

Practical and Pastoral Perspectives on Inter-confessional Marriage in the Finnish Orthodox Context

PEKKA METSO*

In this article, the phenomenon of inter-confessional marriages and families is studied in the context of Finnish Orthodoxy. The focus is on the wedding services, religious upbringings and participation in Church life from the perspective of inter-confessional marriages/families: How does the ecumenical reality influence them? Sociologically, the family has a central role in relation to beliefs, religious practices and activities. The religious upbringing of most Orthodox children takes place in a family of two Christian traditions. In the lived reality of the Finnish Orthodox population, the co-existence of two traditions (Orthodox and non-Orthodox) in inter-confessional marriages is not always non-problematic. In dialogue with the Lutheran Church, the Orthodox Church of Finland has aimed to promote harmony and mutual respect for the two traditions in inter-confessional families, as well as to fortify the Orthodox identity of its members.

Keywords: *Finland, inter-confessional marriage, Orthodoxy, Lutheranism, religious upbringing, ecumenical relations, baptism, Eucharist.*

1. Introduction

The Orthodox priest comes to a Lutheran–Orthodox home to a family celebration to baptize a baby, bless the home or congratulate someone on his birthday or anniversary, or perhaps is otherwise invited to the home as a priest. Even the baptism of the child of a Lutheran mother as an Orthodox demands the removal of many prejudices and misunderstandings. It is easy to encounter a Lutheran–Orthodox home at a baptism or other event in the home. It is a celebration where the prayer and blessing of the Church fill the entire home.¹

In this manner, a Finnish Orthodox priest describes his pastoral ministry and ecumenical encounters among Finnish Orthodox believers living in Orthodox–Lutheran inter-confessional marriages. Marriages between the

* Pekka Metso, Associate Professor in Practical Theology, University of Eastern Finland. Address: School of Theology, University of Eastern Finland, P.O. Box 111, FI-80101 Joensuu, Finland, e-mail: pekka.metso@uef.fi.

¹ Olavi Merras, “Marriage Between Orthodox and Lutherans”, in: *The Finnish Lutheran–Orthodox Dialogue 1989 and 1990*, Helsinki, Church Council for Foreign Affairs 1993, p. 100.

Orthodox and Lutherans have a long history in Finland where the two Christian traditions have co-existed for over four centuries. Faith and ecclesial structures of the Orthodox Church were introduced to Finnish tribes from the East in the 13th century. At the same time, a Catholic mission landed in Finland from the West. However, the majority of Finns became Lutheran after the King of Sweden implemented the Reformation in his kingdom in the 16th century (Finland then being a province of Sweden). Until the mid-20th century, the Orthodox population mostly inhabited Karelia and the easternmost parts of present-day Finland. Those areas have historically been either totally Orthodox or Orthodoxy has been present as the majority religion, but the Lutheran presence in this region has increased steadily since the 17th century. Marriages between the Orthodox and Lutherans have existed throughout that time. Since the other spouse, usually the bride, had, in most cases, to convert prior to the wedding, inter-confessional marriage as such did not exist before the requirements to convert began to loosen in the 19th century. Consequently, Orthodox-Lutheran inter-confessional marriage has existed in Finland in its own right for approximately 150 years.²

For the Orthodox population, a dramatic change in balance occurred when Karelia was for the most part ceded to the Soviet Union in the 1940s. Approximately 70% (ca. 55,000 believers) of Orthodox Finns were among those deported from the ceded territories. As a consequence, the Orthodox population was scattered around other parts of Finland. Their uniform culture ceased to exist and their customs, beliefs and traditions were strange in the eyes of the surrounding Lutheran population. The change had a dramatic influence on the social and societal conditions of the Orthodox population. One of the outcomes was a considerable increase in inter-confessional marriages from the 1940s onwards.³ In just a few decades, what had been a rare

² *Ibidem*, p. 87-88; Ismo Björn, *Ryssät ruotsien keskellä. Ilomantsin ortodoksit ja luterilaiset 1700-luvun puolivälistä 1800-luvun puoliväliin*, Joensuu, Joensuun yliopisto 1993; Tapio Hämynen et al. (eds.), *Family Life on the Northwestern Margins of Imperial Russia*, Joensuu, Joensuu University 2004; T. Hämynen, "A People Divided by the Border: Trends in the Ethnic Identity, Religion and Language of the Karelians, 1809-2009", in: T. Hämynen, Aleksander Paskov (eds.), *Nation Split by the Border. Changes in the Ethnic Identity, Religion and Language of the Karelians from 1809 to 2009*, Joensuu, University Press of Eastern Finland 2012.

³ Heli Kananen, "Kylmille asuinsijoille. Miten paikallisväestö otti vastaan ortodoksisen siirtoväen", in: Ville Kivimäki, Kirsi-Maria Hytönen (eds.), *Rauhaton rauha. Suomalaiset ja sodan päättyminen 1944-1950*, Tampere, Vastapaino 2015, p. 103-125; Teuvo Laitila, "Epäluuloja, välinpitämättömyyttä ja arvostusta. Ortodoksis-luterilaiset suhteet Suomessa toisen maailmansodan jälkeen ortodoksisesta näkökulmasta", in: Hannu Mustakallio (ed.), *Terve sielu terveessä ruumiissa*, Joensuu, Karjalan teologinen seura 2009, p. 339-348; Tarja

exception became almost a norm. Currently, the marriages of Orthodox believers in Finland are in most cases mixed marriages, either inter-confessional (in most cases with the spouse being Lutheran) or inter-faith (marriages with spouses of other faiths, e.g. Islam, are on the increase).

In his 1976 review on inter-confessional marriages, Voitto Huotari, a Finnish researcher on Orthodox-Lutheran marriages, observed that the ecumenical problems in relation to inter-confessional marriages include differences in the theology of marriage and the question of the religious upbringing of children. Huotari notes that even though the Orthodox Church is basically strictly against mixed marriages (due to its questionable theological and canonical validity), local Orthodox churches, in practice, tolerate them.⁴ The phenomenon of mixed marriages thus forces a local Orthodox Church to encounter a possible tension between, on the one hand, the principles of Orthodox theological and canonical tradition relating to marriage, and, on the other hand, the pastoral needs of Orthodox believers in their lived reality in a specific ecumenical context. This proves to be the exact case in Finland.

In this article, I will study inter-confessional marriage in the context of the Orthodox Church of Finland. As the excerpt at the beginning indicates, there seems to be some kind of stability and the Church has pastoral tools when operating among its faithful living in inter-confessional families. My aim is to investigate what kind of impact the phenomenon of inter-confessional marriage has had on the practices and ecumenical relations in the Orthodox Church of Finland. I will focus on three areas in the present-day situation:

1. Guidelines given for inter-confessional wedding services;
2. The impact of inter-confessional marriage on religious upbringings and education; and
3. Practices of ecclesial participation for families formed around an inter-confessional marriage.

Before engaging with the practices originating from and relating to inter-confessional marriages, I will firstly give a background description of the context of the Orthodox Church with an emphasis on its effect on marriage. Additionally, as a theoretical framework, I will look to the relationship between religion and family in the Finnish setting from the perspective offered by the sociology of religion.

Raninen-Siiskonen, *Vieraana omalla maalla. Tutkimus karjalaisen siirtoväen muistelukerronnasta*, Helsinki, Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura 1999.

⁴ Voitto Huotari, "Seka-avioliitot ekumeenisena ongelmana", in: *Teologinen Aikakauskirja* 81 (1/1976), p. 5-6.

2. Description of the ecumenical and sociological context

2.1. *The Orthodox Church of Finland and inter-confessional marriage*

Since 1923, the Orthodox Church of Finland has been an autonomous local church under the Patriarchate of Constantinople. There are three dioceses (three bishops and one auxiliary bishop) and some 20 parishes, ca. 200 priests and deacons (in 2017), one monastery and one convent. Only 1.1% of the entire Finnish population are registered members of the Orthodox Church, which makes it the second-largest church with its 60,500 believers (in 2017). Approximately 71% (in 2017) of Finns are members of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church, the vast-majority church in Finland.⁵ The Pentecostal Church is almost as large a denomination as that of the Orthodox Church. Smaller Christian denominations include Catholics, Baptists, Methodists, the Free Church, Adventists and groups belonging to the Charismatic Movement. Unlike other minority Christian denominations, the Orthodox Church of Finland has the status of being the second national church with a legal position similar to that of the Lutheran Church. For example, it has a right to collect taxes and it is subsidized by the government.⁶ Islam is the biggest non-Christian faith in Finland. Due to immigration, it has grown rapidly in recent years, with the number of Muslims being approximately 70,000 (in 2015).⁷

As the ecclesial demography suggests, encountering the majority church and maintaining ecumenical relations define the life and conditions of all the Finnish minority churches. Marriage is an excellent example of the effect of ecumenism and a minority position in the everyday life of the Finnish Orthodox faithful, and perhaps other minority Christians as well. Statistically, in 2017, of the marriages of Orthodox believers, 150 weddings were performed in the Orthodox Church and 80 in some other church. The number of mixed couples of those married in the Orthodox Church is not, however, indicated in the statistics.⁸ It has been estimated that in over 90% of the marriages of the Orthodox, the other spouse is non-Orthodox.⁹

⁵ *Statistics Finland* (population structure 2017), https://www.tilastokeskus.fi/tup/suoluk/suoluk_vaesto_en.html, viewed on 22nd October 2018.

⁶ For thorough and updated information on Christian communities in Finland, see: Ruth Ilman et al. (eds.), *Monien uskontojen ja katsomusten Suomi*, Tampere, Kirkon tutkimuskeskus 2017.

⁷ Teemu Pauha et al., “Kaksi vuosisataa suomalaista islamia”, in: R. Ilman et. al (eds.), *Monien uskontojen ja katsomusten Suomi*, p. 105; *Statistics Finland* (population by religious community), http://www.stat.fi/til/vaerak/2015/01/vaerak_2015_01_2016-09-23_tau_006_en.html, viewed on 22nd October 2018.

⁸ *Tilastotietoja kirkon väestöstä vuodelta 2017*, <https://ort.fi/sites/default/files/2018-01/Kirkon%20v%C3%A4est%C3%B6tilasto%202017%20sivu%203.pdf>, viewed on 22nd October 2018.

⁹ Elias Huurinainen, “Vihkipapin yhteys perheeseen”, in: Pirjo Työrinoja, Sirpa-Maija Vuorinen (eds.), *Ekumeeninen vihkipapin käsikirja*, Helsinki, Suomen ekumeeninen neuvosto

In the Orthodox tradition, the family has a central role in the religious upbringing and education of children. The family is customarily defined as a *miniature church*. This concept indicates that there is a close connection between the family and the ecclesial community. Ideally, the family shares one (Orthodox) faith lived as true in everyday family life.¹⁰ Most Finnish Orthodox, however, find their spouse outside of their own church. Getting married means, almost as a rule, that the Orthodox spouse differs from the ideal of that miniature church. Through marital and family life, non-Orthodox beliefs have a profound effect on the lives of the Finnish Orthodox faithful and the Finnish Orthodox Church.

In the history of the Orthodox Church of Finland, inter-confessional Orthodox–Lutheran marriages have had an emphatic effect on Orthodox demography from the 1940s onward. Most children born into such marriages were baptized as Lutheran, and the number of Orthodox members started to decline – conversions of Orthodox believers to Lutheranism being the second reason behind the rapid decrease in membership. Deterioration in observing traditions among the Orthodox population due to mixed marriages in the post-war decades was verified in the 1970s by research on Finnish Orthodox-Lutheran inter-confessional marriages. The study demonstrated that Orthodox spouses reduced their religious activity, distanced themselves from the Orthodox community and relinquished Orthodox practices in the home. In contrast, the Lutheran spouses became more active in their Church, and the Lutheran tradition was supported in the family at the expense of Orthodoxy.¹¹ Recent research undertaken among evacuee Orthodox women indicates that social pressure directed women living in inter-confessional marriages to hide their Orthodoxy. While balancing the Orthodox and Lutheran traditions, they observed distinctively Orthodox practices privately (such as the sign of the cross, venerating icons, Orthodox prayers and fasting). Even though these women had, in most cases, given

1999, p. 22; Archbishop Johannes, “Opening Speech”, in: *The Finnish Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue 1989 and 1990*, Helsinki, Church Council for Foreign Affairs 1993, p. 66; O. Merras, “Marriage Between”, p. 87.

¹⁰ Pirkko Siili, Teppo Siili, “Perhe tarvitsee tukea. Perhesuunnittelun teoriaa ja käytäntöä”, in: Leo Iltola (ed.), *Kruunaa heidät yhdeksi. Avioliitto ortodoksisessa kirkossa*, Savonlinna, Ortodoksinen veljestö 2004, p. 50; Metropoliitta Johannes, *Lähimmäiset. Ajatuksia elämän hyveistä, ihmisuhteista, perheestä ja perinteestä*, Helsinki, Ajatus Kirjat 2002, p. 143; Merja Merras, *Johdatus ortodoksisen kirkon etiikkaan*, Joensuu, Ortokirja 1999, p. 73.

¹¹ V. Huotari, *Ortodoksin ja luterilaisen avioliitto*, Helsinki, Suomalainen teologinen kirjallisuusseura 1975, p. 289-290; idem, *Suomen ortodoksinen väestö*, Helsinki, Helsingin yliopiston käytännöllisen teologian laitos 1975, p. 62-69. The main points of his study are summarized in English in V. Huotari, “Orthodox-Lutheran Inter-marriage in Finland”, in: *The Finnish Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue*, p. 102-108.

their children up to be baptized in the Lutheran faith, their children's religious upbringing was still their responsibility.¹²

In half a century, the number of Orthodox members diminished from 80,000 in the 1940s to fewer than 60,000 in the 1990s.¹³ It is therefore not surprising that from a Finnish Orthodox point of view, inter-confessional marriage is seen as a problematic phenomenon, largely due to its effect on the decline in Church membership but also from the doctrinal point of view.¹⁴ Instead of a sharp demarcation being placed around Lutheran influence, the Orthodox Church of Finland has aimed to take care of the well-being of its members living in inter-confessional marriages. This attitude is witnessed in a resource book for family life from 1956, in which the non-Orthodox spouse is exhorted to be tolerant, discrete and respectful towards their Orthodox companion and their possible Orthodox children. The Orthodox partner is likewise advised to respect the faith of the non-Orthodox partner.¹⁵ Enhancing mutual respect seems to be the starting point for the Orthodox Church of Finland in addressing the question of inter-confessional marriage. Archbishop Johannes (1988-2001) stated that spouses from different traditions should first of all respect each other. The ancient principle, voiced in the decrees of the ecumenical councils, of the non-Orthodox spouse abandoning his or her faith and embracing Orthodoxy is no longer the goal. Instead, the Archbishop encourages spouses, firstly, to go deep into their respective traditions and, secondly, to familiarize themselves with the tradition of the other.¹⁶

¹² Helena Kupari, "«I Was Both Lutheran and Orthodox». Evacuee Karelian Orthodox Women, Bidentominal Families, and the Making of Religion", in: Terhi Utriainen, Päivi Salmesvuori (eds.), *Finnish Women Making Religion. Between Ancestors and Angels*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan 2014, p. 143-160; H. Kupari, *Sense of Religion. The Lifelong Religious Practice of the Evacuee Karelian Orthodox Women in Finland*, Helsinki, University of Helsinki 2015.

¹³ In the early 1990s, the Church started to grow slowly in numbers again, and the trend was positive until 2013. The main reason for the increase was adult conversions to Orthodoxy and immigrants with a Russian background registering themselves as Finnish Orthodox. There are currently some 84,000 people with a Russian background living in Finland. Since 2013, the membership has been, however, on a slight decrease. *Väestötilastot vuodelta 2017 ovat valmistuneet*, <https://ort.fi/uutishuone/2018-01-15/vaestotilastot-vuodelta-2017-ovat-valmistuneet>, viewed on 22nd October 2018; *Statistics Finland* (Persons with a foreign background), https://www.tilastokeskus.fi/tup/maahanmuutto/maahanmuuttajat-vaestossa/ulkomaalaistaustaiset_en.html, viewed on 22nd October 2018.

¹⁴ Hannu Loima, *Kirkkoäidin huomassa. Paimenen pubetta etsivälle ihmiselle*, Jyväskylä, Ortodoksinen veljestö 2000, p. 175-176; Matti Sidoroff, "Kirkolliset toimitukset", in: Isä Ambrosius, Markku Haapio (eds.), *Ortodoksinen kirkko Suomessa*, Lieto, Etelä-Suomen kustannus 1979, p. 234.

¹⁵ Erkki Piironen, *Pyhitetyssä kodissa*, s.l., Ortodoksisten nuorten liitto 1954, p. 19-20.

¹⁶ M. Johannes, *Lähimmäiset*, p. 147-148.

Regardless of the prevalence of mixed marriages, the teaching of the Orthodox Church of Finland sets the nuclear family of one faith as the ideal family model.¹⁷ Social changes in Finland since the 1960s have tremendously altered and broadened the concepts, models and ideas of the family – divorce, remarriage, homosexuality, cohabitation and other non-traditional family models have become common in Finland. The Orthodox concept of the ideal family has not, however, changed during that time. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, the Church reacted negatively to the changes made in the marriage law, most recently in regards to legalizing same-sex marriage in 2017. The Church has voiced its concern regarding the protection of the traditional concept of the family, e.g. Archbishop Leo (in office since 2001) has defended traditional family values in the on-going public debate on the concept of marriage. The Finnish Orthodox attitude is crystallized in the following:¹⁸

The Christian family cannot be determined only by its members, nor can it choose its principles irrespective of the tradition of the church. Family cannot and should not be an entity separated from the ecclesial community.¹⁹

To be a genuine Christian family, the spouses must live up to criteria defined by the Orthodox tradition and contemporary interpretations of the hierarchy. However, full loyalty to the traditional concept of the family is not expected when it comes to inter-confessional marriage. Instead of disallowing inter-confessional marriages, the Orthodox Church of Finland aims to promote the peaceful co-existence of two Christian traditions in the family and the wellbeing of spouses and children.

2.2. The impact of religion on the family: Perspectives from the sociology of religion

From the point of view of the sociology of religion, the family plays a fundamental role in religious socialization. As sociologist Teresa Martiano observes, “The family does remain the primary source of religious belief, however much and in whatever form it is taught to children.”²⁰ Children are

¹⁷ Jarmo Hakkarainen, *Yksilöllisyydestä yhteisöllisyyteen. Johdatus ortodoksiseen etiikkaan*, Joensuu, Joensuun yliopisto 1994, p. 129-130; Heikki Huttunen, “Kun kaksi tulee yhdeksi. Avioliitto mysteerinä”, in: *Kruunaa heidät yhdeksi*, p. 32-39; M. Johannes, *Läbimmäiset*, p. 143-147, 159-160; H. Loima, *Kirkkoäidin huomassa*, p. 62-63, 175.

¹⁸ Pekka Metso, Laura Kallatsa, “Contemporary and Traditional Voices. Reactions to Same-Sex Marriage Legislation in the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland and the Orthodox Church of Finland”, in: *Exchange* 47 (3/2018), p. 230-257.

¹⁹ M. Johannes, *Läbimmäiset*, p. 146.

²⁰ Teresa Marciano, “Families and Religions”, in: Marvin Sussman, Suzanne Steinmetz (eds.), *Handbook of Marriage and the Family*, New York, Plenum Press 1988, p. 286.

strongly influenced by the religiosity of their childhood family which has a decisive role in transmitting religious traditions, beliefs and practices.²¹ Research on family rituals and traditions shows that the recurrence of religious themes and practices in the family circle strongly endorses religious socialization. This is even more the case if religion is connected to everyday family activities such as watching TV together and talking over dinner.²² In the following, I will briefly spell out some fundamental elements in the relationship between religion and the family, with an emphasis on the distinctive influence of inter-confessional marriage on the religiosity in the family.

First, studies in the sociology of religion suggest that religiosity is closely connected to the probability of getting married and staying married. Simply put, church goers would rather get married than remain single, would rather remain married than divorce, and have large families. The interplay between religion and marriage is supported by societal and cultural conventions and expectations sustained in religious communities. While offering support, the ideological and social structures of religious communities (and of society, too) can also be burdensome to those who do not fit in the prevailing concepts of marital and family life. Inter-confessional marriage is one case of such a potentially conflicting family setting: one's religious background (Orthodox Christian as well as non-Orthodox) strongly shapes spouses' ideas of marriage, and they may feel that their inter-confessional marriage fails to make certain features of marriage possible.

Second, the roles taken and given in the family for spouses and children alike are often strongly influenced by religion. A religious conviction tends to support traditional gender attitudes and domestic roles. On the bases of religious conviction, traditional motherhood, housekeeping, child care and the religious upbringing of children is oftentimes expected from women.²³ The family as an institution and social unit has undergone a series of major changes in many parts of Europe in recent decades. Different concepts and definitions of the family and relationships have emerged, many of them "non-traditional", as they would be labelled in the prevailing

²¹ Ray Anderson, Dennis Guernsey, *On Being Family. A Social Theology of the Family*, Eugene, Wipf & Stock 2012, p. 115-138; Vern Bengtson, *Families and Faith. How Religion Is Passed Down Across Generations*, Oxford – New York, Oxford University Press 2013, p. 3-70; Peter Benson, Pamela King, "Adolescence", in: Helen Ebaugh (ed.), *Handbook of Religion and Social Institutions*, New York, Springer 2005, p. 121-138.

²² T. Marciano, "Families and Religions", p. 291-292; Donald Ratcliff, "Parenting and Religious Education", in: Blake Neff, Donald Ratcliff (eds.), *Handbook of Family Religious Education*, Birmingham, Religious Education Press 1995, p. 79-81.

²³ Darren Sherkat, "«That They Be Keepers of the Home». The Effect of Conservative Religion on Early and Late Transitions into Housewifery", in: *Review of Religious Research* 41 (3/2000), p. 344-358.

Orthodox perception. Also within Christian traditions there are differences in how gender equality and non-fixed gender roles are perceived. While the Orthodox Church has defended traditional or conservative views regarding marriage and family life (e.g. supporting the nuclear family as an ideal and being against same-sex marriages), liberal opinions have progressed especially in Western Europe and among the churches of the Protestant tradition.²⁴ Of course, one's church denomination does not dictate how religious background factors (e.g. expectations about marriage, roles in the family) affect the family. Much depends on what importance the spouses give to such factors in their relationship and family.

Third, religiosity is an element that strengthens family relationships and generates a positive experience in the family. It builds up familial affection, loyalty and respect for family members and relatives.²⁵ As a factor preventing divorce, religion can also be said to contribute to marital satisfaction.²⁶ Religion as the dominant culture of the family permeates family relationships. When the family does not share a uniform religious culture, as is the case with inter-confessional marriages, tensions affecting family relations may arise. However, there is variety in the relevance given to the religion by the spouses and the degree of religiosity in a family.

The biggest concern in the research on mixed marriages has been on the effect of inter-confessionalism on children's religious identity. From the perspective of European religious law, parents have a right to bring up children in their own religious tradition.²⁷ In the case of inter-confessional marriages, the other parent must renounce that right. Sociologically, when it

²⁴ Norman Doe, *Law and Religion in Europe. A Comparative Introduction*, Oxford – New York, Oxford University Press 2011, p. 214-226; Marc Hooghe, Cecil Meeusen, "Is Same-Sex Marriage Legislation Related to Attitudes Toward Homosexuality? Trends in Tolerance of Homosexuality in European Countries Between 2002 and 2010", in: *Sexuality Research and Social Policy* 10 (4/2013), p. 258-268; K. Kiernan, "The Rise of Cohabitation and Childbearing Outside Marriage in Western Europe", in: *International Journal of Law, Policy and the Family* 15 (1/2001), p. 1-21; Matthijs Kalmijn, "Explaining Cross-National Differences in Marriage, Cohabitation, and Divorce in Europe, 1990–2000", in: *A Journal of Demography* 61 (3/2007), p. 243-263; Mihaela Robila (ed.), *Families in Eastern Europe*, Bingley, Emerald 2004; Elizabeth Thomson, "Family Complexity in Europe", in: *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 654 (1/2014), p. 245-258.

²⁵ Dariusz Krok, "Examining the Role of Religion in a Family Setting. Religious Attitudes and Quality of Life Among Parents and Their Adolescent Children", in: *Journal of Family Studies* 2016, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13229400.2016.1176589>, viewed on 6th June 2018; Bradford Wilcox, Nicholas Wolfinger, "Living and Loving «Decent». Religion and Relationship Quality Among Urban Parents", in: *Social Science Research* 37 (3/2008), p. 828-843.

²⁶ Loren Marks, "How Does Religion Influence Marriage? Christian, Jewish, Mormon, and Muslim Perspectives", in: *Marriage and Family Review* 38 (1/2005), p. 85-111.

²⁷ N. Doe, *Law and Religion*, p. 228.

comes to children's participation in religious activities in their adulthood, mixed marriages are not as successful in terms of religious upbringing as a religiously homogenous family. As a rule, children are more likely to remain in their childhood family religion than join another denomination or leave religion altogether.²⁸ Results from the International Social Survey Programme 2008 indicate that in Finland a child is more likely to secede from religion if his or her parents are members of different religious communities.²⁹ Thus, an inter-confessional (or inter-religious) family setting has a negative effect on transmitting religious beliefs and maintaining a connection with a religious community.

Perspectives suggested by the sociology of religion make certain elements in the Finnish context comprehensible. For example, an emphasis on the importance of the family is detected in the Orthodox understanding of religious socialization. The effectual Church Regulation of the Orthodox Church of Finland defines the role of the family in the religious upbringing of children as follows: "Parents, guardians and godparents must give religious education to children and teach them compatibly with the tradition of the church."³⁰ The definition suggests that the family is first and foremost responsible for raising Orthodox Christians. Priests and parish workers only have a secondary role in religious socialization. Furthermore, designating the "tradition of the church" as the criterion for religious upbringing puts emphasis on normative religion as the standard defining the content of a religious life on the social micro-level of the family. Consequently, in Finnish Orthodoxy, the believers are explicitly encouraged to adopt the models, roles and expectations of the religious community into their family life.

At the same time, the Church is well aware of the negative influence of inter-confessionalism on religious socialization. This is perhaps the reason why, in its recent documents, the Church has expressed its will to especially support its Orthodox members living in "ecumenical families", as the Church calls families formed around inter-confessional marriages.³¹ To my knowledge, in the parishes there are no established special activities for

²⁸ See e.g.: V. Bengtson, *Families and Faith*, p. 113-130; Daniel McIntosh, Bernard Spilka, "Religion and Family", in: B. Neff, D. Ratcliff (eds.), *Handbook*, p. 36-60.

²⁹ Kati Niemelä, "Heikkeneekö uskonnollisuus ikäryhmissä? Uskonnollinen kasvatusta ja sen merkitys uskonnollisuuden selittäjänä", in: Kimmo Ketola et al. (eds.), *Uskonto suomalaisten elämässä. Uskonnollinen kasvatusta, moraalit, onnellisuus ja suvaitsevaisuus kansainvälisessä vertailussa*, Tampere, Yhteiskuntatieteellinen tietoaarkisto 2011, p. 50.

³⁰ *Ortodoksisen kirkon kirkkojärjestys* (12.12.2006/174 v. 2007), §9, in: *Finlex*, <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/2007/20070174#L1P7>, viewed on 6th June 2018.

³¹ *Kirkon strategia 2010-2015*. Unpublished strategy document of the Orthodox Church of Finland from 2009; Sirpa Okulov, *Pyhä melu. Ortodoksisen kirkon varhaiskasvatuksen ja*

supporting Orthodox believers living in inter-confessional marriages. Nevertheless, the prevailing attitude in the Church towards them is approving and understanding.

3. Influence of and reactions to Orthodox–Lutheran inter-confessional marriages

3.1. Inter-confessional wedding services

In Finland, several churches, Christian religious societies and groups of other faiths have a right to perform legally valid weddings. There are currently some 60 religious groups that enjoy that right, the Orthodox Church of Finland being one of them. Civil marriage exists alongside church weddings or religious marriages. For the Orthodox Church of Finland, a civil marriage is seen as legally valid, but it lacks the characteristics and substance of a Christian sacramental marriage.³²

The Orthodox Church of Finland celebrates weddings for inter-confessional couples according to the following principles, prescribed in the Church Regulation (2006)³³:

- One of the spouses has to confess their Orthodox faith;
- The non-Orthodox spouse has to be a member of another church or Christian community;
- If the couple has already been married elsewhere, either by civil marriage or in another religious (Christian) community, they can be wed in the Orthodox Church if they so ask and if canons of the Church permit; and
- Impediments to marriage in the civil law do apply to the Orthodox Church.

As these guidelines indicate, for the Orthodox Church of Finland, inter-confessional marriage is not institutionally a problematic case. All the couples that meet the requirements of the Regulation are welcome to receive an Orthodox wedding. As the text suggests, Finnish Orthodox believers do get married in other churches as well, in most cases in the Lutheran Church. Civil marriages are also very common among the Orthodox population.³⁴ Whenever there is a possibility to perform an Orthodox wedding afterwards

esiopetuksen perusteet, Kuopio, Suomen ortodoksinen kirkollishallitus 2011, p. 7. On the criticism of the term “ecumenical family”, see: O. Merras, “Marriage Between”, p. 92-93.

³² Sirpa-Maija Vuorinen, “Mitä meiltä kysytään?”, in: *Ekumeeninen vihkipapin käsikirja*, p. 9.

³³ *Ortodoksisen kirkon kirkkojärjestys*, §7.

³⁴ Currently, half of the marriages by the Finnish Orthodox are civil marriages. In 2014, there were 253 civil weddings and 222 church weddings among the Finnish Orthodox. In 2017, the number of civil weddings was 191 and a church wedding was 195.

for an inter-confessional couple, the Orthodox Church of Finland is glad to envelop them with its sacramental wedding service. In cases where an Orthodox Christian is marrying a non-Christian, an Orthodox wedding service cannot be celebrated.

In addition to the ecclesial Regulation, bi- and multilateral ecumenical work in Finland has produced recommendations concerning inter-confessional marriage. The Finnish Bilateral Orthodox-Lutheran Dialogue issued in 1990 made suggestions in support of a harmonious life in an Orthodox-Lutheran marriage and family. Concerning the wedding, the two churches agree that it can take place either in an Orthodox or in a Lutheran Church. Before the wedding service, there should be a pastoral discussion on the nature of Christian marriage, the baptism of children and the religious upbringing of children in an inter-confessional family.³⁵ Based on the recommendation, the Orthodox Church of Finland seems to recognize the validity of Lutheran weddings and does not insist that Orthodox-Lutheran couples should be wed in the Orthodox Church, nor their children baptized in the Orthodox Church. As the Church Regulation indicated, couples married in the Lutheran Church are offered an Orthodox wedding if they request it at some later point. Self-evidently, the Orthodox Church of Finland also wilfully baptizes children born in an Orthodox-Lutheran marriage.³⁶

The Finnish Ecumenical Council produced in 1996 recommendations for mixed marriages for the use of all Finnish churches and Christian communities. Like the Bilateral Orthodox-Lutheran Dialogue, the Ecumenical Council recommends that the nature of the marriage, ideas of family life and teaching on sexuality in their respective communities is discussed with the partners before the wedding. The question of baptism and the religious upbringing of future children should also be addressed, as well as possible restrictions concerning godparents. All of this should take place in an atmosphere of mutual respect for the religious convictions of both spouses. In addition, the Ecumenical Council recommends that the church of the other spouse should be informed about his or her intention of getting married in another church. Concerning the actual wedding, the couple should be encouraged to invite priests from both churches to be present and even to participate in the actual wedding service. It is stated, however, that churches differ in their capability of partaking in an ecumenical co-celebration of

Kirkon jäsentilasto vuodelta 2014 valmistui, <https://ort.fi/uutishuone/2015-01-14/kirkon-jasentilasto-vuodelta-2014-valmistui-0>, viewed on 22nd October 2018; *Tilastotietoja kirkon väestöstä vuodelta 2017*.

³⁵ *The Finnish Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue*, p. 62.

³⁶ *Ekumeeninen vihkipapin käsikirja*, p. 57.

marriage.³⁷ The Good Ecumenical Manners, issued in 2002 by the Finnish Ecumenical Council, says the following about the family:

The spiritual journey of each Christian must be respected. When family members belong to different denominations or Christian communities, it is particularly important to emphasize unity, not division. It is essential to learn from the experiences of these families.³⁸

For the Orthodox Church of Finland, it is natural to comply with these guidelines. From the minority perspective, it is important that the faith and the church of the Orthodox partner are appreciated if the couple decides to ask for a wedding in a non-Orthodox church. Likewise, the nature of Finnish ecumenical relations makes it natural for Finnish Orthodox clergy to respect the non-Orthodox partner's tradition if a discussion and a wedding take place in the Orthodox Church.³⁹

When it comes to inviting priests from both churches to attend an inter-confessional wedding, the Orthodox Church of Finland welcomes a non-Orthodox priest being present when the wedding takes place in the Orthodox Church. The non-Orthodox priest can wear liturgical vestments and say a prayer or celebrate a blessing inside an Orthodox Church according to his or her tradition. However, the non-Orthodox part cannot be included in the Orthodox wedding service but should take place before or after the Orthodox service.⁴⁰ In the 1990 joint suggestions, it says that ceremonies of the two traditions should not be intermingled.⁴¹ Presumably, Orthodox priests have at least, on some occasions, invited non-Orthodox priests to perform non-Orthodox blessings instead of the betrothal, the first part of the Orthodox wedding service. In 1995, the Synod of the Bishops condemned such a practice and forbade the replacement of any part of the Orthodox

³⁷ "Seka-avioliittoa koskeva suositus kirkkoille ja kristillisille yhteisöille", in: *Ekumeeninen vihkipapin käsikirja*, p. 13-14.

³⁸ "Ekumenian hyvät tavat", in: *Suomen ekumeeninen neuvosto* (15th October 2002), http://www.ekumenia.fi/sen_toimii/opillinen_vuorovaikutus/asiakirjoja__documents/ekumeenian_hyvat_tavat_/, viewed on 12th June 2018.

³⁹ According to Metropolitan Ambrosius of Helsinki (2002-2017), the Orthodox-Lutheran relations in Finland have witnessed an "atmosphere of ecumenical openness and mutual learning", something other local Orthodox churches could learn from. Metropolitan Ambrosius, "The Orthodox Church of Finland", in: *Lutheran World Information* 11(2011), p. 7-8. On the ecumenical approach of the Orthodox Church of Finland, see: P. Metso, "Ortodoksisuus", in: R. Ilman et al. (eds.), *Monien uskontojen*, p. 28-31.

⁴⁰ Oral statement by the Secretariat of the Archbishop of Helsinki and All of Finland, 22nd October 2018. These practices have not been documented or officially outlined by the Orthodox Church of Finland.

⁴¹ *The Finnish Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue*, p. 62.

wedding service with a non-Orthodox element. In cases of inter-confessional marriages, the Bishops made it obligatory for the Orthodox service to be celebrated intact, even if elements of Lutheran or other non-Orthodox traditions were somehow combined within the wedding ceremony.⁴² Clearly, then, some priests had permitted elements of the Lutheran wedding service to be included in the Orthodox one.

If an Orthodox believer gets married in another church, an Orthodox priest can be asked to attend the wedding. He may wear his *epitrachelion* and celebrate a prayer service for the couple in addition to (but separate from) the non-Orthodox ritual. The order of the prayer service is approved by the Synod.⁴³

The question of inter-confessional marriage became an issue in the Orthodox Church of Finland due to the Pan-Orthodox Council held in Crete in June 2016. In the document “The Sacrament of Marriage and Its Impediments”, the Council expressed the prevailing Orthodox approach to inter-confessional marriages. It is defined as an anomaly contradicting canonical tradition. Nevertheless, the Pan-Orthodox Council allows autocephalous churches to “exercise ecclesiastical *oikonomia*” for the “salvation of man” in proportion to impediments to marriage caused by inter-confessional marriages.⁴⁴

In November 2016, Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople approached the annual Church Assembly of the Orthodox Church of Finland calling for fidelity towards Orthodox teaching on marriage as expressed by the Pan-Orthodox Council.⁴⁵ The Patriarch did not, however, specify if inter-confessional marriages should be perceived in a new way, different from the existing Finnish Orthodox interpretation. While Archbishop Leo (who attended the Council in Crete in the delegation of the Patriarchate of Constantinople) voiced his obedience to the authority of the Pan-Orthodox Council⁴⁶, Metropolitan Ambrosius of Helsinki (in office from 2002-2017) questioned the Council’s relevance on questions relating to marriage – large-

⁴² *Piispainkokouksen päätös avioliiton sakramentin toimittamisen käytännöstä* (22nd November 1995). Archives of the Central Administration of the Orthodox Church of Finland (SOKHA), Kuopio, Finland.

⁴³ Oral statement by the Secretariat of the Archbishop of Helsinki and All of Finland, 22nd October 2018.

⁴⁴ *The Sacrament of Marriage and Its Impediments*, II, 5. In: *Holy and Great Council*, <https://www.holycouncil.org/-/marriage>, viewed on 6th June 2018.

⁴⁵ “Ekumeenisen patriarkan Bartolomeoksen tervehdys Suomen ortodoksisen kirkon papiston ja maallikoiden kokoukselle”, in: *Suomen ortodoksinen kirkko*, <https://www.ort.fi/uutishuone/2016-11-28/patriarkan-tervehdys-0>, viewed on 6th June 2018.

⁴⁶ See e.g.: “Karjalan ja koko Suomen arkkipiispan Leon avauspuhe vuoden 2016 kirkolliskokouksessa Valamon luostarissa”, in: *Suomen ortodoksinen kirkko*, <https://www.ort.fi/>

ly due to the Council's contradiction of the pastoral practices adopted in the Orthodox Church of Finland. As an example of the local exercise of *oikonomia*, the Metropolitan mentioned a permissive attitude towards inter-confessional marriage. According to him, the Council's "medieval mindset" was unsuitable in the Finnish context.⁴⁷

When the Patriarch reminded Finnish Orthodox believers of the principles of Christian marriage, he most likely had same-sex marriage primarily in mind, as this was a topical and highly debated theme in Finland in the 2010s due to the preparation of the new marriage law. Be it as it may, signs of change in the prevailing attitude towards inter-confessional marriage or wedding practices have not yet emerged in the lived reality of the Orthodox Church of Finland.

3.2. A religious upbringing in an inter-confessional marriage

The miniature church as a religiously homogenous ideal of a Christian family is an exception among the Finnish Orthodox population. In the families of Orthodox children, one of the parents usually belongs to another church. This has inevitable effects on the practice of the Orthodox faith at home, the nature and intensity of an Orthodox religious upbringing and participation of the family in Church life. Questions of how faith is practiced in and by the family (e.g. praying together, observing feasts and fasts, attending Church, partaking in the eucharist), and especially when making decisions on how children are baptized are of crucial importance for minority churches. In a small church, inter-confessional marriage affects a considerably large portion of the members and has an effect on the entire church.⁴⁸

In the principles of early childhood education of the Orthodox Church of Finland, *Holy Noise* (In Finnish: *Pyhä melu*), the complex nature of religious upbringings in the inter-confessional families of Orthodox Finns is revealed in the following extract:

The majority of Finnish Orthodox children live in ecumenical families and in families in which some of the members do not belong to any Christian church or do not confess faith at all. Certain things must therefore be addressed discreetly in children's groups, since a child cannot influence the constitution of his family. Going to a club or having a religious upbringing may even inflict conflicts at home.

uutishuone/2016-11-28/arkkipiispan-puhe-0, viewed on 6th June 2018; Arkkipiispa Leo, "Arkkipiispan katsaus kirkkovooteen 2015-2016", in: *Aamun Koitto* 5(2016), p. 18-19.

⁴⁷ Jussi Rytönen, "Yleisortodoksinen synodi ei salli saman sukupuolen liittoja ortodokseille", in: *Kotimaa* 24 (18.2.2016).

⁴⁸ Riina Nguyen, "Perhe ekumeenisena kasvupaikkana", in: Antti Laine, Miikka Torppa (eds.), *Ekumeeninen kasvatust*, Helsinki, Suomen Lähetysseura 2010, p. 142-144.

Especially in the joint gatherings of families one should remember that of those present not everyone is a member of the Orthodox Church or knows Orthodox culture. Organizers of an activity must say what happens on the occasion, how to act and what it is for.⁴⁹

As the citation reveals, dynamics, realities and conflicts in the inter-confessional family become visible when Orthodox children and their families attend parish activities. In the families of Finnish Orthodox children, the Orthodox faith is not necessarily a unifying element and Orthodoxy can be very strange to the other parent.

In a resource book for “ecumenical families” published by the Finnish Ecumenical Council in 1995, a number of individual Orthodox members describe what it means to live in an inter-confessional marriage. Both positive and negative experiences were recounted. As positive descriptions, the harmonious co-existence of Orthodox and non-Orthodox Christian traditions in one family, an experience of mutual respect, reciprocal learning and a strengthening of the Orthodox identity were mentioned. On the other hand, there were negative experiences arising from the context of inter-confessional marriage and family life. Some Orthodox believers could not get acceptance from their spouse to practise the Orthodox faith, and had to, for example, keep Orthodox symbols (such as icons) out of sight at home. The question of baptizing children caused discord between the spouses. If children were baptized as Orthodox, the non-Orthodox spouse did not necessarily endorse an Orthodox religious upbringing. Finally, a weak awareness of Orthodox tradition among children who had grown up in an inter-confessional marriage was mentioned as a defect.⁵⁰

Research on parents of Finnish Orthodox children and youth reveals impeding factors to Orthodox religious upbringings in inter-confessional families. The most common and most demanding problematic factor is a non-Orthodox spouse. If he or she is reluctant towards religious parenting and does not support the Orthodox spouse, religious upbringings become difficult for the Orthodox parent and are associated with feelings of loneliness and insecurity. Attitudes of non-committed spouses varied from indifference to hostility towards Orthodox upbringings. In some cases, non-Orthodox relatives of a non-Orthodox spouse also disturbed the children’s religious education. Their negative attitude towards Orthodoxy and even accusations of heresy were discouraging for some Orthodox parents.⁵¹

⁴⁹ S. Okulov, *Pyhä melu*, p. 11.

⁵⁰ Marjatta Jaanu-Schröder et al. (eds.), *Ekumeeninen perhikirja*, Helsinki, Suomen ekumeeninen neuvosto 1995, p. 75-86. For additional lived-reality accounts on problems in Orthodox–Lutheran marriages, see: O. Merras, “Marriage Between”, p. 97-99.

⁵¹ P. Metso, “Raising a Christian or an Orthodox Christian? Parents’ Experience of Their Ecumenical Reality and Minority Status in Religious Upbringing of Finnish Orthodox

Additionally, several parents reported cautiousness in exposing their Orthodoxy at home and practising it, for example, praying and making the sign of the cross in front of a non-Orthodox spouse, as a hindrance. Interestingly, such hesitancy seemed to be endogenous, originating from personal insecurity. It was not linked to the non-Orthodox spouse's stance, which was in several cases described by the hesitant Orthodox parent as approving towards Orthodoxy. Converts to Orthodoxy reported a special kind of weakening factor: a lack of experience of a lucid Orthodox family tradition. Being raised themselves as Lutheran in a Lutheran family, they had no personal experience of what it meant to live an Orthodox life in a family. Finally, from a minority situation, a quite common challenge arises; a lack of Orthodox peers (for children and parents alike) in the social circles of the family.⁵²

The data also indicates that there are dramatic differences in how parents share their experiences with other Orthodox parents and in how their children interact with other Orthodox children. There were parents who did not have an Orthodox peer group and their children were the only Orthodox children in the sphere of the family's social acquaintances. On the other hand, many parents were fortunate to have strong social structures in support of their religious parenting and their children's feelings of belonging.⁵³

The Bilateral Orthodox-Lutheran Dialogue aimed to promote the peaceful co-existence of two Christian traditions in inter-confessional families. In regards to religious upbringings, the two churches recommend that all children in one family should be baptized in one and the same church. Furthermore, early childhood religious instruction in the family should be arranged according to the tradition the child belongs to. When the child grows up, the tradition of the other parent should be introduced. In addition, the two churches urge their parishes, firstly, to support the prayer life of both traditions in the home of Orthodox-Lutheran families, and, secondly, to encourage the entire family to participate in events and worship in both churches.⁵⁴ These recommendations quite clearly demonstrate the joint commitment of the two churches towards the promotion of a harmonious

Children and Youth", in: Martin Ubani (ed.), *New International Studies on Religions and Dialogue in Education*, Münster – New York, Waxmann 2018, p. 24-25.

⁵² *Ibidem*.

⁵³ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁴ *The Finnish Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue*, p. 62. A similar kind of recommendation was achieved in 2003 by the Evangelical Church in Germany and the Orthodox Bishops' Conference in Germany. Martin Illert, Recommendations Regarding «Mixed» Marriages. An Agreement Between the Orthodox Bishops Conference in Germany and the Evangelical Church in Germany". An unpublished paper presented in the theological consultation *Inter-Confessional Marriages Between Orthodox and Protestant Christians*, Sibiu, 8th–9th March 2018.

religious and ecumenical life in Orthodox-Lutheran families. Unfortunately there has been no research undertaken on how the two churches have managed to transmit the message of peaceful co-existence to the families. The observations made above, based on the accounts of parents, suggest that inter-confessional families may need further support from the two churches.

In the Finnish context, the work done in the families is also held up by Orthodox religious education, an obligatory school subject for all Orthodox pupils in elementary and high school. In the sphere of religious upbringings, the school thus collaborates with the family. Following Constance Tarasar, the American pioneer of Orthodox Christian education, Risto Aikonen, the Finnish pedagogue of religion, speaks of *integrative triangulation* between the home, church and school. They all contribute to the totality of the children's religious upbringing and education. Ideally, three sectors are in balance and interact with each other by bringing together divine worship, education and practical life into an individual's life.⁵⁵

Based on the findings from research on religious parenting, the majority of Finnish parents are happy and grateful for Orthodox religious education at school. Despite occasional problems faced by some parents in terms of how religious education is organized or carried out, religious education seems to fulfil its role in endorsing the religious instruction given at home quite well.⁵⁶ However, parents' expectations towards religious education may also lead to an unfortunate breakup with the Church. In research on factors behind leaving the Orthodox Church of Finland, the reasons included weak religious education arrangements and the personality of religious education teachers.⁵⁷ Perhaps these extreme reactions to disappointment over another partner in the integrative triangulation exposes how delicate and problematic the issues of religious upbringings and education are for many Finnish Orthodox parents.

3.3. Practices of inter-confessional participation

Life in the Orthodox Church of Finland is in many ways conditioned by ecumenical reality. On any given Sunday, for example, one can attend the divine liturgy in any of its churches, and find non-Orthodox Christians pres-

⁵⁵ Risto Aikonen, "Ortodoksinen uskonnonopetus Suomessa", in: Markku Pyysiäinen, Jarkko Seppälä (eds.), *Uskonnonopetuksen käsikirja*, Helsinki, WSOY 1998, p. 429-430. See also: Constance Tarasar, "Orthodox Theology and Religious Education", in: Randolph Miller (ed.), *Theologies of Religious Education*, Birmingham, Religious Education Press 1995, p. 108-114.

⁵⁶ P. Metso, "Raising a Christian", p. 25-26.

⁵⁷ See e.g.: Sirpa Okulov, "Oman uskonnonopetuksen rooli monikulttuurisessa yhteiskunnassa", in: Marianne Kantonen (ed.), *Tarhurit 2011*, Hämeenlinna, Suomen Ortodoksisten Opettajien Liitto 2011, p. 195.

ent – spouses, mothers, fathers, godparents, grandparents, brothers, sisters and friends of Orthodox believers. In the Finnish Orthodox context, it is therefore an everyday routine to recognize and acknowledge the ecumenical presence in liturgical life and in the social activities of a parish.

The 1990 joint Orthodox-Lutheran recommendation encouraged parishes to invite inter-confessional families to participate. What kind of practices exist in these churches for welcoming those Christians who belong to a family of one of the parishioners but are not members of the parish in question? In the resource book for ecumenical families (1995), the Finnish Ecumenical Council explicated how inter-confessional families can participate in the life of Finnish churches and Christian communities. From the perspective of the present article, lists provided by the Orthodox and Lutheran Churches are the most substantial and will be described herein.

In terms of liturgical participation, the Orthodox Church of Finland welcomes inter-confessional families to attend all of its services. Non-Orthodox family members can light candles in front of icons and venerate icons by kissing them. Likewise, when the Gospel book is set to be venerated, they are welcome to participate. Non-Orthodox Christians can receive a blessing from a priest and ointment on their forehead at the vigil (or matins). Even though they cannot receive the Eucharist or any other sacraments, non-Orthodox attendees are given post-communion *antidora* and wine in the liturgy. At the end of the liturgy, they may kiss the cross. When it comes to specific rituals attached to certain feasts, non-Orthodox Christians can join the rest of the churchgoers, e.g. they can be sprinkled by blessed water and drink it, receive blessed fruits and berries, hold blessed willow branches on Palm Sunday and receive eggs at Easter. Additionally, liturgical involvement in the family includes the Orthodox practices of commemorating the deceased and the sacramental nurturing of seriously ill Orthodox family members, on whose behalf non-Orthodox family members are encouraged to ask a priest to pay a visit.⁵⁸

The Lutheran Church, for its part, welcomes non-Lutheran family members to all common worships. Specific expressions of liturgical participation are not, however, itemized. Outside of the liturgical context, non-Lutheran members of an inter-confessional family can participate in all the parish activities. These include Sunday school, camps and trips, and all forms of family work (i.e. clubs, weekend courses, parent groups). The Lutheran Church also blesses the home of an inter-confessional family.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ M. Jaanu-Schröder et al. (eds.), *Ekumeeninen perhekirja*, p. 70-71.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*.

Concerning religious life in an inter-confessional home, a combined list from the Orthodox and Lutheran Churches encourages families to:

- pray together
- read and study the Bible together
- chant hymns
- light an oil lamp in front of an icon
- fast together
- celebrate feasts together
- commemorate the deceased
- ponder and discuss life questions together⁶⁰

To summarize, inter-confessional families are welcome to take part freely in the liturgical life in Lutheran and Orthodox parishes. The Lutheran Church signals that all the other forms of activity are also open to Orthodox believers as well. Lastly, both churches encourage inter-confessional families to manifest and share the expressions and practices of their respective traditions at home.

Even though it is not explicated in the aforementioned list by the Orthodox Church, in practice, non-Orthodox family members can take part in parish activities. Anyone monitoring the Orthodox Church of Finland would soon detect, as one of its baselines, an unproblematic approval of non-Orthodox Christians in its activities. The lived reality on the grass-roots level of inter-confessional families is, for the most part, undocumented, and cannot therefore be easily described within the limitations of this article. Just to open up the reality a little more, I will make reference to burial practices, which are scarcely mentioned above. As is the case in establishing inter-confessional families, and in the early phases of life (e.g. in relation to wedding services and baptisms of children), reaching the final frontier of death entails decisions on how to navigate between two traditions and church regulations. In Orthodox graveyards in Finland one occasionally finds gravestones with two crosses on them: a Russian-style “Orthodox cross” and a Latin-style “Lutheran cross”. As the engraving manifests, it is a family grave where Orthodox and Lutheran Christians lie together in their final resting place. In the Finnish context, inter-confessional marriage thus challenges, in a rather concrete way, the Catholic and Protestant idea of the abating of marriage, encapsulated in the common phrase “until death do us part”.

Even though Christians of another tradition can be buried in an Orthodox graveyard and in the same grave as his or her Orthodox family members, an Orthodox burial service can only be celebrated by those who belonged to the Orthodox Church. Yet, it is possible to sing Lutheran hymns

⁶⁰ *Ibidem.*

at the tomb or at the wake of an Orthodox believer. If the deceased person was a Lutheran, an Orthodox priest can celebrate a litany or *panikhida* (memorial service for the deceased) in an Orthodox Church, attached to the Lutheran burial service or at the grave. In addition, the Orthodox Church of Finland prays in its services for all departed members of the family, be they Orthodox or non-Orthodox.⁶¹

When it comes to the Finnish Lutheran Church, the ecumenical code is not quite as unambiguous. Every now and then, deceased Orthodox believers are buried in the Lutheran Church without the Orthodox parish being informed. From the Orthodox perspective this is unfortunate and ecumenically unacceptable. Archbishop Leo has defined deliberate burials of the Orthodox faithful by Lutheran priests as harmful to Orthodox-Lutheran relations in Finland.⁶² In my understanding, the reasons behind such burials include, at least, a majority-church mentality (i.e. a willingness to serve everybody with an open mind), ignorance of the Orthodox understanding, yielding to the demands of Lutheran relatives (oftentimes the deceased was one of the few or even the only Orthodox believer in the family), and – in some cases, in some regions – a wilful violation of Orthodox sentiments.

As a reaction to the complicated question of burial in inter-confessional families, the Finnish Ecumenical Council issued recommendations for good burial practices in 2013. The Council states that the church affiliation of the deceased should be seen as his or her conscious statement. Therefore, “The conviction of the deceased must be respected even if it would be unfamiliar to relatives.”⁶³ Conflicting views in burial practices show that ecumenical interaction between Finnish churches can also build up tensions.

From the perspective of inter-confessional participation, a possibly even more challenging problem appeared in September 2017 when the Synod of Lutheran Bishops decided that members of other Christian churches were allowed to receive the Eucharist in the Lutheran Church. A baptized non-Lutheran Christian is welcome to receive the Eucharist in the Lutheran Church on isolated occasions. As a prerequisite, he or she must, firstly, have permission to partake in the Eucharist in his or her own church (e.g. he/she

⁶¹ *Ibidem*; Oral statement by the Secretariat of the Archbishop of Helsinki and All of Finland, 22nd October 2018.

⁶² Archbishop Leo, “Dialogue Between Orthodox and Lutheran Church” (report given during the Synaxis of the Hierarchs of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, 29 August–2 September 2015), in: *Suomen ortodoksinen kirkko*, <https://ort.fi/arkkipiispa/node/239>, viewed on 9th June 2018.

⁶³ “Hautaan siunaamisen hyvät käytännöt”, in: *Suomen ekumeeninen neuvosto*, http://www.ekumenia.fi/sen_toimii/paikallinen_ekumenia/paikallisekumeeninen_foorumi/ekumeniaa_arkun_aarella_ym_-_paikallisekumeeninen_foorumi_2013_hameenlinnassa/hautaan_siunaamisen_hyvät_kaytannot/, viewed on 9th June 2018.

must have been confirmed), and, secondly, to accept the Lutheran doctrine of the Eucharist. In addition, a Lutheran pastor must take care that the person in question understands what the Eucharist is and what it means to partake in it. The main arguments behind the decision were increased multiculturalism, the needs of ecumenical families and the growth in ecumenical relations.⁶⁴

Archbishop Leo criticized the decision during its preparatory phase in 2016. He sharply labelled it “ecumenically harmful”, stating that any church inviting the Orthodox to its Holy Communion does not have the right to be an ecumenical partner of the Orthodox Church.⁶⁵ The Synod of Orthodox Bishops also discussed the issue in early 2017, and emphasized that the Orthodox Church is not in communion with the Lutheran Church. The decision of the Lutheran Church will not, therefore, affect the Orthodox stance.⁶⁶

After the decision was confirmed in the Lutheran Church in 2017, its effects on the Orthodox Church and its believers were discussed by clergymen on various occasions in the Finnish Orthodox Church.⁶⁷ Due to the

⁶⁴ “Piispainkokouksen päätös muiden kirkkojen jäsenten osallistumisesta ehtoolliseen”, in: *Piispainkokous* 5.9.2017, http://domus.evl.fi/ktwebbin/dbisa.dll/ktwebscr/pk_asil_tweb.htm?+bid=5936, viewed on 10th June 2018.

⁶⁵ Arkkipiispa Leo, “Avauspuhe vuoden 2016 kirkolliskokouksessa Valamon luostarissa”, in: Suomen ortodoksinen kirkko, <https://ort.fi/uutishuone/2016-11-28/arkkipiispan-puhe-0>, viewed on 10th June 2018.

⁶⁶ *Piispainkokouksen pöytäkirja 1/2017* (14th February 2017). Archives of the Central Administration of the Orthodox Church of Finland (SOKHA), Kuopio, Finland. When evaluating these reactions, one needs to be aware of Metropolitan Ambrosius of Helsinki’s opposite opinion on eucharistic hospitality. In 2015 he suggested that intercommunion between Orthodox and Lutherans could be gradually introduced in inter-confessional families. See Metropolita Ambrosius, “Yhtä jalkaa eteenpäin”, in: Kaisa Raittila et al. (eds.), *Hän joka on. Kirja Jeesuksesta. Arkkipiispa Kari Mäkinen 60 vuotta*, Helsinki, Kirjapaja 2015, p. 32-37. In the same year, Metropolitan Ambrosius invited the Lutheran Bishop of Helsinki, Irja Askola, to observe the ordination of a priest on the altar of his cathedral. The Archbishop condemned her presence on the altar and accused the Metropolitan of violating the canons. The Metropolitan was later given notice from the Patriarchate of Constantinople, with a warning of severe consequences in case anything similar happened. The incident gained popular interest and was exceptionally widely covered in the public media. The Metropolitan got sympathy especially from the outside of the Orthodox Church, but approving voices were also heard from within. In the public’s opinion, the Orthodox Church of Finland was perceived by many as conservative and intolerant towards women. Presumably, strong reactions against the Lutheran decision on eucharistic hospitality in 2017 originate at least partly from the earlier disputes around Metropolitan Ambrosius’ statements and actions.

⁶⁷ See e.g. Marko Mäkinen, “Huomioita ortodoksisesta ehtoolliskäsityksestä”, in: *Suomen ortodoksinen kirkko*, <https://ort.fi/uutishuone/2017-09-12/huomioita-ortodoksisesta-eh-toolliskäsityksesta>, viewed on 10th June 2018; Harri Peiponen, “Riittääkö yksi kattaus ehtoollispöytään?”, in: *Aamun Koitto* 2/2018; Tuomas Järvelin, “Ehtoollisvieraanvaraisuudes-

considerable number of Orthodox-Lutheran marriages, there are Lutherans in almost every Finnish Orthodox believer's family. Thus, a rather loose concept of "ecumenical family" as a condition for eucharistic hospitality located most Orthodox Finns within the group of baptized non-Lutheran Christians who can be invited to the Holy Communion. In the opposing arguments to the decision, the main arguments of Orthodox priests and theologians were:

- The Orthodox and Lutheran teachings of the eucharist are not compatible, therefore Orthodox believers cannot reconcile with the Lutheran understanding of the Eucharist;
- Orthodox ecclesiology is not compatible with eucharistic hospitality, a practice that is unknown in the Orthodox Church;
- From the perspective of ecclesiology, the Eucharist is not a private matter but has a communal character; and
- An Orthodox believer who goes to a Lutheran Eucharist in practice excommunicates himself or herself from the communion with the Orthodox Church.

From the Orthodox point of view, the main problem of the Lutheran decision seems to be foremost ecclesiological and sociological. By inviting the Orthodox believers – among other Christians – to eucharist, the Lutheran Church has obscured the acceptable boundaries between church traditions, and has also blurred Orthodox identity, which has already been weakened by its minority status and tendency to assimilate with the Lutheran majority. It is noteworthy that in the reactions, firstly, the need to teach the Orthodox faithful was recognized as a desired measure to be taken by the Church, and, secondly, a commitment to maintaining a dialogue with the Lutherans was confirmed. Accordingly, the ecumenical effects of the decision were discussed in the preparatory meeting of the next round of the Finnish Bilateral Orthodox–Lutheran Dialogue in October 2017. The meeting produced a statement in which the need to educate, especially Orthodox believers, on the Orthodox understanding of the Eucharist and ecumenical restrictions on eucharistic communion based on it was manifested. In addition, if the Finnish Orthodox Church wishes clarifications regarding the Lutheran decision concerning Orthodox Christians, the Synod of Lutheran Bishops will now process such a request.⁶⁸ To date, no formal procedure has been initiated by the Finnish Orthodox Church.

ta?", in: *Aamun Koitto* 2/2018; T. Järvelin et al., "Ehtoollisvieraanvaraisuutta koskeva tapaus 14.11.2017". Unpublished memorandum on the meeting between the Orthodox and Lutheran clergy, 14th November 2017, Liperi, Finland.

⁶⁸ *Communique of the Preparatory Meeting of the Bilateral Orthodox–Finnish Theological Dialogue*, 23rd–24th October 2017, Mikkeli, Finland. Unpublished statement.

To sum up, established customs for the participation of inter-confessional families in the life of the Orthodox and Lutheran Churches have existed for decades in Finland. Both Churches aim to support a peaceful and full religious life in inter-confessional families and their participation in parish life. Familiar relations between the Orthodox and Lutheran Churches have recently been tested on questions relating to acceptable burial practices and introducing the practice of eucharistic hospitality in the Lutheran Church.

4. Conclusions

The aim of this article was to investigate the phenomenon of inter-confessional marriage in the Orthodox Church of Finland from three perspectives: its effect on wedding services, religious upbringings and education, and practices of participation in Church life.

Each of these themes is in many ways – e.g. socially, emotionally, ecclesiastically – affected by the specific Finnish context. The Orthodox Church in Finland is a small religious minority that lives among the non-Orthodox majority, Finnish society and a culture dominated by the Lutheran tradition and its norms of regular Christianity. This minority position brings with it a specific set of dynamics between different Christian and other religious traditions that pierces, in one way or another, the lived reality of Orthodox Finns. In the specific sphere of marriage and the family, at least 90% of married Finnish Orthodox believers have a non-Orthodox spouse, and their children are quite often baptized outside of the Orthodox Church. Consequently, in the families of most – if not every – Finnish Orthodox believer, there are also non-Orthodox members.

Concerning weddings, inter-confessional couples are self-evidently married in the Orthodox Church of Finland if they so wish if the non-Orthodox partner is also a Christian. Orthodox Finns also get married in other Christian churches, most often in the Lutheran Church. When the wedding of an inter-confessional couple takes place in the Orthodox Church, a priest from the other Christian community can perform a blessing adjacent to the Orthodox ceremony, albeit not as an integral part of it. Reciprocally, when an inter-confessional wedding of an Orthodox Christian is arranged in another church, an Orthodox priest can be present and celebrate a blessing, except for performing the non-Orthodox rite.

In regards to the religious upbringing of children in an inter-confessional marriage, the process of religious socialization is strongly influenced by the ecumenical reality in the family. Even though the Finnish Orthodox Church gladly baptizes children born in inter-confessional families, it respects decisions made in the family to baptize them outside of the Orthodox

Church. The joint Orthodox–Lutheran recommendation from 1990 suggests that children in one family should be brought up consistently in the tradition of one of the parents, and the tradition of the other parent should also be introduced to the children. When children are baptized in the Orthodox Church, Orthodox parents often experience an inter-confessional family as a hindrance to the religious upbringing of their children. An indifferent or disapproving attitude by the non-Orthodox spouse is the most common reason that reduces the chances of a stable (Orthodox) religious upbringing in the family. Additionally, a lack of Orthodox peers for parents and children is another major hindrance to an Orthodox religious upbringing. The Orthodox Church of Finland is aware of the reality of its members' family lives and aims to support and pay special attention to the needs of inter-confessional families. Religious education in school is an important supportive element for the religious socialization of Orthodox children, especially in inter-confessional families.

When it comes to the participation of inter-confessional families in parish life in the Orthodox Church of Finland, non-Orthodox family members of Orthodox believers are welcome to attend all liturgical and social activities. In the prevailing pastoral mentality of the Orthodox Church of Finland, the wellbeing of Orthodox believers is emphasized. Thus, the validity of their inter-confessional marriage is not questioned by the Church, and the non-Orthodox tradition of his/her spouse (and children, perhaps) is not overlooked.

To conclude, the Orthodox Church of Finland has chosen to seek a balance between, firstly, the factual social reality arising from the minority position of its members and, secondly, its ideals of an Orthodox family life. There are established relations and an atmosphere of mutual respect with the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland, the vast-majority Finnish church. Together, the Orthodox and Lutheran Churches have expressed their pastoral commitment to the wellbeing of families where both of their traditions are present. No signs of harmful proselytism can be detected in the statements and actions of either church. Nevertheless, some tensions do exist, for example, in regards to burial practices in inter-confessional families and, more recently, due to the 2017 decision of the Lutheran Church to invite non-Lutheran Christians to Holy Communion.

The interaction and relations between spouses, parents and children in the family are central for the wellbeing of any family, not just for inter-confessional families. The latter, however, forms a special case in which religious traditions, convictions and practices contribute to emotional, relational, social and existential dynamics in the family, and influence the per-

sonal progress of its members. In any given context, not only in Finland, the churches could ask themselves and – more importantly – together, how they can better support Christian life in inter-confessional families. It is perhaps most fruitful to examine these questions on a grass-roots level: How can local parishes sustain a constructive ecumenical life in the inter-confessional families of their members? What can be done to strengthen a welcoming atmosphere for inter-confessional families to participate in parish activities? These questions cannot be thoroughly answered without getting to know the lived realities in inter-confessional marriages and families in more depth. This can only take place by listening to the experts, i.e. people in such marriages and families, and by giving them a voice on this most intimate and imperative issue.