

Laestadians in the Public Sphere: Reading the Biggest Christian Revival Movement in Finland



Tapio Nykänen and Aini Linjakumpu

Abstract In this chapter, we argue that the political and economic activities of the members of the Conservative Laestadianism are often intertwined with the religion and the religious notions of the movement. Many seemingly secular stances and procedures have theological basis, while others rely and utilize the social networks that originate in the church. However, the effects of the religion in the secular life of Laestadians are quite diverse, and one should not oversimplify them. The implications of a person's religious background can be positive for the members of the movements and society as a whole, but the religious dimension can also have negative consequences in politics and business, especially in the context of strong social relationships, bonds, and reciprocal links. Religious literacy means, at least partly, that one recognizes the variable roles that religion has in different social contexts.

Keywords Laestadianism · Revival movement · Politics · Economics · Networks

1 Introduction

Conservative Laestadianism is the biggest revival movement within the Finnish Lutheran Church and the largest Christian revival movement in Scandinavia. Currently, the movement has approximately 100,000–120,000 followers in Finland and Sweden and some 5,000 in the United States and Canada. The movement is the biggest branch of *Laestadianism*, a pietistic revival movement that was born on the spiritual legacy of the Swedish-Sámi priest, preacher and botanist Lars Levi Laestadius (1800–1861).

Most branches of Laestadianism are theologically relatively similar to each other but socially more or less separate, independent and exclusive. This is also the case with Conservative Laestadianism (CL). The movement's established theology represents Conservative Laestadianism as *the* Christianity, and holds that the true Kingdom of God exists solely within the CL community. Hence, salvation can only be found through actual, active engagement with this true church. Other branches of

T. Nykänen (✉) · A. Linjakumpu
University of Lapland, Rovaniemi, Finland
e-mail: tapio.nykanen@ulapland.fi

Laestadianism are considered aberrant and are rejected as offering false hopes. In the Conservative Laestadian view, the Lutheran Church, in turn, offers “protection” from “the world” but not more: true faith and salvation are only found in the parish of Conservative Laestadians (the *ecclesiola in ecclesia* principle).

In this chapter, we will introduce two new perspectives on Conservative Laestadianism. First, we scrutinize the *political culture* associated with Laestadianism in its core support areas in the City of Oulu and its environs. By political culture we refer to the habits and procedures typical of the political behavior of Conservative Laestadians in the region. We begin by introducing the historical-theological basis for Laestadian politics and then go on to describe two empirical examples in a more detailed way: voting in elections and participating in municipal politics as elected council members.

Second, we examine the *business networks* of Conservative Laestadians. We focus especially on the way that religion functions as a resource for business. The analysis shows that the economic activity of Conservative Laestadianism is linked to and benefits in many ways from the doctrines of the movement as well as the social practices and the existing relationships. Among Conservative Laestadians, a theological understanding supports participation in economic activities, and the movement’s social networks feature simultaneously as part of the economic activity.

In terms of religious literacy, this chapter aims at understanding how Conservative Laestadianism positions itself and how its members are acting in seemingly non-religious spheres, i.e. how to understand religiousness in political and economic contexts. We argue that the political and economic dimensions of the Laestadian world are not separate or self-sufficient. Instead, they are—sometimes quite visibly—intertwined with the religion and the religious notions of the movement (see Moore 2015, 31). There are, for example, procedures and guiding principles that have explicit religious connotations. Moreover, religious networks are sometimes clearly embedded in “secular” networks, especially in business life (see Granovetter 1992).

This approach challenges the positions interpreting religious groups or members of religious groups solely from the perspectives of religion or spirituality. When researching religious groups, it is important to realize that the interaction between religious and non-religious spheres can be complex and could even challenge the very idea of religiousness. This understanding is crucial since there are several disputes regarding the manner in which Conservative Laestadians and other conservative religious groups act in society. In this way, “‘being literate’ suggests that one is knowledgeable about religions and able to navigate the complexities of religious domains” (Biesta et al. 2019, 3).

We have gathered research material for the project during the period 2015–2018. The primary material consists of 39 interviews with politicians, entrepreneurs, office holders and other stakeholders, who had experience in local politics, business or both. The emphasis of the material is on the interviews of Laestadian informants. In addition to formally organized interviews, we have had informal discussions or consultations with some 40–50 Laestadian and non-Laestadian informants around the region.

Moreover, we have gathered material produced by the media, register data, material produced by the Conservative Laestadian movement, as well as material drawn from historical and genealogical sources.¹

2 Laestadian Politics—Historical and Theological Basis

The official religious doctrine of Conservative Laestadianism has valued politics and political participation at least since the early 20th century (Talonen 1988; Nykänen 2012, 2016). Theologically, the positive approach has originated in the Lutheran two kingdoms doctrine. According to the doctrine, religious (divine) and secular power are separated, but also secular power gains its legitimacy from God. Because of this, a true believer should support secular authorities in everyday life—even if the authorities are sometimes misguided and make decisions that are problematic from the religious perspective (Nykänen 2012, 2016, 133–175). However, this does not mean that one should refrain from criticizing authorities entirely: Criticism is allowed but it should be moderate and reasonable, which means that a Laestadian should not act in a disruptive way (Nykänen 2016).

In fact, the movement has encouraged a constructive attitude towards society. It means that a believer should be an active citizen who does his/her best to enhance the prosperity² of the hometown. In practice, one should, for example, participate actively in working life and vote regularly in elections. Participation in business life is also associated with this approach.

In the 19th century, the movement often gave very precise instructions on how Laestadians should vote and, in particular, how they should *not* vote. The political left as a whole was considered problematic because of its atheistic and revolutionary background. Also, supporting the Finnish Rural Party was condemned in the 1960s because its politics was deemed disruptive (Nykänen 2012, 2016). Perhaps the most imperative and explicit restrictions were issued in the 1960s and 1970s. Back then, the movement struggled with internal divisions that were catalyzed by arguments between the movement's priests and leading laymen and by the general modernization and liberalization of Finnish society (Linjakumpu 2012). The movement's leadership tried to contain the situation by tightening internal discipline, which led to a more explicit control over political behavior as well.

In the early 1980s, the movement replaced its general instructions with a request to vote in elections. At the same time, politics and religion became more or less officially separated (Nykänen 2016). This was at least partially a counter-reaction to

¹The themes of the chapter are examined more deeply on Nykänen and Harjumaa (2019) and Linjakumpu (2018).

²This interpretation originates in the book of Jeremiah: "Every human being, a religious one among others, lives and works in the context of one's own time and culture. But even the ones who were forced to move and lived their life in Babylonia 2,500 years ago, received a request from God, passed on by the prophet Jeremiah: 'Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile' (Jer. 29:7)" (Hintikka 2008, 134–135).

the distressing atmosphere of the two previous decades. However, the old political stance prevailed, and it still does in the late 2010s. Exact support numbers are not available,³ but all studies strongly suggest that the members still tend to vote the moderate political right (Talonen 2019; Nykänen 2016). Our research suggests that The Centre Party is, as it has traditionally been, the most popular political choice amongst Laestadians in Finland. The second most popular choice seems to be the National Coalition Party (see also Talonen 2019).

3 Voting in the 21st Century

As was mentioned above, prior to the 1980s, it was a rather common practice within the movement to give explicit orders about which party to vote and, in particular, which party to avoid. Moreover, in some cases, believers were instructed to vote for a particular Laestadian candidate. This was an organized way to funnel votes to certain individuals (Nykänen 2012, 162). Based on our material, neither of these is happening in the 2000s—at least not in such an overt manner. This, however, does not mean that the members of the movement would not talk about politics and political candidates. They do so, but usually the discussions are not arranged by any of the movement's organizations, such as the central organization SRK or the local congregations. Instead, political discussions are more or less spontaneous and carried out from bottom up. The most common exceptions are Laestadian politicians, who often campaign for themselves in Laestadian villages and municipalities. However, official rallies are not organized in parish houses or during religious events. As one interviewee stated, “the Centre Party is not the same thing as the Kingdom of God”.

All of our interviewees, regardless of their relation to the movement, claimed that Laestadians still usually prefer other Laestadians in voting. It is not imperative to vote for a Laestadian, but based on our material, it is a common practice. The most typical explanation for this was that another believer shares similar values and can, therefore, be expected to generally act in a desirable way in politics. As a Laestadian politician put it, another Laestadian “might think similarly, a conviction somehow represents thoughts in general”.

Another interviewee, a politician who had recently left the movement, pointed out that sometimes Laestadian values do also have a concrete effect on politics. The doctrine of the movement takes a negative view on particular social and cultural practices, such as open expressions of sexuality, consuming alcohol and competing in sports.⁴ When a Laestadian votes for another Laestadian, he/she can expect that the candidate would not spend too much tax money for example on “building an

³Tapio Nykänen attempted to conduct a survey of the political opinions of Laestadians in 2011 during their annual summer gathering called *Suviseurat*. The movement's central organization SRK did not give permission to conduct the survey. According to the movement, *Suviseurat* is a religious meeting, and politics should not be mixed with religion.

⁴Physical activity is not problematic as such—especially young Laestadians are often quite active in playing games such as volleyball or basketball and generally exercising together. Competitive

open-air dance pavilion or financing a sports club”. The interviewee also claimed that many older members of the movement often vote for another believer simply because the community has traditionally recommended so.

Many of our interviewees pointed out that there are only so many Conservative Laestadians and that the religious community is quite close-knit. Word about qualified and popular candidates spreads quickly in the network. It seems that nowadays votes concentrate on top candidates often through this semi-autonomous mechanism. In any case, the religious network can be seen as a valuable resource for Laestadian politicians, who can expect to get a significant number of votes from fellow believers. Nevertheless, according to several interviewees, it is quite rare that a Laestadian candidate would rely solely on fellow Laestadians’ votes. There are usually multiple popular Laestadian candidates competing for the votes, and not all Laestadians can be expected to vote for Laestadian candidates. Especially in national elections Laestadian politicians usually campaign to appeal to a wider audience.

From the perspective of religious literacy, it is crucial to note that religious conviction and religious codes have effects on the Laestadian voting behavior and on the way Laestadian politicians campaign. However, religious context or religious rules of the community do not explain everything. Moreover, their role in voting and campaigning changes due time.

4 Being a Laestadian in Politics: Values and Cooperation

Finnish municipal politics often focuses on making practical decisions concerning the everyday lives of residents. Obviously, such decisions have a normative background, and, occasionally, the norms and values related to such decisions are debated openly. However, in connection with religious arguments, values are relatively rarely addressed in an open manner.

This does not, however, mean that religious values would be completely absent from municipal-level politics. As was stated earlier, religious notions may affect practical decisions such as “financing a dance hall or a sports club”. In case of Conservative Laestadianism, religious values manifest themselves perhaps even more clearly through the general *style* of political action: Laestadians should act in a constructive way also in municipal politics (Nykänen 2012, 133–149). According to the interviewees, it means that “discussion and listening” are preferred to separation, let alone open conflict.

In addition to being constructive, actions taken by Laestadians are expected to contribute towards “the prosperity of the city”. Hence, the general aim of political actions should be to benefit the local community, not to raise one’s personal status or to increase the power of the party. What constitutes the good of the local community was often described in quite functional terms in the interviews. The interviewees

sports, in turn, are seen to require lots of attention and time, which may make it too difficult to practice the faith in proper ways.

reported that it is important to maintain a well-functioning school network, among other things. This can be considered family-oriented politics, and the family is, indeed, a crucial socioreligious institution in Laestadianism (Nykänen 2012, 133–148, 2016). The movement is strictly against birth control, and Laestadian families are still typically very large: it is not uncommon to have a family with more than ten children. Hence, society's support for large families in their everyday needs is very important to Laestadians. According to the interviewees, family-oriented thinking is often, if not always, clearly visible in the politics of Laestadian council members.

Even if Laestadian politicians do have some similarities in their political style and agenda, generally they were not seen to form independent or separate groups in councils. Instead, according to most interviewees, Laestadians and non-Laestadians alike, they primarily act as members of their political group in the council and can engage in cross-party cooperation as well. This was notable, as non-Laestadian interviewees and many other non-Laestadian informants described Laestadian communities generally as somewhat introvert and even cliquish. Some interviewees explained that a shared religion does not mean that the members of the movement would also have to share their political opinions. Furthermore, some of the interviewees said that religion is deliberately excluded from secular politics in order to ward off suspicions of the existence of inner circles. One Laestadian politician noted that Laestadians are usually a minority not only in the council but also in the political group, so cooperation with others is also a necessity.

If Laestadians do not generally form separate political groups in councils, are they still, to some degree, loyal to the religious community when acting in politics? Most interviewees claimed that, in politics, Laestadians are primarily loyal to the political party. However, there were also some contradictory statements. An interviewee who had left the movement stated that, in local politics, one should be clearly loyal to other Laestadians or at least other Laestadian politicians instead of the political party. Another politician, a younger Laestadian woman, stated that even though Laestadians are generally loyal to their party and not to the fellow believers in politics, things may get more complicated in some cases. According to the interviewee, especially older Laestadian men tend to think that they are "somewhat smarter" than younger female politicians. In some cases, this has meant that the interviewee in question has been expected to conform to the views of the older Laestadian politicians and to act as is "appropriate" in her role as a mother of a big family.

The above example shows how different networks may sometimes converge surreptitiously. Although politicians see themselves primarily as representatives of their party, the shared religious background of the older men and the younger woman in question seems to affect their relationship in a political context. The Conservative Laestadian community is quite patriarchal, especially in spiritual terms (for example, women are not accepted as priests or preachers), and the social norms that are constructed in religious contexts may well manifest themselves in secular interaction as well. This does not necessarily happen because the movement officially would require so: there are no religious rules that would make older men more competent than younger women in political decision-making. Instead, the example shows how

social structures that originate in religion may sometimes have unofficial but still normative effects in secular life.

5 Economic Life: Religion as a Resource

In addition to being active in the political sphere, members of religious movements can be active economic actors (see e.g. Dana 2010). However, economics is generally not a core issue of religious movements or human spirituality: i.e. economic matters are not traditionally associated with the spiritual dimensions of human life. On the other hand, the combination of spirituality and economic concerns is often seen as a personal matter, and as such, affords some degree of discretion. On the surface, it does not seem appropriate to look at economic activity by associating it with religious belief, and the economic perspectives of religious movements or their members may seem rather marginal in comparison to their spiritual aspects.

Even though it may seem unusual at the outset to profile a religious movement through its engagement in economic activity, there are numerous religious movements in the United States, Europe and elsewhere with significant economic activity, and Finnish Conservative Laestadianism is quite similar to these in many respects (see Linjakumpu 2018, 15–18, 36–77; Dana 2010; Gauthier and Martikainen 2013; Kraybill and Nolt 2004). In the discussion that follows, Conservative Laestadianism is understood as a resource that influences and enables engagement in economic activity. The resourcefulness of Conservative Laestadians manifests itself in three ways: it is related to the (1) theology, (2) practices, and (3) social relationships of the movement. It is not economic activity as such that is of interest here but, rather, the *prerequisites* for it. We examine how Conservative Laestadianism as a network-like social entity endorses economic activity among the members of the movement.⁵

From the point of view of the religious literacy, the examination is essential because the complexity of religiousness and of the religious communality are identified in relation with the non-religious spheres of life. On the one hand, the religiousness does not determine the forms, conditions and prerequisites of the economic life straightforwardly but, on the other hand, religious communality plays an important role in the concretization of economic activity. Religious literacy implies the contextual articulation and interpretation of this role.

⁵By economic activity, we refer in particular to entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs. We also include economic activities such as working on company/institutional boards, issues of ownership, and holding responsible positions in companies.

6 Laestadian Theology as a Resource for Economics

Conservative Laestadianism, in particular *the central organization of Conservative Laestadians in Finland* (SRK), determines the theological interpretations adopted within the movement. These interpretations also apply to activities related to economics. Although entrepreneurship as a theological issue is not very common in Laestadian theological tradition, the subject is, however, addressed directly or in conjunction with employment, or earning or possessing money (Linjakumpu 2018, 109–116). As was stated earlier, Conservative Laestadianism is often associated with the Pietistic tradition, which was born within Lutheranism in the 17th century. In Pietism—as with other movements representing Protestant Ethics—the notion of work was strongly linked to the spiritual premises. According to Max Weber, Pietism in a way sought to secure salvation in secular professional life (Weber 1930/2005).

This Pietistic character is relatively easy to see in Laestadian theology. Work is a very common area of theological reflections in SRK's publications. Work is widely respected within the movement, and the theological considerations associated with it are abundant in the publications produced within the movement. Economic activity is an act of service that serves God, the family, and society. Entrepreneurship is a way of working whereby one earns a living for oneself and the family. It is also equated with taking responsibility—not just for oneself and the family but, by extension, for the well-being of society.

An entrepreneur can experience God's blessing through his/her engagement in economic life (see e.g. Lindgren 2011, 91). It can manifest itself as success, which is an indication of God's blessing for the entrepreneur and his/her actions. There may not be any outward justification for success, but the blessing comes as if it were a gift. The “dangers of mammon”—referring to greed, which makes money and ownership problematic—constitute the reverse side of the entrepreneurial blessing. In the theological sense, mammon—i.e. money and wealth—is an ambivalent topic, because in the Christian tradition, poverty often appears to be an acceptable, or even preferable, “condition” of a Christian person. The poor are blessed because they do not “have the stumbling block of mammon.” (Hay 1989, 51.) However, the poor, or poverty, do not have a special role in the theology of Conservative Laestadians, i.e. poverty is not specifically referred to when discussing work or entrepreneurship.

Despite the risk of excessive mammon, pursuit of poverty is not specifically encouraged in Conservative Laestadian theology. Theology is rather giving an approval for entrepreneurship and earning money. In this sense, Conservative Laestadianism has similarities to the prosperity gospel (Linjakumpu 2018, 114). However, earning money is not a declared goal, but more like a matter that is not forbidden, but rather treated with “a cautious sympathy”.

Theology of Conservative Laestadians is supporting—and resourcing—entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs. It embraces the idea that entrepreneurship as such is not problematic spiritually or in terms of conviction. Neither does it limit everyday business practices unless an entrepreneur is resorting to excess. In particular, the attitude towards money and ownership affects how entrepreneurship appears

within the movement. If earning is seen as a theologically possible endeavor, it creates favorable conditions for entrepreneurship. By contrast, a positive attitude to entrepreneurship can produce a positive theological assessment of money and ownership, as is currently the case within the movement.

7 Religiously Motivated Practices as a Resource

In terms of religious literacy, it is crucial to understand that the theological tenets of a certain religious movement do not *directly* or *necessarily* affect the worldly life of a member of the movement. Instead, often theology constitutes a *potential* that directs and supports the members of religious movements. The potential can be concretized in the choices of life and in practical situations, but, at the same time, it is also possible that it is not realized in any way.

In addition to theology, what also matters is how the movement functions in practice. Conservative Laestadianism is indeed quite strongly based on practice, i.e. it is formed in and through existing practices whereby members of the movement are guided in desirable and acceptable directions. These practices are obviously often connected to the “official” theological basis of the movement, but sometimes the connection is quite loose and practices are rather based on social and organizational solutions. For this reason, it is interesting to investigate what forms of organizational support and approval for entrepreneurship emerge from Laestadianism.

One form of community-based support is linked to the official activity of the movement, that is to say, the ways in which official organizations close to SRK or SRK itself are promoting or advancing entrepreneurship. An important form of organizational support for entrepreneurship is the movement’s weekly newspaper *Päivämies* in which articles, interviews and stories related to entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs appear frequently. In 2011, SRK also published a book on entrepreneurship. Entitled *Mitä jää viivan alle. Ajatuksia yrittäjyydestä* (“What’s below the Line. Thoughts on Entrepreneurship”), the book includes 24 texts related to different aspects of entrepreneurship. The authors are entrepreneurs, some of whom are also known in public for their religious conviction and their membership of the movement. (See Tahkola and Niskanen 2011.)

In addition, the movement organizes entrepreneurial education at the Christian folk high schools it owns. Operating in three locations in Finland, the schools have slightly different study programs, but each school offers at least some entrepreneurship education. This entrepreneurship training, mainly targeted at Laestadian youth, has gained a fairly important role in the selection of education in these schools.

The folk high schools also offer so-called short courses. Some of these courses deal with entrepreneurship and are available in each of the three folk high schools. The entrepreneurial courses—unlike the entrepreneurial study programs—were originally intended mainly for business people and their spouses. The entrepreneurial courses are a well-established form of activity and they have been organized for decades. The number of participants has been rising steadily and, today, a total

of over 100 persons in all schools participate in the courses annually. In addition to the general entrepreneurship courses, specialized courses have been arranged for female entrepreneurs, senior entrepreneurs and even for children. Furthermore, courses have been arranged for specific target groups such as bankrupt entrepreneurs, entrepreneurs in the ICT industry and rural entrepreneurs. (See Linjakumpu 2018, 118–122.)

Publishing and the activities of folk high schools are tangible ways in which the official organization of Conservative Laestadians supports entrepreneurship. In terms of business-related activities or publications, it is not a matter of the formal organization of the movement urging people of any age to become entrepreneurs. It is rather that entrepreneurship altogether seems to be embodied in the movement's activities and practices: for Conservative Laestadians, entrepreneurship appears as a "normal" and everyday matter, which is quite unconventional in the context of religious movements.

Through the activities related to entrepreneurship, Conservative Laestadians are able to build mutual trust, and in this way, the activities reinforce existing relationships between people and create new ones. They therefore support networking among people belonging to the movement, although it is not necessarily a declared goal. These relationships, efforts at building trust and working together can be seen as a resource for entrepreneurially oriented people (cf. Portes 1995; Rothstein 2005; Granovetter 1992). The organization builds a culture of entrepreneurship i.e. is creating preconditions for entrepreneurship.

When thinking of Conservative Laestadianism from the point of view of religious literacy, it is particularly important to be aware of the holistic and communal nature of the movement (see e.g. Hurtig 2013, 46). Practical support for entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship is part of the religious nature of Laestadianism. This is not a typical way of acting among religious groups. In case of less holistic or communal groups, there is no need for practices that are dealing with seemingly non-religious issues such as business life.

8 Social Dimensions and Networking as a Resource

Although entrepreneurship may often appear as a practice of pursuing individual goals and ideas, it is, however, essential to work with other people, i.e. customers, business partners, subcontractors, financiers and employees. The social dimension and the various relationships involved are essentially present in the implementation of business activities. Entrepreneurial activity is linked to various existing social networks and is therefore, by definition, a network-like practice. This starting point is also essential when examining business activities among Conservative Laestadians.

The network perspective provides conceptual tools for perceiving the importance of social contacts, communality and interdependence in the economic activity of people belonging to the movement. In this way, economic activity appears to be socially located and constructed. There is a wide range of contacts, interests and

relationships between Conservative Laestadians in the context of economy. Following the ideas of Mark Granovetter, economic relationships have become embedded in social (and sometimes, political) networks (Granovetter 1992, 62–65). In other words, economics depends on the relationships and networks in which different forms of economics are located (see Johanson 2015, 206–207). It is based on social relationships, and it is linked to these relationships. It should be noted that these relationships are, in part, inevitably shaped by non-Laestadians, and in some cases, they can also largely determine the logic of economic activity.

The concept of embeddedness means that the social relationships and networks within the movement are part of the networks of economic activity or, more accurately, the economic networks of Conservative Laestadians overlap with—or are embedded in—other Laestadian networks. In practice, this means that Conservative Laestadianism as a whole is seen through social relations, as a relatively broad, and at the same time, a complex network entity of which economic networks are part.

The Conservative Laestadian way of life, the theological premises, and the practices of the spiritual community form a wide range of relationships that build networks. The local, regional and national practices of the movement contribute to building relationships. The local Associations of Peace, voluntary work, and bazaars intrinsically bring members of the organization together. Likewise, the regional or national activities run by the SRK offer similar opportunities beyond the local level. Summer services, regional services, speaker meetings, congregational days, large-scale courses and publishing activities create contacts and relationships among a substantial number of people. (Cf. Nykänen 2012, 96–109, 198–215; Hurtig 2013, 46–47.)

In addition to the “official” activities, unofficial practices build relationships between people. The members of the movement spend time with each other: hobbies, neighborly help, and other informal communication between families, friends and acquaintances are creating and maintaining social relationships. In all of these situations, people meet other people, create relationships and trust, share information and maintain friendship and acquaintance.

Therefore, the socially active Conservative Laestadian lifestyle creates, as if naturally, networks between people. Networks built on concrete activities are encouraged directly or indirectly in the doctrine of the movement. This way of life is strengthened by the official doctrine of the movement, in which the joint activities between the Associations of Peace, the families, and the other members of the movement are seen in a positive light.

When Conservative Laestadianism is understood as a network of different relationships, economically relevant relations are part of—or overlap with—all other relationships, i.e. economic networks are therefore not a separate or autonomous part of the other networks and relationships of the movement. Economic actors do not work in a social vacuum: networks link economic actors with social interaction (Johanson 2015, 207). This means that, for example, an entrepreneur cannot merely think of, or pursue, his or her own interests and profit in the context of economic activity, but must also take into account the prerequisites imposed by the social environment. However, networks are not coercive or mandatory structures that define

the content of an activity and the variety of choices that may be made. Rather, they tend to provide structures that can be employed in many different ways in economic concerns. (See e.g. Portes 1995, 12.)

In terms of religious literacy, in strongly communal religious movements, economic activity is not separate from relationships among the members of those movements, but they are essentially linked to each other. Thus, the effect of religion on business activities cannot be understood without the existence of social relations and networks. It should be noted, however, that the importance of these relations is not the same for all people: benefits brought by the relations vary from person to person.

9 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have analyzed the engagement of Conservative Laestadian people in the political and economic spheres, or in the movement's own terms, "the world". The research results help to understand the connection of religion to economics and politics. We have taken particular care not to "religiousize" the Laestadian people, i.e. not to see Laestadians only as Christian devotees. Instead, Laestadianism in "the world" is interpreted as a social movement inspired by its spiritual background, but simultaneously, as a movement functioning in the domains of earthly life.

An additional purpose of this chapter has been to draw attention to the fact that research on economics and politics is at least partly blind to religion. Economics and politics are sometimes seen as secular territories where religion has no significance. The chapter outlines the religiousness of these areas: how religion is structured in the areas of non-religious life, i.e. politics and economics.

To conclude, there are at least two mechanisms that mediate the effects of the "religious faith" in the worldly dimension as well. First, there are some fundamental theological/religious values that explicitly affect the secular life of Laestadians. These include, for example, the demand to not act disruptively but in a constructive way, benefitting one's "hometown". Also, some regulations concerning open sexuality and the use of alcohol are based explicitly on religious doctrines. Both value-sets are visible in Laestadian politics. In business, the theological norms perhaps serve more as a resource: they enable and support acting in business life.

Second, religious and religion-related networks are embedded in the secular—such as political and economic—ones. In other words, people who know each other from religious or religion-related networks easily form networks and enter into co-operation in other contexts as well, such as voting in elections or doing business together. These forms of co-operation may not be best described as "religious" in the common—or even theoretical—sense of the word, but they can be seen as having roots in religion and religious networks.

It should be noted here that the relationship and interaction of religion, or the religious community, and economy can also be examined from the opposite perspective. In other words, religion does not only have an effect on economic matters, but economic matters do also affect the religious community. This can be illustrated through

an illuminating example offered by Adam Dinham. Before the modern welfare state, welfare used to be strongly the provenance of churches (Dinham 2015). Among other effects, this relation engaged people to the parishes very effectively. Once the relation was broken, churches lost some of their practical meaning in people's lives. In Conservative Laestadianism, the parish is still strongly connected to welfare, or to be exact, to the material wealth and well-being. In practice, religion-based networks help people in their everyday life: they offer several kinds of social capital, business opportunities and political support (see Furbey et al. 2006). The embeddedness of the networks is not necessarily the reason for being a devotee, as one can stay for example in the business networks after leaving the religious community. However, it creates cohesion and strengthens the religious network. When several good things originate in the community, one does not want to leave it.

Based on our work, religious literacy means, at least, sensitivity to understand the role of religion in non-religious contexts and in various social relationships and structures. This implies that a religiously literate person also recognizes the diversity of the effects of religion on social life. The implications of a person's religious background can be positive for the members of the movements and society as a whole, but the religious dimension can also have negative consequences in politics and business, especially in the context of strong social relationships, bonds, and reciprocal links. Hence, social, political and economic effects of religion are seldom (if ever) one-dimensional. Instead, they are variable and different in changing contexts.

References

- Biesta, G., Aldridge, D., Hannam, P., & Whittle, S. (2019). *Religious Literacy: A way forward for religious education?* A Report Submitted to the Culham St Gabriel's Trust. Retrieved November 14, 2019, from <https://www.reonline.org.uk/news/religious-literacy-a-way-forward-for-religious-education/>.
- Dana, L.-P. (Ed.). (2010). *Entrepreneurship and religion*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Dinham, A. (2015). Religious literacy and welfare. In A. Dinham & M. Francis (Eds.), *Religious literacy in policy and practice* (pp. 101–112). Bristol: Policy Press.
- Furbey, R., Dinham, A., Farnell, R., Finneron, D., & Wilkinson, G. (2006). *Faith as social capital: Connecting or dividing?* Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Gauthier, F., & Martikainen, T. (2013). Acknowledging a global shift. A primer for thinking religion in consumer societies. *Implicit Religion*, 3, 261–276.
- Granovetter, M. (1992). Economic action and social structure: The problem of embeddedness. In R. Swedberg & M. Granovetter (Eds.), *The sociology of economic life* (pp. 53–81). Boulder: Westview Press.
- Hay, D. A. (1989). *Economics today. A Christian critique*. Leicester: Apollos.
- Hintikka, M. (2008). Työn aika. In K. Hyry & M. Leppänen (Eds.), *Työssä, levossa* (pp. 127–137). Oulu: Suomen Rauhanyhdistysten Keskusyhdistys ry.
- Hurtig, J. (2013). *Taivaan taimet. Uskonnollinen yhteisöllisyys ja väkivalta*. Tampere: Vastapaino.
- Johanson, J.-E. (2015). Heikot suhteet ja uppoutuneisuus. In K. Eriksson (Ed.), *Verkostot yhteiskuntatutkimuksessa* (pp. 196–213). Helsinki: Gaudeamus.
- Kraybill, D. B., & Nolt, S. M. (2004). *Amish enterprise. From plows to profits*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

- Lindgren, K. (2011). Vastuullinen taloudenhoito. In M. Niskanen, & J. Tahkola (Eds.), *Ajatuksia yrittäjyydestä. Mitä jää viivan alle* (pp. 88–91). Oulu: Suomen Rauhanyhdistysten Keskusyhdistys ry.
- Linjakumpu, A. (2012). *Haavoittunut yhteisö. Hoitokokoukset vanhoillislestadiolaisuudessa*. Tampere: Vastapaino.
- Linjakumpu, A. (2018). *Vanhoillislestadiolaisuuden taloudelliset verkostot*. Tampere: Vastapaino.
- Moore, D. L. (2015). Diminishing religious literacy: Methodological assumptions and analytical frameworks for promoting the public understanding of religion. In A. Dinham & M. Francis (Eds.), *Religious literacy in policy and practice* (pp. 27–38). Bristol: Policy Press.
- Nykänen, T. (2012). *Kahden valtakunnan kansalaiset. Vanhoillislestadiolaisuuden poliittinen teologia*. Rovaniemi: Lapland University Press.
- Nykänen, T. (2016). The Political Trinity of Conservative Laestadianism: God, His Kingdom and Authorities. *Political Theology*. <https://doi.org/10.1179/1462317X15Z.000000000175>.
- Nykänen, T., & Harjumaa, T. (2019). Vanhoillislestadiolaisuus Pohjois-Suomen kunnallispolitiikassa. In A. Linjakumpu, T. Nykänen, T. Harjumaa, & S. Wallenius-Korkalo (Eds.), *Politiikka, talous ja työ. Lestadiolaisuus maailmassa* (pp. 59–91). Rovaniemi: Lapland University Press.
- Portes, A. (1995). Economic sociology and the sociology of immigration: A conceptual overview. In A. Portes, (Ed.), *The economic sociology of immigration. Essays on networks, ethnicity, and entrepreneurship* (pp. 1–41). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Rothstein, B. (2005). *Social traps and the problem of trust*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tahkola, J., & Niskanen, M. (2011). Lukijalle. In M. Niskanen, & J. Tahkola, (Eds.), *Mitä jää viivan alle. Ajatuksia yrittäjyydestä* (p. 7). Oulu: Suomen Rauhanyhdistysten Keskusyhdistys ry.
- Talonen, J. (1988). *Pohjois-Suomen lestadiolaisuuden poliittis-yhteiskunnallinen profiili 1905–1929*. Helsinki: Suomen kirkkohistoriallinen seura.
- Talonen, J. (2019). Lestadiolaisuus, politiikka ja eduskuntavaalit 2015. In A. Linjakumpu, T. Nykänen, T. Harjumaa, & S. Wallenius-Korkalo (Eds.), *Lestadiolaisuus maailmassa. Politiikka, talous ja työ* (pp. 23–58). Rovaniemi: Lapland University Press.
- Weber, M. (1930/2005). *The Protestant ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Routledge: London.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

