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The sacredness of the self, of society and of the human body

The case of a Finnish transgender pastor Marja-Sisko Aalto

Introduction

A Finnish professor turns on a TV in a hotel room in Damascus, in Islamic Syria in December 2008. He happens to switch onto a Russian channel, broadcast from Moscow, the capital of a mainly Orthodox nation, and comes across a report on a Finnish Lutheran male pastor who has just undergone sex reassignment surgery. The body and gender of this Lutheran minister made headlines not only in Finland, but her case transcended religious and national borders. The change of sex of a Finnish transgender pastor attracted media attention to Lutheran Christianity on a worldwide scale, which compared to other religious traditions seldom makes it to the world news. In this article I shall discuss the sex reassignment undergone by Marja-Sisko Aalto, a Lutheran pastor from the town of Imatra, in south eastern Finland, who in 2008, at the age of 54, was transformed into a woman. Throughout the following account, I will use the pronoun *she*, even when discussing her life prior the sex reassignment surgery.

Marja-Sisko Aalto (formerly Olli-Veikko Aalto) was born in July 1954 in Lappeenranta in south eastern Finland. There were eight children in the family: she was the seventh son and after her a daughter was born. Marja-Sisko's family was Lutheran, though her parents did not observe religious customs very strictly. In 1973, Marja-Sisko entered the Faculty of Theology at the University of Helsinki. In 1986 she started working as a pastor in Imatra. She has been married twice and has three daughters from her first marriage. Since early childhood, she has experienced that her natal, or genital sex—that of a man—does not correspond to her own perception of her sex. Marja-Sisko's decision to change her sex and become a woman gave rise to heated debates within the Lutheran Church and in the media. Shortly after returning to her work as a pastor in the small town of Imatra, Marja-Sisko felt an urge to resign from her office because her colleagues, bishops, friends and members

of her congregation expressed their suspicion and turned their backs on her. Throughout this process, Marja-Sisko has been giving interviews and has appeared frequently on TV; a documentary about her was shown on national TV in March 2010 and she also writes a blog.

This particular case of sex reassignment raises intriguing questions about the role of the human body in religion, as well as about issues that may have analytical value in making sense of the problematic experiences faced by individuals with non-binary gender identity, whether lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender or intersex-identified individuals. I ask the question as to why would perceptions of a pastor's body matter more than her theological competence and a sincere will to put love into practice? Why is it that her physical, sex reassigned body is perceived as an anomaly, which no longer fits her previous position in the congregation? When Marja-Sisko Aalto brought her sex reassignment treatment into the public domain, she had a sincere wish—based on her Christian conviction—that the Evangelical Lutheran Church as her employer would accept her choice in making this fundamental transition in her life and create conditions for her to continue her work as a pastor. After all, her personal identity and personality traits, as well as her strong commitment to the Lutheran Church have remained the same as before. However, during the last two years following the start of her sex reassignment process, Marja-Sisko Aalto has become stigmatized and to a certain extent, has experienced discrimination. Persons in leading positions in the ecclesiastical administration have repeatedly turned down her applications for various positions, until finally she was elected as the notary of *diocese* for *Kuopio* by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in September 2010.

I argue that in order to find answers to these questions, we need to theorize why our cherished notions of the self, of society and of the human body, work the way they do. As scholars of Religious Studies, we are aware of the fact that sociocultural practices, including religious practices, are located in our bodies. The necessary link between the ideal and the real, the symbolic and the imaginative, the appropriate and inappropriate, the pure and licit as well as the impure and illicit, which characterizes religious thought and behaviour, is founded on the corporeality of human beings. Our societies are constituted on categorical boundaries on the basis of which people tend to stigmatize those who are not imagined as part of 'us'. By 'us' and 'we' I refer to the imaginary we, who tend to think that only we have normal bodies, intelligent brains, rational thinking and capacity for love and emotional responses.

Even prior to Marja-Sisko Aalto's return to her congregation after the sex reassignment surgery and treatments, the major issue faced by her was that

the key persons in the parish had already decided that her physical body no longer fitted the notion of the social body. Let me cite the late British cultural anthropologist Mary Douglas, who writes that

[t]he social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived. The physical experience of the body, always modified by the social categories through which it is known, sustains a particular view of society. (Douglas 1996: 69.)

We need to rehearse our academic training in Religious Studies, cultural anthropology, sociology and psychology in order to find ways of understanding why our notions of the self and society are religiously charged. We need to understand why we think and behave in the way we do, as members of religious organizations and as members of nations and societies. I shall argue that the religious charge stems from marking boundaries between the categories of the self, of the society and of the human body. In my interpretation, it is the anomalous, taxonomic status of the transgender pastor within the normative Christian categorical thinking that creates awe and fear.

I will start with some remarks on the relation between religion and the body and briefly discuss terminological issues. In the second part of the article, I will return to Marja-Sisko Aalto and her life story. The discussion is based on my interview with her in April 2010. In the last section I will discuss the Finnish cognitive scholar Ilkka Pyysiäinen's reflection on folk biology as an explanation for making sense of the public image regarding a priest's gender. I conclude by looking at Marja-Sisko Aalto's case from the perspective of marking boundaries between the categories of the self, the society and the human body. At the end of the day, however, I have no definite answers and solutions. I can only theorize Marja-Sisko's case from a variety of vantage points and trust that they resonate confidentially with the information that she has extended to me.

Religion and the body

Within the field of religious studies, we need to acknowledge the fact that cultural practices, including religious practices, are located in our bodies. As historians of religions, we are well aware of the fact that interpretations of corporeality vary immensely according to religious traditions, cultures and societies. The body of Jesus Christ, *Corpus Christi*, lies at the heart of

Christianity. A human being is regarded as an image of God, carved in our flesh and body by the force of biblical tradition. However, throughout the history of Christianity, the human body has posed a theological problem for the Christian Churches due to its non-divine properties. While the human soul possesses a boundless religious potential through the notion of the spirit, the body is weak flesh and decaying matter, playing a less important role in the Christian worldview.

Salvation-related Christian discourse has been predominantly centered on normative or, citizen bodies, i.e. bodies which adjust and conform to general rules and regulations prescribed and controlled by the state, its social institutions and its laws (see Graham 2007). Over the last two decades an increasing number of LGTB-activists (lesbian, gay, transgender, bisexual) have been drawing the attention of the public to claims of gender-variance citizenship. In societies like Finland, where the official Lutheran religion is intimately connected with the notion of the citizenship, non-normative gender and sexual identities appear to be a major source of cognitive dissonance for members of the society in general and for Christian believers in particular.

In discussing the role of religion in moulding attitudes towards variances in sexual and gender identity, we need to be clear about gender-specific terms and categories. 'Transgender' is a term that is used to describe people who transcend conventional gender boundaries, irrespective of their physical status or sexual orientation: the term includes intersex and third-gender people, androgynes, cross-dressers, drag queens, drag kings and gender queers (see Kidd & Witten 2008: 33). 'Transgender' is an etic category, i.e. an experience-distant category, which cultural agents subsumed in that category do not employ in their everyday parlance. Instead, they use terms of their own gender community: they refer to themselves as girls, fem queens, women, gay, and so forth. Transgender is thus an imposed etic category which is used by academics, social service providers, and by participants in the transgender liberation and lesbian liberation movements. The distinction between 'transgender' and 'gay' reinforces social hierarchies, as Anne Enke, the American professor of Gender and Women's Studies at the University of Madison, Wisconsin points out. Enke writes that

[a] long history of medical practices, academic theorizing, social movement efforts, and social service provision have worked hard to construct distinctions between sexual preference and gender identity or expression. But the institutionalization of the categorical distinction between transgender, gay, and straight not only separates sexuality and gender,

but simultaneously reinforces race and class hierarchies according to the privileged logics of heteronormativity and homonormativity. (Enke 2009: 199.)

The choice of a particular term marks an important difference: gay, lesbian and bisexual identities concern predominantly sexual preference, while transgender is used to pertain only to gender identification. Transgender-identified individuals do not necessarily put emphasis on sexual identity. Marja-Sisko Aalto has likewise posited that her change of sex has nothing to do with her sexual preferences. I will now proceed with a brief account of her biographical process.

A narrative construction of the self

I met Marja-Sisko for the first time in April 2010 in Helsinki, where she lived after resigning from her office in Imatra. During our two-hour discussion, she repeated many of the same ideas and told me about the same episodes of her life that I recognized from the documentary as well as various other interviews in newspapers and on TV. Some of the information can be obtained also from her blog in the Internet (<http://marja-siskonblogi.blogspot.com/>). Marja-Sisko's willingness to discuss her experiences publicly is a conscious choice and an act of civic activism—she seeks to raise consciousness about the existence of transgender-identified individuals. Simultaneously, through public accounts about her life and about the process of becoming a woman she is self-professing a social identity as a woman. In other words, and to refer to Judith Butler, Marja-Sisko is engaged in a process of discursively constructing herself as a woman (Salih 2003: 74). In the following, I aim to discuss how transforming one's sex is not only a biological, but also an ongoing narrative and performative process that involves narrating one's past from the perspective of the present day. Memory plays a significant role in the discursive construction of the self. Let me refer to Thomas Csordas who writes that 'memory is a powerful symbol of the self, such that access to memory is access to a privileged zone of communion with that 'other who becomes myself' (Csordas 1997: 110). The following analysis is based on my interview with Marja-Sisko Aalto as well as her public appearances.

In spite of having been born into a male body, she felt that she was female before she had words to express herself. Like many male-to-female (or MTF) individuals, Marja-Sisko uses the notion of female, not feminine, as the

gender identifier. Being a very articulate and, rational person and having had an academic education, she does not talk about her traumatic experience of having been in the 'wrong' body with mixed feelings, but describes her life in a very self-confident manner.

I was a very different child. According to my mother, I reflected things a lot although I did not have words to express myself. When I was three I asked my parents, why I need to wear boys' clothes even though I am a girl. At the age of six I faced my first serious crisis when I talked with my parents about being a girl. I learned that it is disgraceful even to say it out aloud. I had to shut off such a big part of my life, to tear off an important piece of me. It was such a horrible idea for a 6-year old to hear that I was naughty and disgraceful for saying who I was.

One of the striking traits in Marja-Sisko's personality is her serenity and tranquility. Her personality has been tested several times. On an occasion of managership training at the end of 1980s, she achieved the highest points in the history of the psychology centre in testing her ability to tolerate stress. According to her, this trait, along with her Christian faith has helped her in life, at least externally.

In Marja-Sisko's childhood home, religion was an issue of values, attitudes and choices in life. Her grandfather from her mother's side had been a lay representative at the Synod and her mother had been in various positions of trust at the congregation in Lappeenranta for 30 years. It was taken for granted that children would participate in the various activities organized by the parish. There has been no religious crisis whatsoever in Marja-Sisko's life; her religious faith has evolved as an integral part of her family life. The only crisis, or rather struggle, has been a continuous attempt to reconcile the Christian faith and Marja-Sisko. Theologically, the words of St Paul have helped her to conceptualize her struggle: 'I am the clay who continuously quarrels with the potter.'

The family consisted of eight children: there were six big brothers before Marja-Sisko (i.e. Olli) and one little sister after her. To my question on religious motivation for a large family, Marja-Sisko replied to me that her parents were medical students during the war years. By helping to treat the dying young men they saw in practice the demographic damages of war to the society. They loved children and wanted to have a large family. Her father had been an only child and perhaps felt a need to compensate.

An interesting feature, or a narrative construct, concerns the role of dreams in coping with the discrepancy between her inner life and the facts of the real world. She recollects that from the time of being very young, dreams and images have assisted her in coping with her situation.

In my imaginary world everything that was prohibited in the real world became true. The most beautiful dream that I repeatedly had was the one in which our family went to visit neighbours. My parents were extremely sociable people, especially my mother. We visited neighbours and other acquaintances and things like that. The dream was about a very typical visit. My mother introduced us by saying that here are my six sons and two daughters.

In real life, Marja-Sisko's father could not cope in any way with the gender issue. Throughout his life, he wanted to make his son's gender identification invisible. Marja-Sisko illustrates that she could not discuss the issue in peace with her father. The cure that father offered was sport; in athletics the confusing thoughts would go away. Until Marja-Sisko was around 15 or 16 she was a good runner: at the time when she was a 'he', she ran 800 and 1 500 meters and progressed well in competitions. However, in the shower rooms, she was disturbed by the thought that she had to put on the clothes of a teenage boy. Her major hobbies today are still volleyball, reading, philately and choral singing. Marja-Sisko's singing register is second bass. At present, she is in speech therapy and in the process of learning to raise the pitch range of her voice to alto.

Rewinding the marks of manhood

Perceiving of herself to be a transgender, Marja-Sisko's life has been a continuous learning process. She was socialized to adopt a male gender identity. From the pre-school years onwards she has felt a great pressure to adopt and learn culturally normative masculine gender expressions, but at the same time also a need to express femininity. Thus, masculine body language and feminine self-conception have contradicted each other. Two decades ago, long before undergoing treatment, Marja-Sisko sought paid help to acquire skills regarded as feminine, or as she put it, 'the most basic things that girls usually learn from their mothers': how to apply make-up, how to stand, sit and walk as a woman, how to carry a purse or wait at traffic lights. 'There are a thousand such small things in everyday life.'

The situation after the sex reassignment treatment is still a blend of male-female traits. However, at the present time Marja-Sisko is happy with the changes she is going through. She does not need to shave so often, she can let her hair grow and change her hairstyle, her skin has softened, her breasts have started to take shape, her hips have got wider, the fat content in her thighs has increased. Transformation of the body is a slow process, but as Marja-Sisko stated, it is going in the right direction. She now rejoices at the kinds of bodily changes that caused so much pain and fear in puberty when they went in the opposite direction.

When classmates in school expressed their joy of getting more strength, of having grown taller, of getting wider shoulders, of growing beards and of getting lower voices, they were great things to happen, taking them closer to manhood. To me these were the most horrible things I could imagine. It meant a transition towards uncleanness. Having a razor was a mark of manhood. I enjoyed this mark only for being able to shave every hair off my face as carefully as possible.

Metaphorically, sex reassignment treatment signifies a second puberty to Marja-Sisko. She feels that changes in her body are now going in the right direction and they are a great source of joy. She says realistically that she cannot change her shoe size, or her height (she is 183 cm, i.e. 6 feet) according to her taste, but she can manage with them. She can never become a beauty queen, but she is happy to have looks of a woman of her age. Even though Marja-Sisko does not need to cover up anymore, she says that being in a crowd is a great place to hide.

Marja-Sisko has been married twice. She has three grown-up daughters from her first marriage with Birgitta. Her second marriage was to Sirkka, which lasted only for two years and according to Marja-Sisko, 'was a hopeless attempt to act like a man.' She has maintained her relationship with her previous wife Birgitta after the sex reassignment. According to Jeremy Kidd and Tarynn Witten, it is usually the case with the long-term partners of transgender-individuals that they choose to maintain the relationship after changing gender presentation and/or genital sex (Kidd & Witten 2008: 51).

The first Sunday sermon as a woman in Imatra was a wonderful experience for Marja-Sisko. She describes having a tremendous feeling of relief that came from being herself and not having to cover herself up anymore, to be able to do this work as a woman, despite the fact there was very little feminine in her. She said that in that sermon

my femininity was invisible. My hair had grown a little and I had a light permanent wave; underneath my alb there were black socks and trousers and the kind of light shoes that I am wearing now. Alb is a very gender-neutral cloth, but I knew what was underneath it and that it was the first time in my life that I was able to witness this occasion as a woman. Even though I played a minor role in saying prayers, reciting the Bible and assisting in the Holy Communion, it was an enormous joy. Some people who attended the sermon have also said that they observed the joy radiating from me. There were others, however, who thought that it was gross to see a big man who thinks that she is a woman. What a total misunderstanding! There are people who like to think that I have done this on impulse.

Analysis: Why does the body and gender of priest matter?

Why is a transgender pastor perceived as a problem, as gross, filthy, inappropriate and impure? And on the other hand, why does the Evangelical Lutheran Church become a topical issue in the public sphere, drawing media attention predominantly when sexuality and sexual orientation are at stake? Before Olli Aalto became Marja-Sisko during the autumn of 2008, at the time when her sex reassignment was being intensively discussed, Suomen Lehtiyhtymä, a group of local newspapers in Finland, designed a questionnaire for the priests of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Out of 106 priests who responded to the questionnaire, 27.9 per cent expressed the view that Marja-Sisko Aalto's case did not concern the Church as an institution; they saw it entirely as a personal issue. 36.5 per cent were of the opinion that a public discussion about Marja-Sisko Aalto's sex reassignment provided a window of opportunity for the Church to take a stand on burning present-day issues. For one fifth of the respondents, Aalto's confidence needed to be assessed prior to making a decision on her right to continue as a priest in Imatra. (*Turkulainen* 2008.)

In reference to the public discussion about Marja-Sisko Aalto, the Finnish cognitive scientist of religion, Ilkka Pyysiäinen has reflected upon the theological debate regarding a priest's gender. According to Pyysiäinen, gender is not an arbitrary social construct in a theological debate, but a folk-biological category, and as such is perceived as the enduring property of an individual. The notion of folk biology suggests that categories, whether of species of animals or plants, are independent of taxonomies based on scientific biology. In folk biology properties of various species are understood on the basis of

invisible, unchangeable essences that members of a particular species share with one another. An entity cannot move from one category to another one, since the essence cannot be changed, made to disappear, or be put to death. Six-year old children already think that a bird hatched from the egg of a duck is a duck, even though a chicken may have sat on it. As Pyysiäinen posits, Carl von Linné and his contemporaries thought that species are created by God and that their essences are unchangeable. The concept of essence is a conjectural construct, based on circular reasoning. It is determined on the basis of external cues, which are then explained in terms of essence. Stripes and typical ways of moving determine the category inclusion of a tiger, who is differentiated from other species on the basis of these prototypical features which are determined by tiger essences. In similar manner, theological arguments explain priesthood on the basis of unchangeable essences that are attached to priests once they receive ordination. In Catholicism, ordination is a sacrament in which a priest is given *character indelebilis*, a mark that cannot be taken away. In protestant Lutheran Christianity, ordination does not have the status of sacrament. However, a priest remains a priest even if he or she is dismissed from a specific position in a specific parish. Pyysiäinen posits that in theological reasoning, a priest has an unchangeable essence. Once a priest, always a priest. (Pyysiäinen 2009; see also Pyysiäinen 2005: 24–5, 28–9.)

According to my view, Pyysiäinen tends to think that the essence of a priest, or of any other religious specialist is perceived of as a container in which sacredness, a status set apart, is imbedded either inherently or as a result of specific procedures of statement or reinforcement. Pyysiäinen refers to the Dalai Lama as an example of the first case, and to a Siberian shaman of the second case. He also provides an option based on E. T. Lawson's and R. N. McCauley's theory of religious ritual form, which he uses to explain the acquisition of the essence from gods, or God, in ordination, since—according to the theory—'only a superhuman agent can change metaphysical presuppositions'. (Pyysiäinen 2009: 196.)

Pyysiäinen argues that theological reasoning—similarly to vernacular categorization—is based on folk biology. Conceptions of a priest's gender are susceptible to becoming linked with etiological narratives, i.e. myths of origin. Thus, customs, values and essences originate from times immemorial. Their eternal, unchangeable paradigmatic properties date back to the mythic *illo tempore*. Since theological categories of 'man' and 'woman' draw on folk-biological conceptions, Pyysiäinen is critical of applying them to real human beings. As a way out of this vicious circle, he argues for the view that theological concepts should be grounded more closely in scientific biology and also,

based on biological evidence that the heterogeneity of the gender category needs to be acknowledged. This would prevent us from viewing transsexuals as an embarrassing challenge that can be dealt with by considering them as a biological curiosity or even as an individual's sinful choice. Pyysiäinen cites two Finnish academic philosophers, Petri Ylikoski and Tomi Kokkonen, who advise us to look to the future instead of the distant past. They write that '(m)odern medical science enables sex reassignment surgery and hormonal treatments which were previously unknown and which alter the view of gender as an eternal and unchangeable essence' (Ylikoski & Kokkonen 2009: 391–5, cited in Pyysiäinen 2009: 198).

I welcome Ilkka Pyysiäinen's theorizing on the folk biological foundation of gender categories in theological argumentation in general and in understanding ambiguous responses of Lutheran theologians to the change of a pastor's sex in particular. However, three things need to be reconsidered. Firstly, the postulate based on biology and essentialism is a weak one without sociological and anthropological analyses of the semantic links between religion, the human body and society. Regarding the role of a priest's gender in Lutheranism, pastors receive their position by election. Sacredness is not an enduring property of Lutheran priests. It is not bestowed in ordination, since priests are elected by adult members of the parish. It is the congregation, a social collective, which grants the set apart, the sacred position, to a person qualified to become a nominee due to his/her theological training. A Lutheran priest is rather a *sacerdos* than a *presbyteros*.

Secondly, Pyysiäinen makes an unnecessary dichotomous distinction between modern and pre-modern thought regarding boundary-making between the categories of male and female. He relies only on theological sources in arguing that women were displaced during the early Christian centuries when congregations were hierarchically organized. He writes that '[b]ecause the displacement of women took place prior to the birth of scientific biology, it was clear who was a woman and who was a man' (Pyysiäinen 2009: 196).

When applying scholarly theories and frameworks to the lives of real people, evidence from the history of religions helps us to locate particular issues in their historical context. Taxonomic classifications of scientific biology do not play a significant role in religion and in its ritual expressions even today. Prior to the emphasis of scientific biology as a prominent cultural paradigm, evidence from the history of religions testifies to the notion that gender-blending, cross-dressing and third-gender identification have taken place in cultures and religions the world over. In theorizing social drama and representations of liminality in ritual behaviour, the late anthropologist

Victor Turner repeatedly presented ethnographic data on universals of performance in which the society's normative control of biological development does not occur as anticipated. These universals can be detected also from Christian contexts, be they medieval, early modern or modern. In referring to his theory of liminality and gender reversals, Turner says that

symbols expressive of ambiguous identity are found cross-culturally: androgynes, at once male and female, theomorphic figures, at once animals and men or women, angels, mermaids, centaurs, human-headed lions, and so forth, monstrous combinations of elements drawn from nature and culture (Turner 1985: 295).

The history of religions provides a much more multi-faceted view of gender distinctions in the religious history of European cultures and societies, whether pre-modern or modern. Gender-blending and gender-variance is not a modern or post-modern cultural phenomenon. Caroline Walker Bynum posits, for instance, that 'a careful and comparative reading of texts by male and female authors from the twelfth to the fifteenth century suggests that it is men who develop conceptions of gender, whereas women develop conceptions of humanity' (Bynum 1986: 261–2). Bynum points out that in the Middle Ages,

women did not have a strong sense of binary opposites grouped around male/female contrast. They did not associate specific personality characteristics or roles—such as authority, rationality, nurture, emotion—with one or the other sex. Although they made use of the conventions of vernacular love poetry to write of themselves as brides, they also slipped easily into the male imagery where no reversal or even gender-specific meaning was implied. (Bynum 1986: 271.)

In the Middle Ages, role inversion was a prevalent practice among peasants and townspeople, especially during the calendrical rituals. Cross-dressing by lay women, who also gave it some religious significance, was common. However, cross-dressing by males was a rare phenomenon, 'because such acts represented a decline in status' (Bynum 1986: 272).

Thirdly, regarding the category of the self, this particular case of a Finnish transgender pastor shows that transforming sex is not only a biological, but also an ongoing narrative and performative process. By changing her sex, Marja-Sisko cut herself off, set herself apart, and made herself a whole, a puri-

fied person: in a word she *resacralized* herself. By making this move in her life, she has sacralized her *self* by marking off her own bodily boundaries and by becoming the woman that she has always wanted to be. Her sex reassignment has non-negotiable value to herself, even if it contradicts the social, citizen body on which her prior status as a male priest was founded. Her new social body is taking shape step by step, even if she still has, three years after the surgery, difficulties in crossing over the sacred buffer zones of the Lutheran Church.

Conclusion

Why is a transgender pastor difficult to approve of? According to my interpretation, it is Marja-Sisko Aalto's anomalous taxonomic status within the normative Christian theological thinking that creates awe and fear, thereby challenging a categorical boundary that sets the Church apart from the rest of the society in general and a Lutheran priest—whether male or female—apart from his or her fellow citizens in particular. The bodily behaviour of a priest plays an important role in separating and also maintaining the boundaries of the Church and its division into the two distinct domains of the interior and the exterior. The distinctiveness of the Church, i.e. its sacredness as an institution, is created by theological notions, and subsequently expressed in the Church Code, which are used to mark internal and external boundaries within the limits of its institutional power. The sacredness of a priest is predominantly a social notion and is intimately connected with metaphorical and metonymical relations between the Church, society and a corporeal individual. In my work on the issue of sacredness (see e.g. Anttonen 2000). I have promoted a view according to which the notion of the sacred should be treated as a relational category of thought and action, which becomes actualized in specific value-laden situations when a change in the culturally and contextually interpreted boundaries of temporal, territorial or corporeal categories takes place (Anttonen 2000: 278). In accordance with and in reference to my approach, Kim Knott has pointed out in her spatial analysis of religion that the 'sacred' is neither private nor public; it is transitive in associating both that which is public and that which is valued as private (Knott 2005: 99–102).

As Mary Douglas has pointed out in her book *How Institutions Think* (1986), social institutions play a significant role in conferring identity. They have the authority within their territories to include or exclude social agents with normatively unsuitable physical bodies, whether conceptual or phys-

al. The pastor's anomalous taxonomic status within the normative Christian categorical thinking has created awe and fear by challenging conventional, hetero-normative perceptions of gender boundaries and established conceptions of the society, which theological notions metaphorically represent.

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