

Clinical services instead of sermons

Today, we are facing the decline of institutional religion. In Finland, the decrease in membership of the mainstream Evangelical Lutheran Church has been unusually rapid over the past few years, but, at the same time, the variety of religious supply has significantly increased. Criticism of the mainstream church has been twofold: on the one hand the church has been regarded as being too liberal, accepting almost anything without being able to draw the line and be explicit about its moral principles. On the other hand, the church has been criticised for being too hierarchical, conservative and normative, not paying enough attention to differences and the contemporary needs of society. In addition to non-Christian spiritual and religious alternatives, innumerable lay movements, functions and practices are also offering their services within the Christian field, both in non-denominational circles and in those more or less linked to the mainstream church.

The changes that occur in the religious field in Finland take place largely within the Christian cultural field. In addition to the obvious organisational changes taking place in the religious landscape of Finland, there is a certain fragmentation of contemporary religious attitudes. Such changes have been identified throughout the Western world—conventional definitions of ‘believing’ and ‘belonging’ do not seem to fit anything properly anymore. Furthermore, ‘practising’ and ‘participating’ as dynamic aspects of religiosity make the general view even more nuanced. As an example of religious involvement within this frame, I present here a Christian intercessory prayer service called the Healing Rooms. It is a religious practice that is attempting to accommodate the contemporary situation of post-secular Finland, and simultaneously advocating its traditional mission of evangelicism. This article is based on ethnographic material and a questionnaire that was distributed to people who use these services.

Believing, belonging, practising and participating

Defining religiosity as *believing without belonging* (Davie 1994), or being *spiritual but not religious* (Fuller 2001), refers to an attitude which also seems to be widespread among present day Finns who have resigned from official religious affiliations and institutionalised organisations. Despite of the lack of the social dimension, these people may acknowledge a spiritual aspect to their lives, in the sense of seeing meaning and a social connectedness to something greater than themselves, but they do not want to be tied to a particular religious tradition or deity (e.g. Bandura 2003: 170). Typically, they see no connection between their spiritual life and any organised religious group (McGuire 2008: 98). Membership of a community of believers is not an issue in their spiritual lives; ‘the sacred persists but not necessarily in traditional forms’, as Grace Davie has summarised the situation (Davie 1994: 228). However, as a psychologist of religion Ulrike Popp-Baier points out, the often-cited argument that ‘I am spiritual but not religious’ has different connotations depending on what is meant by ‘spirituality’, which is a far from straightforward concept. In some cases, it refers to a rejection of conservative and institutional Christianity in favour of more liberal interpretations of the same religion and more personal involvement. Nevertheless, it is often used also in the meaning of being *not Christian* but having a personal relationship with God, the divine, the universal energy and so forth, or of discovering the divine in oneself, being aware of one’s inner self or being connected to the universe, just to mention a few definitions. (Popp-Baier 2010: 44.)

Whereas believing without belonging has been seen as a trend in secularised Western societies since Grace Davie’s (1994) findings on post-war Britain, it is surprising that otherwise non-religious and non-spiritual people may claim a religious affiliation to demonstrate their togetherness as church members. However, considering the still relatively high church membership rates in Finland¹ in spite of recent ‘mass resignations’, *belonging without believing* seems to be a relevant religious orientation in many cases for the Finns. While some people find spiritual development and support as the result of being members of congregation, others may use their membership as

1 78.2 per cent of roughly 5 million inhabitants were officially members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church at the end of 2010 (The website of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland). However, according to a survey a couple of years earlier, only 3.1 per cent of the members were active church-goers (Kääriäinen *et al.* 2008: 73). In that sense, the situation in Finland is quite similar to that of the neighbouring Nordic countries (e.g. Furseth 2006).

the performance of a desirable identity (McGuire 2008: 98; cf. Day 2010: 19). It may also be seen as *believing in belonging*, as Abby Day has characterised this particular attitude among the young people in Britain, emphasising the importance of the social aspect of a religious affiliation to the detriment of holding religious beliefs to be true and meaningful as such. Day even gives enlightening examples of ‘unbelieving Christians’ (Day 2009).

Contemporary religiosity is in a process of transfer that emphasises and combines processes such as individualisation, democratisation, fluidity, hybridism, relocation and the breaking of boundaries. But traditional religion has *not* lost its influence and relevance either, as scholars of post-secularity claim (e.g. Habermas 2006, Taylor 2007). On the contrary, an increase in new kinds of religious and spiritual activities and practices, a process of fragmentation and the emergence of global networking are expanding the spectrum of choices in the field of spiritual and religious services. Furthermore, strict commitment and extremist attitudes are openly expressed, too, even though they do not appeal to the majority. Among other indicators of this, the rise of fundamentalist Christianity such as Evangelical and Charismatic-Pentecostal movements has been seen as one of the examples of searching for Christian spirituality in present day Western cultures (e.g. Woodhead 2002, Roof *et al.* 1995).

In Finland, various independent Neo-charismatic congregations have been offering fundamentalist Christian choices to meet the need for more experiential religiosity since the early 1990s. However, the actual number of committed members of these groups remains rather small. Instead, loosely organised prayer communities and networks, evangelising events and spiritual aid services have acquired more supporters and users than congregations have new committed members. These new trends have gained footholds both outside and inside the mainstream church; typically, as lay activities. Good examples of this which are also in touch with the mainstream Evangelical Lutheran Church are home cells and prayer groups, alternative services like the *St Thomas Mass*² where laypersons have active roles during the proced-

2 The St Thomas Mass is celebrated every Sunday at 6 p.m. at Mikael Agricola Church in Helsinki. The St Thomas Mass is a Lutheran act of worship, which has been influenced by ancient liturgical traditions of the Church, as well as by the spirit of ecumenism. It has been named after the Apostle Thomas, who seemed to have more questions than answers in his faith. The St Thomas Mass is a celebration. Its starting point is the biblical story about the dinner celebration in the house of a Pharisee, with Jesus, the host, a prostitute and village folk all present. (The website of the St Thomas Mass.)

ure; charismatic events called *the Word and Prayer*, as well as practices focusing on faith healing, life coaching and marriage consultancy. After all, the changes that occur in the religious field in Finland take place largely within its Christian culture or in some kind of related field.

A recent newcomer to the Finnish religious landscape, the Christian ‘prayer clinic’ practice called Healing Rooms, has already gained a firm foothold in the country after five years of intensive campaigning. It is an example of relocating religious, in this very case Christian, practices in a novel form outside the congregational functions and without being tied to any particular church, organised congregation or any given Christian movement. Simultaneously, it represents Charismatic Christianity with its ideas of the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit, that is *charismata*; healing being one of them. The Healing Rooms operates as a very specialised form of function with the mission of increasing health and well-being as an outcome of an anticipated growth of Christian faith. The intercessory prayer service has, of course, the implicit basic mission of winning new followers over to Christianity.

The Healing Rooms—history

I introduce the Healing Rooms as a kind of a Charismatic Christian response to the post-secular situation, where formal institutional frames are seen as restrictive factors in an individual’s inner development and well-being, which are understood to be spiritual challenges. The Healing Rooms is an international, intercessory prayer service movement that operates locally as clinical receptions mostly in urban settings. The idea dates back to the first decades of the last century. It was launched by John Lake, a Pentecostal pastor in Spokane (Washington, USA) in the beginning of the 1930s. It was the short-term revival of a single charismatic leader, and soon after the death of Lake in 1935 its activities ran out for several decades. However, the Healing Rooms was revived again in the 1990s by another Pentecostal pastor, Cal Pierce, who discovered the history of the already forgotten ideas of Doctor Lake and started to spread the idea of a non-denominational network throughout the world by starting to found local *prayer clinics*, as this concept of intercessory service was named.

The comeback of the Healing Rooms in the 1990s followed the rise of the Neo-charismatic movements, which are often characterised as the Health and Wealth Gospel because of a strong emphasis on healing, well-being and prosperity as privileges for true believers. So *thematically*, it is a kind of continu-

ation of, or supplement to the Pentecostal-Charismatic revival, even though it is not associated unambiguously with it. The Healing Rooms might rather be called an 'inter-charismatic' network without clearly committing itself to any single Christian church or movement, but rather aiming to co-operate with all of them. The Healing Rooms is also a story of successful global networking. That is to say, it has expanded very quickly to every continent, taking advantage of already existing and functioning local religious infrastructures. The headquarters of the movement is located in Spokane, Washington in the United States. The International Association of the Healing Rooms was founded in 2001. (The website of the international headquarters of the Healing Rooms Ministries.)

The Healing Rooms was introduced to Finland by a married couple who got to know the prayer clinic service on a holiday trip to California, at a local Vineyard congregation. They founded the first prayer clinic in Finland in 2006 and started to run the organisation, developing a training course for those who want to become prayer team members at local clinics. By autumn 2011, 26 prayer clinics had been founded around the country. The organisation operates in several different organisational contexts in Finland, such as the Pentecostal and Free Church congregations, as well as in the context of the mainstream Evangelical Lutheran Church. So, it crosses the borders between different churches and denominations. Prayer clinics may also work in purely secular surroundings like shopping malls, or in other public spaces. The Finnish leaders explained that the arrangements at local prayer clinics are based on the principle that a prayer clinic should be accessible to everyone; accessible both mentally and physically (IF mgt 2011/105). In order to make the clinics accessible, they are always situated in urban centres with functioning public transport. The spaces where the clinics operate on a regular basis are carefully chosen so that the threshold of access would not be prohibitive for anyone. For that reason, a prayer clinic is never arranged in a church building.

The settings and actors of the Healing Rooms practice

The description of prayer clinic practice is based on my ethnographic fieldwork, carried out during the spring term of 2011. I compiled the material that I am referring to in this article by such methods as thematic interview and participant observation, as well as by means of a questionnaire. I interviewed the leading couple in the Finnish headquarters of the movement, and

28 members of prayer teams representing five other clinics altogether, including the headquarters in Espoo. The short questionnaire was directed to the clients of every prayer clinic in the country.

At prayer clinics, there are two interacting groups: the inner circle community of carefully selected and trained prayer team members and their clients³, that is to say people who visit the prayer clinic in order to be prayed for. The local Healing Rooms clinics are arranged once a week or fortnightly. Before the actual clinical reception opens for the clients, the prayer teams prepare by praising and praying by themselves for an hour. This meditative get together helps the prayer team members to concentrate on their task and be present for the clients. The prayer team members whom I interviewed regard this moment of preparation as a necessary step towards being able to take on the role of a mediator, to be a *channel*, as they call themselves, between God and a client. After having done their spiritual preparations, the team members form serving teams each of three members, preferably having representatives of both sexes in each team.

The actual reception of the clients takes two hours. The clients wait for their turn to be prayed for in a waiting room where a receptionist has given every client a form to fill in. After the clients have written down their prayer requests, they are invited one by one to the prayer room—as to a doctor's surgery—where the team of three trained prayer team members prays for each client personally in private, according to his or her request. In the course of one reception, there are usually on average 10 visitors and 2 to 4 teams working for them.

Discussion with the client is meant to be minimal. It is expressly emphasised that the Healing Rooms service is not supposed to involve a therapy style conversation. For this reason, all actors, both the prayer team members and the client, stand during the prayer, which takes, depending on the case, 10 to 20 minutes. If people were sitting during this process, the situation could easily be interpreted as a therapy session, and that is not in the provision of

- 3 The term 'client' may sound misleading in this context because it is usually understood to be connected with the exchange of products and money. Even though Healing Room services are based on voluntary work and are free of charge for those who use them, I call the visitors to the clinics by the name 'clients' because most of the members of the prayer teams in Finland do so. The Finnish word *asiakas* literally means 'a client' in English. Basically, the interviewed prayer team members did not see any problem with the term, even though as used in other contexts it has a commercial connotation. Occasionally, Healing Room clients are referred to by other terms, such as *kävijät* (attenders/visitors) or *rukoiltavat* (those who are prayed for).

the Healing Rooms at all. The clients may stay in the waiting room afterwards as long as they like, have refreshments and read leaflets, but there is no other programme offered to them; no teaching, no hymn singing. Praying for solutions to various problems is the only service provided, and in a case of other needs, clients are advised to turn to their home congregations, physicians, or other professional helpers.

The standardised training is an absolute precondition for being authorised as a prayer team member in the Healing Rooms. The two day long training course includes praying demonstrations and charisma teaching, as well as an orientation to the strict and explicit rules for a team member to observe when encountering a client. A client must be treated respectfully and in a calm and discreet manner, and for instance, praying in tongues is not allowed because it may make somebody feel uncomfortable. The 'Laying on of hands' is a typical Christian ritual gesture especially for blessing or healing. However, in the Healing Rooms, a client is not touched without his/her permission, which is always asked for. Taking into account these cultural norms of proximity is regarded as an important aspect of respecting privacy. This is a remarkable detail because, as in the Nordic countries it is not normally acceptable to go and touch or hug people whom you do not know personally. However, in Charismatic meetings, the typical situation it is rather the other way around and it often confuses newcomers. The Healing Rooms represents, in this respect, less intrusive style of approach that is more familiar to most of the Finns, also within the mainstream church.⁴

The prayer teams serve at local Healing Rooms clinics as volunteer workers. However, they are selected and trained to encounter people from different backgrounds. The most important criterion is that a team member is a believer who belongs to a Christian church or congregation, no matter which one. The standardised training is an absolute precondition for being authorised as a prayer team member in the Healing Rooms. In fact, Healing Rooms training courses gather believers from different Christian backgrounds, even those without any intention of joining a prayer team. In Finland, they come from various Christian backgrounds, mostly the mainstream church, Pentecostalism and the Free Church.

4 The Finnish leaders explained carefully the importance of 'acculturating' the Healing Room concept to make it easily adaptable to the Finnish culture and society (IF mgt 2011/105). Respecting the cultural norms of social interaction can be seen as an example of this.

The clients, for their part, are not required to reveal their religious affiliations or to confess anything if they do not wish to do so. The atmosphere is meant to be easy, safe and comfortable for clients, and not at all judgemental. However, if a client is not a believer, their conversion is also prayed for somehow between the lines. After all, winning new followers for Christianity is the underlying purpose of the Healing Rooms prayer service. All my interviewees had a very strong motivation for evangelising. The main theme that the Healing Rooms advocates is holistic well-being which is said to *preconceive* a Christian way of life, but a confession is not pushed openly. Active proselytizing is not allowed and team-members are urged to be sensitive to clients' experiences of unpleasant situations and also receptive to any feedback from clients.

Consumers of the Healing Rooms prayer service

The questionnaire (HRQ2011) to the clients was distributed to all 24 prayer clinics that were operating in the country between late March and early May 2011. It was requested that the questionnaire was offered to the clients at the reception desk. The response rates varied very much from one clinic to another, because the 'customer flow' was not the same everywhere. According to the interviewees, the average number of clients per night was 5–10. Eventually, the Healing Rooms Finland headquarters in Espoo gave the best result (22 responses), while there were 3 prayer clinics that did not send out one single response. On the whole, I got back 124 responses. It goes without saying that this kind of questionnaire distribution excluded those clients who have visited a prayer clinic only once and, for one reason or another, do not go there again. Nevertheless, their experiences would also be most valuable, but it was not possible to reach them via the clinics.

Among the clients who did answer to the questionnaire, there were *occasional visitors* and *regular customers*, that is to say, both those who came for the first time and those who were already familiar with the service. First time visitors were 30.64 per cent of the respondents, which means that most of them are more or less regular customers. The great majority of the respondents—74.19 per cent—also belonged to the mainstream church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, as most of the population do. Seven respondents did not belong to any religious community and quite as many belonged to neo-charismatic communities. Others were Free Church members (9.7 %) and Pentecostals (12.9 %).

Nevertheless, nominal membership does not say much about an individual's religiosity. In order to get more information about it, I also asked about attendance and interest in religious activities; that is to say, about practice and participation. It was no big surprise that 78 per cent of the respondents participated regularly at more or less charismatic Christian services and meetings. 12.9 per cent of the respondents denied participating any other religious or spiritual events, except for occasional or regular visits to a local prayer clinic. On the whole, interest in spiritual services (other than Christian) among the respondents was quite limited. According to the questionnaire responses, the circle of customers using the Healing Rooms services is principally made up of Christian believers, who draw a strict line between Christian ideas and New Age. This leads to the conclusion that the Healing Rooms appeals mostly to those who are already more or less familiar with the Pentecostal-Charismatic type of Christianity. Furthermore, their responses reflect internalised Christian attitudes, such as references to Jesus and God's power. However, 20.26 per cent of the respondents indicated having tried or used other spiritual services; most of them mentioned Reiki, a spiritual healer, clairvoyant, angle therapy, energy healing and Rosen therapy.⁵

Most of the respondents were women (71 %). This is also typical, considering that women are said to partake more actively in religious life in Finland, no matter how it is measured (Kääriäinen *et al.* 2005). However, according to interviewees, the number of male clients was gradually increasing during the spring of 2011. As a result of the questionnaire, men covered 25 per cent of the respondents. A few people did not want to indicate their gender. As regards to the age of clients, the clinical intercessory prayer service seems to appeal most of all to the middle-aged. The biggest age group among the respondents was 36–45 years (31.45 %), while the second biggest groups were 46–55 years (24.19 %) and 56–65 years (20.16 %). Clients younger than 30 years and over 60 years were few and both very old and very young people were missing. Clients basically represent actively working age groups.

To the question of education, 44.35 per cent of the respondents indicated that they had a vocational training, while little less, 36.30 per cent of them, checked an academic education. The rest were students or had done only basic schooling. Considering the age groups, surprisingly many were retired (29 %). The result may indicate, for instance, the frequency of people drawing disability pension among the clients. The largest professional category

5 Such alternatives as TM, homeopathy, hypnosis, intuitive healing, fire healing, stone therapy, chakra opening and flower therapy were mentioned only once each.

among the respondents was made up of clerical employees (31.44%), labourers (17%) were the second biggest professional category while 7.25 per cent of the respondents represented entrepreneurs. In the spring of 2011 in Finland, the unemployment rate was around 8 per cent, which was visible also in the questionnaire responses—8.87 per cent of the respondents were unemployed.

A practical perspective on faith

As the title of my article implies, institutionalised forms of religion may not be quite enough even for all members of those institutions, while for the others, they obviously are too much. The prayer service that is completely outside of normal worship service and congregational life seems to appeal to those who seek practical and focused spiritual aid, either for their everyday lives, or for some specific acute trouble. In addition to being easily accessible, the low admittance threshold in the Healing Rooms means also that nothing is too trivial for a prayer request and all requests are taken equally seriously, as a very active male prayer team member vigorously explained:

. . . when a client comes, well, if his/her cat's collar is missing and he/she wants a prayer for the collar to be found, we pray for it. It is no more freaky than if somebody asks to be prayed for a bad cancer. . . It is important to that person. . . If God makes contact with the person by letting the cat's collar to be found, why not? (IF mgt 2011/075.)

Typical prayer requests most often deal with physical illness, but also social relationships and psychological problems. Solutions to financial problems and unemployment are often asked to be prayed for, too. The underlying purpose of the Healing Rooms function, though, is evangelising, but it is implemented exclusively by praying for clients following their own wishes. Clients write down their requests for prayers of intercession on a form that is taken to the prayer team in advance. Principally prayer requests fall into two categories. Firstly, there is the category of physical illness and discomfort, and secondly, the category of social relationships and emotional or mental problems. The typical physical problems that are prayed for are prolonged or constant pain, chronic illness or a poor condition that has not necessarily been medically diagnosed, but is experienced as painful and restrictive.

The second category of prayer requests covers everyday life from home to work and social relationships; also praying for someone's next of kin, and psy-

chological problems such as anxiety, depression or insomnia. According to the team members, there has been a shift in prayer requests from physical illnesses and practical matters to more psychological and also expressively spiritual areas. Difficulties in social relationships and crises in marriage and the family, loneliness and burnout in working life, as well as unemployment are all mentioned as being common prayer requests. 'Becoming whole' emotionally and spiritually has become more frequently an issue in healing evenings during its five years of active work, while in the beginning, the focus was on physical healing. This may partly be interpreted as a result of the majority of the clientele being regular customers; the clients may have a tendency to change their prayer requests from being concerned with the immediate needs of daily life to more abstract themes in the process of time, after becoming more acquainted with the practice.

79.2 per cent of the respondents had had some kind of medical treatment because of the disease that was being prayed for. 33.6 per cent of the respondents had had psychotherapeutic care for the problem presented as a prayer request. Thus obviously, the services of the Healing Rooms are used in a spiritually supportive capacity, not as a cure-all. According to the prayer team members, clients are never advised to give up the medical treatment, if they have any, and rest in the hope of a miraculous healing. On the contrary, they are encouraged to be careful with medication and look for professional help for their diseases.

Personal evaluations of the effects of prayer were traced in the questionnaire by asking 'have you had an experience of a prayer helping you?' and 'have you had an experience of a prayer not helping you?' There was also some space to specify these experiences on the form. According to the answers to these questions, 94.4 per cent of the respondents felt that an intercessory prayer had had a positive effect on their life situation and it had helped them in one way or another. Quite a few of the respondents (64.8 %) cared to give an example of, or an explanation for the beneficial effects of the prayer in their lives. Some answers were only slogan-like summaries of the effects:

God answers my requests (HRQ 2011/120).

It heals (HRQ2011/038).

It makes me feel better (HRQ2011/114).

IT WORKS!! (HRQ2011/085)

Some respondents gave more detailed information of what they had experienced. Physical healing and miracles are often propagated as the most significant outcomes of faith healing and, above all, at the rhetorical level, for instance, in Pentecostal-Charismatic sermon speech. Considering the physical and miraculous public image of faith healing, surprisingly few respondents reported having experienced something so concrete and outright. Specifically, only 16 per cent of the respondents checked having actually been healed of an illness, injury or bodily pain. This result indicates that the circle of customers in the Healing Rooms mostly look for something other than simply a physical cure.

A little more than half of the respondents, who gave some kind of a description for the question of how prayer has helped (53/101), explained it in terms of their life situation and state of mind. The feelings after the prayer service and its effects were described, for instance like this:

With the help of a prayer, the situation gets clearer and the problem comes into the right perspective (HRQ2011/081).

It calms me, I have had a chance to share the burden and have felt that somebody prays for me, cares (HRQ2011/079).

I get into a better mood, sometimes for several days (HRQ2011/021).

I get courage, understanding about a problem, help with emotional troubles, for example, peace (HRQ2011/080).

The therapeutic function of the prayer service is obvious. As especially the second citation above shows, the interpersonal level, the interaction between a client and a prayer team member as an experience of being cared for refers to having received social support that had been lacking. Current difficulties may also be seen in a different light, and thus, finding solutions to the problems may feel more attainable. Regarding the used vocabulary in the answers, evidently doctrinal references to Christianity were quite numerous. However, only one respondent explicitly referred to the idea of charisma as a channel:

... I have got messages and answers from God through the prayer team members' visions (HRQ2011/031).

The prayer team members, for their part, talked a lot during the interviews about the role of charismata in their work. Nevertheless, as they drew a strict line between their inner circle meetings and the customer work, they emphasised the principle of not expressly using their charismata, such as glossolalia, or speaking out prophesies to a client. Thus in this case, the clients' personal knowledge of the charismatic Christian tradition is evident. More often the answers dealt with the controlling and helping superhuman entity, God's kindness, some also commented on the strengthening of faith:

It calms me, it helps me to understand that there is something bigger than us in the world (HRQ2011/095).

God has released me from the chains, given me joy instead of depression (HRQ2011/060).

Jesus becomes very dear (HRQ2011/086).

However, 41.6 per cent, that is nearly half of the respondents had also had an experience of getting no benefit from being prayed for. Those respondents who had experienced failure despite being prayed for, were not as eager to give explanations as those who reported having got positive results. If non-functioning prayer was explained or commented on, it was almost invariably done in biblical terms, mostly by referring to God's will (20%). One respondent explained the lack of 'prayer answers' curtly as Satan's intervention, and disbelief was mentioned here twice. More often the reason was seen as it not being the right time for prayers to come true yet (16.8%). The notion of the wrong kinds of requests, those that do not please God, or are not good for the person himself, were assessed as 'personal faults' (19.2%), as well as impatience, not being relaxed and restlessness⁶, stubbornness, biased wishes, haste, uncertainty and being unforgiven. Basically, all responses were serious; only one respondent approached the issue with a piece of humour signifying it with a smiley:

God probably had other engagements. . . ☺ (HRQ2011/090).

6 This was the answer of a person who also meditated and was familiar with intuitive healing.

13.6 per cent of the respondents expressed their ignorance with regard to the reasons for a non-functioning prayer, and almost half of them (47.2 %) did not comment on the possibility of not being helped by a prayer in any way. One respondent obviously regarded the question as irrelevant by having scored it off.

On the grounds of the questionnaire responses, it is obvious that most of the Healing Rooms' clientele represent different intensities of Christian belief. Those few of the respondents who did not belong to any religious community, seemed to find the individually organised prayer service as the right kind of spiritual activity for themselves—without an obligation of *belonging* to any religious community.

Discussion

Instead of discussing the diminishing role of religion in society, it is more illuminating to study how religious traditions accommodate to new situations; for instance, as different practices that may, in some cases, even contest each other. Another interesting point is how traditions absorb functionally relevant elements and ideas to compromise and make the most of new situations. In Finland, the Healing Rooms prayer service seems to have found its niche somewhere between the traditional, but for many people too binding, congregational participation and the spiritual therapy of pastoral care. It has also met an interest in individual spirituality and well-being in society. The perspective of holistic well-being has an appeal that may also attract many of those who do not find collective worship or liturgical services sufficient, interesting enough, or suitable for their religious needs.

Thus, the Healing Rooms is accommodating the basic Christian evangelising mission to the present day Western religious and spiritual marketplace, where vital issues are well-being and healing. It is noteworthy and symptomatic that even though the Healing Rooms actively resists and fights against the New Age type of spirituality and the idea of healing in other contexts as Christian, it quite as actively also involves that scene, namely, the scene of holistic well-being. As Marion Bowman has pointed out, a striking feature in twentieth century spirituality—and undoubtedly in the spirituality of the twenty-first century, too—is a perception of the need for healing. It seems that for many people nowadays, healing is the new *soteriology*. Nevertheless, the emphasis has shifted from questions of salvation to questions of healing. Instead of asking 'what can I do to be saved?' and 'what can I do to save the

world?’ one asks ‘what can I do to be healed?’ or ‘how can I heal the world?’ (Bowman 1999: 1).

To propagate the interpretation of the Biblical healing following Jesus’ work as an exemplar, the Healing Rooms introduces its work at the well-known annual New Age happenings in Finland, *The Fair of the Spirit and Knowledge* (‘Hengen ja tiedon messut’) and *The I Am Fair* (‘Minä Olen -messut’). These are events where various New Age practitioners present their services for a couple of days every autumn. It is an important forum for the Healing Rooms, too, because that fair is ‘the place where the seekers are.’ Thus, it is taken as an opportunity to win new followers for Christianity by using the spiritual theme of healing. As the great mission, the Healing Rooms claims to ‘rehabilitate the concept of healing and bring it back to its original biblical meaning after having been stolen by New Age thinkers’ as the leading couple of the Healing Rooms Finland argued (IF mgt 2011/105). The setting as an interaction between practitioners and clients, and the clinical arrangements for praying for healing, accommodate the idea of a prayer clinic to the field of alternative well-being practices.

Of course, healing has often been related to religion (Bowman 1999: 4). In Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity particularly, saving and healing have traditionally gone hand in hand, and the idea of holistic healing, covering simultaneously the body, mind and spirit is the very focus of the doctrine. This theme and its practical manifestations have been even more emphasised since the rise of Neo-charismatic movements, such as Vineyard, Toronto Blessing, Word of Faith and so forth. As the responses that I received to my questionnaire showed, the Healing Rooms service appeals mostly to those who are already more or less familiar with Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity. So its recruiting function works as an attempt to make passive believers more active in their faith. In the light of the questionnaire results, participating without believing was not observed.

Conclusion

After five years of intensive campaigning, the Healing Rooms has gained a foothold in Finland’s Christian culture. The clinical practice type of intercessory prayer service seems to make a functioning symbiosis between the members of prayer teams and their clients. For team members, the active role of a prayer, as well as worshipping in a coherent and democratic community of believers provides a chance for personal spiritual self-actualisation in a sup-

portive spiritual community which is focused on a structured mission for its members instead of sitting in a pew. It creates more active agency for those believers who find their role and subjectivity restricted in one way or another as lay members in their own hierarchical churches. By serving as ‘clinic practitioners’, trained prayer team members enact their subjectivity and are able to occupy a spiritually more rewarding role, so to say: to live their religion.

For clients, the Healing Rooms provides no community to join as a member, but a prayer clinic offers a tailor-made support for the seamy side of life—discreet and individual care with easy access that does not take much time, is free of charge, and which demands nothing in return. For the client, it serves as a practice to be used when needed without any obligations of committing oneself to anything permanently. It is simply a place to visit when spiritual care or treatment is needed to solve a problem or to feel better. On the clients’ side, it is practising and participating without belonging.

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