration did not mind newcomer participation in services. Passivity, inexperience, and awkwardness did not cause disapproval. Nevertheless, there was a certain lack of interaction between beginners and other worshippers that could well cause experiences of exclusion to people eager to integrate into the community. It was not customary to greet strangers before the start of the service. During the service, people were focused on the ritual and their own experience. Even the post-service coffee hour did not serve as an avenue for informal interaction, for first it was cancelled due to Covid-19 restrictions and later catechumens were encouraged to participate separately and return to the nave for the group meeting right after. All in all, the worshipping community appeared to establish what Lave and Wenger (1991, 93) have called “a space of benign community neglect” around newcomers, leaving them to figure out their relationship to the practice for themselves, supported by the catechumen group and its instructor.

For Marja, the overall scarcity of communication between beginners and old-timers was compensated by peer support offered by other newcomers. Yet, this was not able to dispel her feeling of invisibility. Marja's emphasis on “being seen” is significant, as it can be understood to depict a basic form of mutual engagement – one of the characteristic features of a community of practice. The significance of this experience is evident in the material in other ways

as well. Emma, one of the more seasoned churchgoers among our interlocutors, described the worshipping community as “pretty clannish”, but explained that after she had participated in services regularly for some time, people started taking notice of her, which to her signalled that she had gained their “silent approval”. Furthermore, she also fondly recalled a situation where an old-timer had guided her hands-on to take a more active part in the ritual: “she saw how important the moment was for me, she saw that and took me with her. And it was just that moment, no more and no less.” For Emma, this moment constituted a memorable experience of acceptance into the community.

Marja, Piia, and Emma exemplify the delicacy of the newcomer position as regards the construction of inclusion and exclusion. While the legitimacy of newcomer participation in Orthodox worshipping communities is founded on beginners having access to most rituals, our material highlights the importance of spontaneous interaction between beginners and old-timers for the feelings of beginners being accepted. Old-timers could bolster the interviewees’ sense of the legitimacy of their participation by minimally engaging with them, by recognizing their presence in some way – or undermine it by ignoring them.

Participation on the periphery: learning ritual conduct and gestures

In communities of practice, mutual engagement in a joint enterprise relies on a pool of resources that is continuously refined and reinforced. This “shared repertoire” is a collection of diverse elements, such as “routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, actions, or concepts”, that have become ingrained into the community’s practice (Wenger

1998, 82–83). Newcomers learn the community’s repertoire through legitimate peripheral participation. For them, gaining competence in the use of the repertoire is an important step towards fuller membership. In this section, we begin our inquiry into how this process unfolds in the worshipping community of the Church of the Transfiguration. Our specific focus is on one aspect of the repertoire, ritual gestures.

Orthodox collective worship is characterized by pronounced ritualism, rich symbolism, and multi-sensory materiality. The stability of liturgical forms and choreographies is greatly valued. At the same time, their execution requires situational creativity and improvisation on the part of both clergy and laity. Lay participation in liturgical life happens mainly through bodily postures, gestures, and movement. In Finnish Orthodox churches, it is customary to stand during services. The standard posture is to stand with one’s head slightly tilted down and one’s arms hanging loosely on one’s sides. For the most part, worshippers pick a place and stay relatively still. However, moving about in the nave is also accepted. People can come late and leave early, and they can greet icons in various parts of the nave. At certain times, the congregation gathers closer to the altar. At other times, they must make way for priests coming to perform ritual actions in the nave. Common ritual gestures include making the sign of the cross, bowing, prostrating, and kissing or pressing one’s forehead to icons or other sacred objects. Some of these gestures have their fixed places in the services, while others are used more flexibly.

The Church of the Transfiguration catechumens’ comportment in services varied from standing in complete stillness to active observance of the ritual choreography. Most of them kept to the back of the

congregation. As months went by, some eased themselves closer to the altar and became more involved. As part of the fieldwork, Kupari was also able to witness some examples of tentative engagement. Towards the end of a December service, a small group of catechumens approached the icon placed in the centre of the nave (field diary, 19 December 2021). Of the three people in the group, two approximated the customary way of greeting an icon by bowing and making the sign of the cross. The third assumed a completely different posture, supporting her chin with one hand and her elbow with the other, which made her look rather like a connoisseur assessing a piece of art. It is possible that this person had not yet embraced the bodily resources for paying one's respect to icons, reverting instead to a posture from outside the community's repertoire.

A key constituent of peripherality is an awareness of one's limited competence in the practice. In the interviews and informal conversations, our interlocutors expressed concern about proper church conduct and performance of ritual gestures. An important cause of anxiety was making mistakes in front of other worshippers. As we have already learned, Laura worried about causing "disapproval" and Marja about "making a fool of herself". Jaana, in depicting her first visits to Orthodox services, used similar expressions: "I was really nervous about conducting myself in the right way, so that I don't disturb anyone's experience by doing something wrong and behaving badly." Whereas some of our interlocutors conveyed a fear that their lack of skill weakened their legitimacy in the eyes of old-timers, others emphasized wanting to avoid standing out as a newcomer (see Lave 2009, 205). Overall, they described their initial participation in services as characterized by "shyness", "embarrassment", and even "shame".

In the learning of ritual conduct, imitation played a central role. Piia described her early experiences: "I didn't feel shy exactly, but first I floundered with the signs of the cross, like, when to make them. But then Father Pekka explained that you learn the right times by following others, and that is where it concretizes." Besides this ritual gesture, catechumens took the example of other worshippers in many aspects of the practice, including how to stand and when to approach the altar, how to greet an icon, when and how to perform prostrations in a Great Compline service, and how to kiss the cross after the Divine Liturgy. To adjust to different social situations through mimicry is characteristic human behaviour. What heightens its importance in the context of Orthodox liturgical life, however, is the lack of explicit instruction. Orthodox services do not allow for much meta-level discourse between clergy and the congregation. The proceeding of the ritual is not easily interrupted for the purposes of commentary or direction. Moreover, there may not be much informal communication among lay participants either – at least there was not in the Church of the Transfiguration.¹⁶

According to Lave and Wenger, the absence of didactic language use is not a problem but an asset when it comes to legitimate peripheral participation. After all, "If masters don't teach, they embody practice at its fullest" (Lave and Wenger 1991, 85). Nevertheless, communities of practice also have local customs and genres for sharing experiences and information (p. 109). In the worshipping community of the

16 One of our interlocutors pointed out an interesting difference between Finnish and Russian language services of the OCF. In Russian services, she remarked, worshippers socialize much more openly between themselves.

Church of Transfiguration, time for such talk was outside the services proper, maybe during coffee hour (cf. Teisenhoffer 2018). Furthermore, catechumens were provided with a special venue for talking about practice: catechumen group meetings.

In the catechumen course, liturgical life was an important topic. Group meetings and online content covered Orthodox services from many angles, including origins and evolution, different types of services, the liturgical calendar, liturgical texts, church art and architecture, church music, and sacraments. Towards the end of the course, a special Divine Liturgy was celebrated in which simultaneous interpretations were provided for different parts of the service. The theme of ritual conduct, however, received little coverage. It was not often spontaneously broached by Father Pekka. Moreover, when it came up in the question-and-answer sessions of catechumen group meetings, a mismatch emerged between the catechumens' desire for precise instructions and the vagueness of Father Pekka's responses. He often simply encouraged people to model themselves on other worshippers, in this way emphasizing observation and imitation as key to ritual competence.

This advice, however, did not satisfy all catechumens. It was considered insufficient for the simple reason that not everyone at church behaved the same way. Of the members of the worshipping community of the Church of the Transfiguration, most stood but some sat, some positioned themselves closer to the altar than others, some moved about more than others, and some performed ritual gestures more actively than others. Lacking the capacity to decipher these differences, catechumens were left wondering whether one style of participation was the right one. In a January 2022 catechumen group meeting, Katja

admitted that all the individual variation at church “makes her head spin” (field diary, 9 January 2022). She described how she was constantly observing other participants there, “comparing the depth of bows and the frequency of signs of the cross”. Father Pekka had no simple solution to Katja's predicament. He emphasized the importance of cultivating respect for a variety of religious “dialects”, while also conveying the point that the structure of the liturgy leaves little room for innovation or individualism.

The discussion related to Katja's confusion highlighted a key limitation of observation and imitation as methods of learning. It boiled down to the question of who to mimic. In his contributions, Father Pekka strove to highlight the flexibility of suitable conduct, whilst guiding the catechumens towards traditional forms of embodied ritual participation. In so doing, he sketched the boundaries of the worshipping community's repertoire regarding ritual conduct. For catechumens, the challenge lay in the lack of precise guidelines. As part of their learning, they needed to develop a feel for the limits of acceptable variation (which for the most part remained unarticulated) and the ability to creatively adjust their behaviour to emerging situations.

Participation on the periphery: the negotiation of meaning

Skilled use of the shared repertoire of a community of practice involves applying elements of the repertoire to projects valuable to the community (Wenger 1998, 134–36). Successful utilization of the repertoire, moreover, is not merely about getting something done. It is about meaning “as an experience of everyday life” (p. 52). This experience emerges through situational negotiation, in which elements of the repertoire function as “points of focus” (p.

59). From this perspective, becoming more knowledgeable in the use of the repertoire translates into new experiences of meaning. This does not entail that the elements of the repertoire have set meanings attached to them that newcomers come to internalize. Everyone does not need to agree on the precise meaning of a specific resource for it to help create a sense of cohesion and purpose among community members (p. 83).

In Orthodox liturgical life, worshippers cultivate a relationship with God. This encounter between divinity and humanity is mediated through a multi-layered sensory and material environment, including church art and architecture, liturgical texts, recitative and singing, ritual objects and sacred substances, and choreographies of embodied interaction. Using Wenger's (1998, 58–59) terminology, all these resources constitute “points of focus” that give form and direction to the “negotiation of meaning” taking place in the services. To become a full member of an Orthodox worshipping community, a beginner needs to learn to relate to this repertoire in a way that contributes to an experience of meaning sufficiently aligned with the community's enterprise. In this section, we investigate this process, keeping our focus on descriptions of embodied ritual conduct.

Teija: I have noticed that the embodied elements of services do not come naturally to me. Like that I should learn to make the sign of the cross when praying. That you go to bow to icons in respect. These things are difficult. ... I have taken it as my guideline that I will start doing them when it feels right. I feel that it would be pretending to do them without feeling anything yet.

Jaana: I don't go around bowing to the icons. I make the sign of the cross when entering the nave ... and go to

bow to the icon in the middle, and maybe some other icon, make the sign of the cross there. I don't feel, at this moment, that I would dare to light a candle in prayer. ... I want to proceed really slowly, and feel that now I have the need to, and the time is right, and then I will do it.

Through the postures they assume and gestures they make, worshippers express reverence, humility, and adoration, pray to God, bless in the name of God, and join themselves to the community of Christ. Some of our interlocutors, however, had trouble connecting their own experiences with these standard theological interpretations. In the quotations above, our interlocutors Teija and Jaana describe their hesitation with respect to performing certain ritual gestures. As a divergence from the discussion of the previous sections, Teija and Jaana do not admit to being particularly worried about successful execution of the ritual choreography. Rather, they are waiting for the right time for them to adopt these gestures. In their understanding, the gestures involve a feeling, which they had yet to attain. Without the proper mindset, the gestures remain hollow. Teija's and Jaana's interpretation contrasts with that of Laura, illustrated in the opening vignette of this article. There, Helena (the researcher) confesses to Laura her reservations over the sign of the cross. In her response, Laura reasons that it is all right to try out the gesture even if one is unsure about its intended internal component: “if you make it in a good and respectful spirit, it cannot be wrong.”

These accounts and interactions convey our interlocutors' felt challenges with learning to make use of ritual gestures in a way that would tie them more closely to the worshipping community and its enterprise, that would contribute positively to

their bond with God and other worshippers. In other words, they illustrate beginners' tentative experimentations with the negotiation of meaning taking place in the community's practice. While some interviewees were struggling to find ritual gestures relevant to them personally, others wondered about how their interpretations related to those of other worshippers or some abstract norm. For all of them, the important thing was that the use of the gestures strengthened their evolving experience of the services as meaningful.

Emma: I don't even remember that I asked anyone any questions, I just followed others when it felt right to me, like now I want to go and greet the icon in the middle [of the nave] with a sign of the cross, as some icons spoke to me more than others. And it just came, the messages are there in the liturgical texts, Gospels and psalms, they give me answers, and then I follow the feeling, go along with it.

In contrast to the previous examples, Emma, whose embodied participation in services was active, did not express doubt about her association with the worshipping community's enterprise. In the above quotation, echoing Teija and Jaana, she emphasizes waiting for the right time to engage in different gestures. Like them, she also indicates that the right time is ultimately about right feeling. Furthermore, she explicitly states being guided by icons and liturgical texts to reach the proper state of mind. In other words, according to her description, the community's visual and linguistic resources help organize her experience of meaning at services.

An Orthodox worshipping community's enterprise is not, in the last instance, about synchronized ritual choreographies.

This is something that all our interlocutors had already realized. Rather, competent use of the community's repertoire couples embodied gestures with an intentional and emotional component. As to the precise nature of these internal elements, however, no direct answers were available. Moreover, with respect to them, even observation and imitation could only take someone so far. In fact, when the topic of ritual gestures came up in catechumen group meetings, Father Pekka commonly noted that they need not be rushed. One should attend services frequently but "show mercy to oneself" and not do anything that one was not comfortable doing (field diary, 20 February 2022). With this comment, Father Pekka cautioned catechumens against mechanical copying of other worshippers' outward gestures. Through sufficient exposure to collective worship, he reassured them, their sensibilities would be shaped to facilitate embodied orientation. This view parallels Wenger's (1998, 138–39) interpretation, according to which sustained peripheral participation ideally transforms beginners' experience of meaning to the extent that competent use of the repertoire becomes possible. In her interview, Emma can be seen to produce an emic description of this process.

At the time of the interviews, our interlocutors had come different distances in the journey towards full membership in the worshipping community of the Church of the Transfiguration. Emma, it can be argued, had already left behind the status of peripheral participant. The interviewees often linked the performance of ritual gestures to increasing competence and belonging. After all, it provided possibilities for more active involvement. Teija's account, however, illustrates that profound embodied engagement was not essential to developing a connection with

the worshipping community's enterprise. Summarizing her experiences of Orthodox collective worship, she noted: "Nothing is expected of me besides standing there and being present. [The congregation] takes care of everything. If I am too weak to pray, someone else prays for me." The description conveys a sense of vicarious inclusion in the community's project, in which not even praying is required. The prioritization of presence and communality facilitated Teija's sense of belonging and legitimacy, even with her difficulties regarding the observance of ritual gestures.

Conclusion and discussion

In this article, we have investigated how aspiring Orthodox Christians, participants in a catechumen course for potential new members organized by the Orthodox Church of Finland, develop ritual knowledge through taking part in liturgical life in one worshipping community. Making use of Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger's conceptualization of social and situational learning, we have explored beginners' experiences of legitimate peripherality as an initial stage of community membership. Our analysis has focused especially on the learning of embodied ritual conduct. Ritual gestures are an important aspect of lay participation in Orthodox services, as they constitute the way for worshippers to express their belief in God and deference to the Church actively and visibly. In the style of micro-sociology, we have emphasized nuances of face-to-face interaction and minutiae of practice. Because of this orientation and our theoretical commitment, we have not paid as much attention to Orthodox liturgical theology as would be required in a more holistic ethnography.

Based on our analysis, skilful participation in Orthodox collective worship was learned primarily through observation

and imitation. Newcomers adapted to the rhythms, postures, gestures, and movements of the congregation by following other participants. This was a necessity: for the most part, no explicit instruction was available. Even the priest in charge of the catechumen group under study encouraged catechumens' organic processes of adjusting to the services and mostly refrained from express teaching of ritual practice. For beginners, however, the difficulty of this method of learning lay with navigating variation and coupling embodied expression with intention and emotion.

While embodied engagement in Orthodox services builds on a repertoire of recognized gestures and postures, Orthodox church etiquette does not require complete uniformity of behaviour. At least in Finnish Orthodox worshipping communities, the observance and execution of ritual gestures allows for a degree of flexibility, recognizing differences in cultural background and personal preference. In some respects, the performance of these gestures in emergent events even resembles improvisation. Our analysis illustrated how catechumens strive to embrace the curated artistry of ritual practice, and to accept that it cannot be condensed into a set of rules.

Through ritual gestures, lay participants help produce and confirm Orthodox services as a meeting point between humanity and divinity. As part of their experimentation with the worshipping community's embodied resources, our interlocutors struggled to align their personal experiences with this shared goal. The analysis revealed interesting differences in how interviewees interpreted the relationship between form and content in the performance of ritual gestures. For some, a sufficiently profound experience of meaning was a prerequisite for more active engagement. All in all, a recurring theme in our

interlocutors' reflections on ritual conduct was the monitoring of feelings, demonstrating their high level of self-awareness.

The learning of ritual conduct took place in real-life situations, through participation in collective worship in one Orthodox church. As part of our analysis, we examined how micro-level interaction between newcomers and old-timers contributed to the newcomers' sense of being accepted into the worshipping community. For many of our interlocutors, concrete experiences of inclusion and exclusion were constructed through nuanced dynamics of recognition.

Our interviewees' fragile sense of legitimacy brought additional challenges to their learning. It was connected to their anxiety concerning impression management and could even hinder participation in the first place. Negative emotions related to potential divergence from expected behaviour featured prominently in the material. As is to be expected, increased skill in the performance of ritual gestures was connected to increased confidence and belonging. Nevertheless, it would be too simplistic to conclude that among catechumens more passive participation automatically indicated peripherality and more active participation fuller membership. On the contrary, comprehensive embodied engagement was not always necessary for experiencing a connection with the community's enterprise.

It is important to note that ritual conduct and gestures constitute only one aspect of Orthodox liturgical life. Our study has not addressed beginner engagement with the rich historical, doctrinal, and symbolic content of Orthodox divine services. What has justified our specific focus is that in our material visible embodied participation – more than theological interpretation – constituted a particular cause of

concern for newcomers. Our interlocutors' early experiences of Orthodox collective worship were tinged by worries over lack of ritual know-how. Lave and Wenger's theorization of social and situational learning has been useful in unpacking these dynamics related to the catechumens' initial accommodation to Orthodox divine services. The notion of legitimate peripheral participation well illustrates the social and physical space reserved for beginners in the Church of Transfiguration worshipping community. More research is needed to assess whether this tool-kit provides a comprehensive framework for approaching learning in the context of Orthodox liturgical life, including the cultivation of sophisticated theological knowledge.

The standpoint of adult religious beginners constitutes an important topic of study because of its simultaneous specificity and topicality. On the one hand, newcomers perceive religious worlds differently from old-timers. On the other, they are a conspicuous feature of the religious landscape. The widespread popularity of religious and spiritual experimentation in today's world has created a situation where first timers and beginners abound. Moreover, the multitude and heterogeneity of religious and spiritual communities renders countless trajectories of involvement possible.

Our study suggests that Lave and Wenger's conceptualization of beginner learning as legitimate peripheral participation can help better understand the situation and status of newcomers at the fringes of religious and spiritual communities of practice. It can provide nuanced insights into processes of religious conversion and secondary socialization, as well as religious seeking. The notion of legitimate peripherality, we propose, is useful in investigating not only the initial stages of integration into communities, but also what people

who never become full members learn, and how their religious knowledge and skill is constructed. After all, even a temporary position at the margins of a community may contribute to a person's learning and identity development (Wenger 1998, 154). Whether our interlocutors stayed on an inbound trajectory after the catechumen course came to an end is beyond the scope of this study. However, based on informal discussions with priests responsible for catechetical work in the parish, disappearing converts – not seen in the church after their anointment – were an existing phenomenon. For the priests, this was a concern, but the people in question did not necessarily see it as such. A characteristic feature of contemporary religiosity is that people can choose to take part in different communities with varying intensity and commitment.

Lave and Wenger's conceptualization of legitimate peripheral participation is founded on a practice-theoretical understanding of social activity (Lave and Wenger 1991, 49–51). To make use of a better-known concept from the same theoretical tradition, what we have examined in our analysis is the embodied and visceral experience of trying to get by in a situation of radical mismatch between one's habitus and social surroundings (Bourdieu 1977). The notion of legitimate peripherality can be employed to closely inspect some of the preconditions for and dynamics of budding processes of adjustment and re-habitation, especially as regards the surrounding community and its practice. In our opinion, it can offer a complementary perspective to scholars of religious conversion interested in uncovering intricacies in the relationship between the convert and the receiving group. Another potential field of further implementation is that of ritual studies. As our analysis demonstrates, Lave

and Wenger's approach, which acknowledges the significance of embodied, emotional, and other non-verbal dimensions of experience, well facilitates inquiries into ritual learning. ■

Acknowledgements

The article is part of the research project "Learning from New Religion and Spirituality" funded by the Research Council of Finland (325148).

Helena Kupari, Ph.D.,

is a scholar of religion and university lecturer at the School of Theology, University of Eastern Finland. Her recent research projects have investigated conversion to Orthodox Christianity, especially from the perspective of Finnish converts' adjustment to the ritual and material aspects of the Orthodox faith. In the spring and summer of 2023, she worked as university researcher in the Academy of Finland-funded project "Learning from New Religion and Spirituality" (2019–23), PI Professor Terhi Utriainen. Kupari's wider research interests include contemporary Finnish religiosity, lived and everyday religion, intersections of religion, gender, ethnicity, age, and class, theories of practice, and social memory research.



Terhi Utriainen, Ph.D.,

is professor in the study of religion, Faculty of Theology, University of Helsinki. She was the leader of the project "Learning from New Religion and Spirituality" (LeNeRe; funded by the Research Council of Finland between 2019 and 2023 [325148]); presently she leads the project "Whose Angels? Art, Research and Enchantment" funded by the Kone Foundation (2023–26). Her research focuses especially



on contemporary vernacular religion, religion and gender, and ritual studies. Her recent publications include "Lived Religion Meets Secular Life: The Dynamics of Framing and the Subjunctive Power of Ritual" (*Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 2020). She is the co-editor of the books *Post-secular Society* (Transaction Publishers, 2012), *Finnish Women Making Religion: Between Ancestors and Angels* (Palgrave, 2014) and *The Relational Dynamics of Enchantment and Sacralization: Changing the Terms of the Religion Versus Secularity Debate* (Equinox Publishing, 2017).

List of references

Materials

- All materials are in the possession of Helena Kupari.
 Field diary, 51 pages, September 2021 – June 2022.
 Seven interviews, 8 hours 53 minutes, May–June 2022.
 Three written reflections, 10 pages, May–June 2022.

Literature

- Aikonen, Risto, and Sirpa Okulov, ed. 2016. *Seisokaamme hyvin. Ortodoksisen kirkon aikuiskasvatuksen oheismateriaali*. Kuopio: Suomen ortodoksinen kirkko.
- Anderson, E. Byron. 2018. "Communities of Musical Practice: Introduction." *Liturgy*, 33, no. 4: 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0458063X.2018.1478574>.
- Berliner, David, and Ramon Sarró, ed. 2007. *Learning Religion: Anthropological Approaches*. New York: Berghahn Books. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qcmz4>.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Carroll, Timothy. 2018. *Orthodox Christian Material Culture: Of People and Things in the Making of Heaven*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Cejvan, Olivia. 2023. "Arts and Crafts Divine: Teaching and Learning Ritual Magic in Sodalitas Rosae Crucis." Ph.D. diss., Lund University.
- Courduff, Jennifer. 2018. "Community of Practice Foundations in Scripture: A Model of Vocational Preparation." *Practical Theology*

11, no. 4: 334–46. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1756073X.2018.1502542>.

- Cox, Andrew. 2005. "What are Communities of Practice? A Comparative Review of Four Seminal Works." *Journal of Information Science* 31, no. 6: 527–40. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0165551505057016>.
- Csinos, David M. 2010. "'Come, follow me': Apprenticeship in Jesus' Approach to Education." *Religious Education* 105, no. 1: 45–62. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344080903472725>.
- Di Placido, Matteo. 2023. "Praying Interaction Rituals: Prayer, Ritual, and Spiritual Capital in a Contemporary Neo-Guru Movement." *Social Compass* 70, no. 2: 226–42. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00377686231166516>.
- Fuller, Alison. 2007. "Critiquing Theories of Learning and Communities of Practice." In *Communities of Practice: Critical Perspectives*, edited by Jason Hughes, Nick Jewson and Lorna Unwin, 17–29. Abingdon and New York: Routledge.
- Gallonier, Juliette, and Diego de los Rios. 2016. "Teaching and Learning to be Religious: Pedagogies of Conversion to Islam and Christianity." *Sociology of Religion* 77, no. 1: 59–81. <https://doi.org/10.1093/socrel/srv055>.
- Hughes, Jason. 2007. "Lost in Translation: Communities of Practice – The Journey from Academic Model to Practitioner Tool." In *Communities of Practice: Critical Perspectives*, edited by Jason Hughes, Nick Jewson and Lorna Unwin, 30–40. Abingdon and New York: Routledge.
- Hughes, Jason, Nick Jewson, and Lorna Unwin, ed. 2007. *Communities of Practice: Critical Perspectives*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge.
- Kenney, Michael. 2017. "A Community of True Believers: Learning as Process among 'the Emigrants.'" *Terrorism and Political Violence* 32, no. 1: 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2017.1346506>.
- Klingenberg, Maria, Sofia Sjö, and Måns Broo, ed. 2019. Thematic issue "Rethinking Religious Socialization: A Transnational Perspective", *Religion* 49, no. 2. <https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rrel20/49/2>.
- Knott, Kim, and Benjamin J. Lee. 2022. "Fascist Aspirants: Fascist Forge and Ideological Learning in the Extreme-Right Online

- Milieu." *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* 14, no. 3: 216–40. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19434472.2020.1850842>.
- Koponen, Ari, and Maria Hattunen. 2011. "Valistustyö sitouttaa kirkkoon." *Aamun Koitto* 1: 6–7.
- Lave, Jean. 2009. "The Practice of Learning." In *Contemporary Theories of Learning: Learning Theorists ... In Their Own Words*, edited by Knud Illeris, 200–08. London: Routledge.
- Lave, Jean, and Etienne Wenger. 1991. *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lester, Rebecca J. 2005. *Jesus in Our Wombs: Embodying Modernity in a Mexican Convent*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Lomas, Tim, Tina Cartwright, Trudi Edgington, and Damien Ridge. 2016. "New Ways of being a Man: 'Positive' Hegemonic Masculinity in Meditation-based Communities of Practice." *Men and Masculinities* 19, no. 3: 289–310. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X15578531>.
- Long, Micol. 2017. "High Medieval Monasteries as Communities of Practice: Approaching Monastic Learning through Letters." *Journal of Religious History* 41, no. 1: 42–59. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9809.12345>.
- Long, Micol, and Steven Vanderputten. 2019. "Introduction." In *Horizontal Learning in the High Middle Ages: Peer-to-Peer Knowledge Transfer in Religious Communities*, edited by Micol Long, Tjamke Snijders and Steven Vanderputten, 9–16. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvnb7nbt.4>.
- Long, Theodore E., and Jeffrey K. Hadden. 1983. "Religious Conversion and the Concept of Socialization: Integrating the Brainwashing and Drift Models." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 22, no. 1: 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1385588>.
- Luhrmann, Tanya M. 1989. *Persuasions of the Witches' Craft: Ritual Magic in Contemporary England*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Luhrmann, Tanya M. 2012. *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Martikainen, Tuomas, and Teuvo Laitila. 2014. "Population Movements and Orthodox Christianity in Finland: Dislocations, Resettlements, Migrations and Identities." In *Orthodox Identities in Western Europe: Migration, Settlement and Innovation*, edited by Maria Hämmerli and Jean-François Mayer, 151–78. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Merriam, Sharan, Bradley Courtenay, and Lisa Baumgartner. 2003. "On Becoming a Witch: Learning in a Marginalized Community of Practice." *Adult Education Quarterly* 53, no. 3: 170–88. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0741713603053003003>.
- Murphy, Thomas N. 2018. "Learning Compassion through Practices of Encounter in l'Arche." *Religious Education* 113, no. 3: 339–47. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344087.2018.1457296>.
- Naumescu, Vlad. 2019. "Pedagogies of Prayer: Teaching Orthodoxy in South India." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 61, no. 2: 389–418. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417519000094>.
- Nguyen, Riina. 2010. "Kirkon jäseneksi. Suomen ortodoksisen kirkon reaktiot kirkosta luopumisiin ja kirkkoon liittymisiin vv. 1950–1989 sekä luopumisten ja liittymisten motiivit." Th.M. thesis, University of Eastern Finland.
- Olson, Laura J. 2017. "Negotiating Meaning through Costume and Social Media in Bulgarian Muslims' Communities of Practice." *Nationalities Papers* 45, no. 4: 560–80. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2017.1303470>.
- Otero, Lucille M., and Michael J. Cottrell. 2013. "Pioneering New Paths for Adult Religious Education in the Roman Catholic Community." *Journal of Adult Theological Education* 10, no. 1: 50–63. <https://doi.org/10.1179/1740714113Z.0000000004>.
- Pagis, Michal. 2019. "The Sociology of Meditation." In *The Oxford Handbook of Meditation*, edited by Miguel Farias, David Brazier and Mansur Lalljee. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198808640.013.50>.
- Piironen-Backman, Outi. 2008. "Aikuiskasvatustus seurakunnassa." *Ortodoksiviesti* 4: 32.
- Regan, Jane E. 2016. *Where Two or Three are Gathered: Transforming the Parish through*

- Communities of Practice*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press.
- Robinson, Christine, Linda Cranley, and Daniel O'Connell. 2023. "The Journey to G.R.A.C.E: Creating an International Community of Practice." *Religions* 14, no. 1: 43. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14010043>.
- Shanneik, Yafa. 2018. "Moving into Shi'a Islam: The 'Process of Subjectification' among Shi'a Women Converts in London." In *Moving In and Out of Islam*, edited by Karin van Nieuwkerk, 130–51. Austin: University of Texas Press. <https://doi.org/10.7560/317471>.
- Slagle, Amy. 2011. *The Eastern Church in the Spiritual Marketplace: American Conversions to Orthodox Christianity*. De Kalb: Northern Illinois University Press.
- Snijders, Tjamke. 2019. "Communal Learning and Communal Identities in Medieval Studies: Consensus, Conflict, and the Community of Practice." In *Horizontal Learning in the High Middle Ages: Peer-to-Peer Knowledge Transfer in Religious Communities*, edited by Micol Long, Tjamke Snijders and Steven Vanderputten, 17–46. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvnb7nbt.5>.
- Statistics Finland. 2023. Statistics Finland's free-of-charge statistical databases: "Population Structure, 11rx – Belonging to a Religious Community by Age and Sex, 1990–2022." Accessed August 22, 2023. https://pxdata.stat.fi/PxWeb/pxweb/en/StatFin/StatFin__vaerak/statfin_vaerak_pxt_11rx.px/.
- Stausberg, Michael. 2001. "Kohärenz und Kontinuität: Überlegungen zur Repräsentation und Reproduktion von Religionen." In *Kontinuitäten und Brüche in der Religionsgeschichte: Festschrift für Anders Hultgard zu seinem 65. Geburtstag am 23.12.2001*, edited by Michael Stausberg, Olof Sundqvist and Astrid van Nahl, 596–619. Berlin and New York: DeGruyter.
- Suomen ortodoksinen kirkko. 2023. "Vuositaisia tilastotietoja." Accessed August 22, 2023. <https://ort.fi/keskusrekisteri/tilastot>.
- Teisenhoffer, Viola. 2018. "Assessing Ritual Experience in Contemporary Spiritualities: The Practice of 'Sharing' in a New Age Variant of Umbanda." *Religion and Society: Advances in Research* 9, no. 1: 131–44. <https://doi.org/10.3167/arrs.2018.090110>.
- Wenger, Etienne, Richard A. McDermott, and William M. Snyder. 2002. *Cultivating Communities of Practice: A Guide to Managing Knowledge*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Wenger, Etienne. 1998. *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.