

Localising and acculturating the global

The Healing Rooms prayer service network in Finland

The article addresses the theme of accommodating an imported model of international religious practice into a national context. The case in question involves an intentional 'translation' of an American Pentecostal concept of a lay-based prayer service into a Nordic, rather secularised Lutheran context. This recent newcomer into the Finnish religious field is the Healing Rooms network which is a predominantly charismatic Christian, globally expanded, interdenominational intercessory prayer service. This study of Healing Rooms is based on material compiled by means of ethnographic methods. According to the interviewees, the idea of a prayer clinic must be adjusted culturally and nationally, even though the basic function of the practice is the same everywhere. In Finland this means adjusting the service to fit a culture and society in which the mainline Lutheran Church has traditionally had simultaneously a distant and dominating role on the religious scene.¹

Introduction

Today, Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity is the most expansive form of Christianity in the world. Different doctrinal and ritual dimensions, such as healing and miracles, prosperity and success, evangelising, worship and praise, are emphasised in its various branches. However, the primary appeal of all varieties of Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity

throughout the world seems to be healing through the power of the Holy Spirit (Brown 2011: 8, 14). A human need for managing uncertainties in life, such as dealing with illness, makes healing, undoubtedly, a theme that is easily absorbed, no matter what the cultural context is.

The rapid growth of Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries plays an intriguing role on the contemporary religious scene globally. It is a powerful driver of radical cultural change, promoting the idea of a discontinuity between an unsatisfactory past and a promising future; it is characterised by a practical tendency towards lived religion, and it has a distinctive relationship to modernity (cf. Robbins 2010: 156–8). There is, indeed, a certain built-in globalisation even in its self-descriptions. Many neo-Pentecostal churches and movements present themselves as 'global' or 'international', and these terms are often featured in their names. Pentecostal ideas also circulate globally through modern communication and travel technologies which have been harnessed to assist their evangelising missions. The era of mass media has thereby opened up new dimensions for aiming at spreading the gospel to all nations (Brown 2011: 19; Meyer 2010: 113). 'Conquering the world' (both in its tangible and metaphorical meanings) is the built-in objective of its biblical missionary thinking (cf. Coleman 2007: 49).

The notion of a process of 'glocalisation' of religious influences – formed by a combination of the words 'globalisation' and 'localisation' – was introduced by Roland Robertson for depicting the ways in which a global phenomenon is responded to in various local cultures (Robertson 1994: 173–4). People have a tendency to look at the world through their

1 The study of Healing Rooms was a part of my post-doctoral project, which was funded by the Academy of Finland (2011–13, project number 138213) and, as a case study, it was connected to the CoE project of Åbo Akademi University Post-secular *Culture and the Changing Religious Landscape in Finland* (2010–14).

own cultural lenses and to modify imported religious influences to fit the local mentality. Global religious trends, being interwoven with locally relevant other spheres of life – the social, the political, the economic and the cultural – create a rich diversity within an expansive tradition like Pentecostalism, when systems of belief may be given different meanings than the ones originally attributed to them (Meyer 2010: 113; Hunt 2000: 335). In any case, religious movements, traditions, or ideas do not expand and develop by themselves. On the contrary, they always need agents and actors, as well as a suitable time and social setting in order to be introduced.

In this article, I am addressing the theme of global charismatic Christian networking by exploring the idea of an international faith-healing practice in a national context. The ‘glocalised’ case in question is a Finnish ‘translation’ of the American Pentecostal-charismatic concept of a lay-based intercessory prayer service; the Healing Rooms. It is my intention to give an overview of the accommodation process of this specialised practice in the Finnish context, which is a basically Lutheran but, nevertheless, relatively secularised Nordic culture.

Many earlier attempts at re-awakening Pentecostalism have occurred in Finland since the beginning of the twentieth century. Still, Pentecostals are a marginal religious group in Finland, even though Pentecostalism in Finland today has an established status as a church (cf. Mantsinen in this issue). At the beginning of 2014, the Pentecostal Church of Finland had 7,675 registered members and 41 local congregations bonded to the church. However, the official figures of the Pentecostal Church do not tell the whole truth of Pentecostalism in Finland because most of the Pentecostals are not members of the established organisation. In Finland, Pentecostalism is a lay movement with 238 Finnish-speaking and 26 Swedish-speaking congregations which has approximately 46,000 adherents, making it one of the biggest revival movements in Finland, with a population of nearly 5.5 million inhabitants (see the websites of the Pentecostal Church of Finland and Pingstfi, the Swedish-speaking Pentecostal congregations in Finland). Yet, alongside the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland it has a minority status in the religious field. Other charismatic Christian communities are not included in these figures since traditional Pentecostal communities have not been willing to identify themselves with the later ‘Third Wave’.

The Pentecostal-charismatic idea of healing prayer is being introduced into the wider Christian scene in Finland in the form of a cooperation between different Christian communities at the grassroots level as an interdenominational peer network. This represents a new attempt at re-awakening. The peculiarity of the Healing Rooms (HR) idea compared to earlier prayer movements in the country is that to fulfil the ultimate purpose of Christianity – to prepare people for the ‘End Times’ – it is organised in the form of a clinic, giving it the feel of a spiritual health centre. The strategy of the HR evangelism is exclusively by means of the personal, intercessory prayer.

The blurriness of boundaries and networking

A frame for my approach is the application of a post-secular perspective, which identifies globalisation, individualism and neo-liberalism as the typical characteristics of contemporary forms of religion (cf. Habermas 2008, Taylor 2007). Rather than implying a lack of religion in society, the term ‘secular’ refers to a shift in focus towards privatised religiosity which has taken place in the period following the Second World War, as well as a move towards an increasing pluralism instead of a single-institutional and inclusive religion. Thus, the term ‘post-secular’ does not refer to a ‘return’ to religion following its hypothetical disappearance, but the situation of a multi-valued, continuous change and fragmentation on the religious scene (cf. Harrington 2007: 547). In a post-secular society, there are contesting alternatives in the religious field, a complex relation between individualism and collectivism, various ways of belonging. There is also an ongoing dialogue between the religious and the secular making thus religion more visible in the public sphere, de-institutionalisation and new spiritual and experiential forms of religiosity. Due to globalisation, the religious scene is also a never-ending, transcultural process which is characterised by a reciprocal exchange of ideas (cf. Welsch 1999). Thus, instead of asking whether the role of religion is diminishing or not in a society, a relevant question could be: how are religious ideas absorbed and traditions accommodated functionally in new situations and environments?

Even though conservative Christianity is often seen as a counter reaction to modernisation and secularisation, many charismatic Christian movements and organisations seem to fit quite well into

modernity, as well as with the post-secular principles of globalisation, individualism and even neo-liberalism. For instance, Birgit Meyer has interpreted the global growth of the so-called 'prosperity gospel' as an expression also of neo-liberalism. Furthermore, instead of treating Pentecostalism and globalisation as two separate entities she sees Pentecostalism, with its megachurches and transnational networks, in the first place as an actively globalising project (Meyer 2010: 114, 119–20). Still, as Simon Coleman has pointed out in his study of the Word of Life in Sweden, globalisation is not mere communication across territorial boundaries, but also the creation of a multi-dimensional yet culturally specific sense of reaching out into an unbounded realm of action and identity (Coleman 2007: 6). He points out that Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity is simultaneously a combination of experiential, idealistic, biblical and oppositional tendencies (*ibid.* 67–8).

The full scope of the Pentecostal and charismatic traditions is characterised by many different doctrinal and ritual variations. Peter Beyer has aptly indicated that 'Pentecostal' describes a style of Christianity rather than a defined movement (Beyer 2003: 373). So-called 'house churches' and 'charismatic renewal', when referring to the so-called Third Wave revival, have been recognised as twenty-first century trends which are also to be found within mainstream Christian denominations. These interests manifest themselves practically in new organisational structures of communities. Simultaneously, an emphasis on holistic healing as a spiritual process is visible (e.g. Percy 2000, Hunt 2008, Brown 2011). Some researchers even see the innovative character of these contemporary trends as a reformation within Christianity in its search for a 'primal' spirituality and piety (Hunt 2010: 195; Cox 2011: xix).

Networking beyond the denominations as 'restoration', a kind of a return to the 'apostolic' model of the church in both national and global contexts, is the obvious tendency in forming interdenominational communities of believers among the charismatics. Andy Lord and others have pointed out, that in the United Kingdom, the charismatic movement 'has often been considered in terms of the ways in which the Spirit is at work inside and outside the established denominations' (Lord 2012: 90). Acting beyond denominations is, for the most part, defined among the charismatics as restorationism, that is to say, as returning to the model of the 'original' church.

This activity is closely linked with the development of networking. The same goes for Finland where charismatic Christianity has had a certain impact not only in the form of independent, local, Third Wave congregations, but has also already existed as a renewal movement within the mainline church since the 1970s. Today, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland hosts quite a few more or less charismatic activities, such as small local groups as well as national organisations, including the renewal movements Hengen uudistus kirkossamme (Spiritual Renewal in Our Church) and the Nordic Oasrörelse (Oasis movement) in the Swedish-speaking parishes. Thus, many other forms of charismatic Christian networking have already been paving the way for the HR movement in the country, even though its operational model of 'prayer clinics' is unprecedented.

The Pentecostal expansion can be seen in terms of a sociological theory of networking as a set of interconnected 'nodes' (Lord 2012: 95; Castell 2000). What actually renders the network functional is the frequency of interaction between the nodes, be they units such as 'cells' within a congregation, or individuals. As Manuel Castells has outlined, networks are open and able to expand limitlessly, integrating new nodes as long as they share the same communication codes (Castells 2000: 501). In the case of Healing Rooms, it seems that prayer clinics as nodes of the national HR network, as well as the prayer team members as nodes of local prayer clinics, share those codes. The activity is based on a systematic, nationwide plantation plan which uses a training course as a means of sharing the code, as well as a regular follow-up system and social control and the establishment of interpersonal support structures within the prayer teams.

Healing Rooms: the background and its plantation in Finland

The Healing Rooms project dates back to the first decades of the twentieth century in the United States. It was launched by John Lake, a Pentecostal pastor in Spokane, Washington, at the beginning of the 1930s. Very quickly, Lake's reputation as a charismatic healer praying for the sick earned him the nickname 'the Doctor', and his local meetings were called 'Healing Rooms'. However, soon after the death of Lake in 1935 these activities ran aground for several decades. Later on, Healing Rooms was revived in the 1990s

by another Pentecostal pastor, Cal Pierce, who discovered the history of the already forgotten ideas of 'Doctor' Lake. Pierce and his wife Michelle decided to spread the idea of the Healing Rooms by starting to found their own local 'prayer clinics', as they termed these intercessory services.

The recovery of Healing Rooms in the 1990s was very much concurrent with the arising of a neo-charismatic movements, often identified as the 'health and wealth gospel' because of the strong emphasis on healing, well-being and prosperity as privileges for true believers. Here, as is typically held in Third Wave Pentecostalism, miracles and supernatural healing can be channelled through all believers, not just through religious specialists like preachers or pastors (cf. Poloma and Hoelter 1998: 259). So thematically, Healing Rooms is a kind of continuation or supplement of the Pentecostal-charismatic revival, even though it is not associated unambiguously with it. Healing Rooms rather operate as an interdenominational charismatic network without clearly committing to any single Christian church or movement, but rather aiming to cooperate with them all. As a lay-based network, it has spread very quickly to every continent, taking advantage of already existing and functioning local religious infrastructures. The headquarters of the movement is still in Spokane. The International Association of Healing Rooms was founded in 2001 (see the website of Healing Rooms Ministries).

Healing Rooms was introduced to Finland in 2005 by a Finnish Pentecostal married couple who got to know the prayer clinic service during a holiday trip to California, at a local Vineyard congregation there. Following the model of HR, they finally founded the first prayer clinic in Espoo, in the vicinity of the Helsinki a year later. Since 2006, 33 prayer clinics have started to operate regularly around the country. There have actually been even more prayer clinics established in Finland than that, but not all of them have succeeded, for different reasons. For instance, a prayer clinic is run by volunteers, and if the local team is not big enough it may turn out to be too demanding for only a few volunteers to run the local practice on a regular basis. Furthermore, instead of having premises of its own, the HR prayer clinics operate within several different organisational contexts. So, there is a certain challenge in creating stable, functioning relationships with local congregations or finding other sympathetic parties with

which to cooperate; the new concept is not automatically approved everywhere.

In Finland, prayer clinics are usually connected to Pentecostal and Free Church² congregations, or local parishes of the main-line Lutheran Church. Healing Rooms may also work in purely secular surroundings, such as shopping malls or in other public spaces. The

criterion for choosing the site for a local practice is that the prayer clinic should be accessible to everyone. Thus in order to ensure the clinics are accessible, they are always placed in urban centres, where there is a functioning public transport system. The spaces where the clinics operate on a regular basis are carefully chosen so that the psychological threshold which would be needed to be stepped over in order to attend would not be too high for anyone. Furthermore, the interdenominational aspect is regarded to be important for spreading the concept of a prayer clinic in the country.

The leaders of the Finnish Healing Rooms have, above all, made a concerted effort to profile their founding principles in such a way that they would be easily received into the new cultural environment. The transcultural principle can therefore be seen not only in the crossing of the borders of different national cultures, but also in the transcending of the boundaries of the different Christian traditions. The leaders clarified this situation by saying that if



John G. Lake (1870-1935), c. 1900-05.

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- 2 The Evangelical Free Church of Finland (EFCF) is a Finnish revival movement theologically representing evangelical and charismatic Christianity. Historically, it was inspired by the American Holiness movement of the nineteenth century that was introduced to Finland through Sweden. It has been operating in Finland for over 120 years. Arising from a historically Lutheran context, this denomination of 100 congregations is present today all over the country. EFCF is actively involved in inter-denominational cooperation, missionary work and development projects in many countries abroad. (See the website of the Evangelical Free Church of Finland)

one thinks there is only one orthodox form of Christianity, one cannot act as a prayer team member for Healing Rooms.

Material of the study

This study of Healing Rooms is based on material compiled in accordance with ethnographic methods. I compiled most of the research material during the spring term of 2011, using thematic interviews and participant observation.

I initially interviewed the Finnish founders at the movement's headquarters in Espoo, and thereafter 28 members of prayer teams, representing five clinics in various districts. The thematic interview was semi-structured by open-ended questions on becoming a practitioner as well as the meanings and functions of intercessory prayer work. The discussion with each interviewee took on average 1.5 hours. The oldest of the interviewees was a man born in 1937, and the youngest a man born in 1977. Most of them were middle-aged or just retired, born in the 1940s and 1950s. Nineteen of the interviewees were women and 11 men. One third of them were Pentecostals while the majority were Lutheran. One elderly couple came from the Seventh-day Adventist Church and two interviewees from neo-charismatic congregations, while one local team leader represented the Free Church. The age and gender groups as well as religious affiliations of the interviewees reflect quite accurately the composition of the prayer teams in general in the Finnish Healing Rooms clinics.

The short questionnaire was directed at the clients of every prayer clinic³ in the country and it was meant to give information on the background and experiences of HR clients. Since the questionnaire was distributed and collected via the prayer clinics, the process excluded those clients who visited a prayer clinic only once, and for one reason or another, did not go there again. However, the received responses (N=124) gave the impression of the prayer clinics having both regular and occasional visitors. Most of them – 74.19 per cent – belonged to the mainline

Lutheran Church, as the majority of Finns do. The rest of them identified themselves as Pentecostals, Free Church members and charismatics. Most of the respondents were women (71%) and the biggest age group among the respondents was those aged 36–45 years (31.45%). People younger than 30 years and older than 60 years were few and both very young and very old were missing. Thus, the clients basically represent actively working age groups.⁴

I found that it was also important to get contextualising information by doing participant observation (at prayer clinics, a 'conference', a closed meeting of a local prayer team, in homes). And again, an unavoidable source in the study of contemporary religiosity is the internet. Healing Rooms Finland has a very systematically constructed and constantly updated website which gives a lot of information about the functions of the organisation (see the website of Healing Rooms Finland). In addition to its own websites, HR shares information and healing testimonies on Facebook and YouTube. Furthermore, contextual information can also be found on chat forums and blogs. HR also maintains an email list for its supporters in order to share monthly information about upcoming activities.

The 'healing evenings' at local prayer clinics are arranged once a week, or fortnightly. The setting and procedure are supposed to be precisely the same at every clinic. There is a waiting room where the clients can wait for their turn to be prayed for privately in separate 'consulting rooms'. In each consulting room, there is a team of three intercessors who pray for each visitor privately for 10–20 minutes according to the visitor's request.

Before the actual clinical reception opens to the clients, the prayer teams prepare by praising and praying by themselves for an hour. This meditative get-together helps them in getting focussed for their work and being present for the clients. The intercessors whom I have interviewed regard this moment of preparation as a necessary step towards being able to take on the role of a mediator – to be a 'channel', as they call themselves – between God and the



3 There were 24 prayer clinics at that moment in Finland.

4 More detailed report on the questionnaire responses in Hovi 2012.

client. Actually, many of them take a lot more time to prepare for the service. They do this, for instance, by praying alone during the day or even by fasting. Before the reception begins, they form the serving teams of three intercessors, preferably having representatives of the both sexes in every team.

Even though prayer team members serving at local HR clinics are volunteer workers, they are carefully selected and trained to encounter people who come to be prayed for. The most important criterion is that a prayer team member is a 'born-again' believer who belongs to a Christian church or congregation – no matter which one, as long as he or she accepts the HR rules. The clients, for their part, are not required to divulge their religious affiliations at all if they do not want to do so. In HR, congregational boundaries are regarded as irrelevant.

Localising and acculturating the global practice

Having been inspired by the project of the prayer clinic network, the leaders of the Finnish HR acquainted themselves with Healing Rooms principles at the international headquarters in Spokane. Initially they used the original HR training course material in their recruitment of prayer team members in Finland, but as they very soon noticed, the Spokane material did not actually work in another cultural context. The Finnish leaders came to the conclusion that 'it is not possible to bring America to Finland'. So, they decided to 'culturise' the material insofar as they thought would be necessary for the HR concept to be acceptable in Finland; the idea of a prayer clinic had to be adjusted culturally and nationally. Above all, according to the Finnish leaders, it was of the utmost importance to ensure that the people in charge in the parishes of the mainline church had given their approval to the idea of a lay-based local prayer clinic.

Acculturating HR practices into the Finnish context is an example of an intentional and systematic 'cultural translation' of a project at the grassroots level. In what follows, I raise a few themes that have been consciously considered when launching HR practices in Finland. First of all, I introduce the practical matters that were regarded as important prerequisites for adapting and fitting the model into the Finnish mentality and its secularised, Lutheran cultural context. Secondly, I discuss the role of the cultural understanding of the project's doctrine. Thirdly, I give examples of how particularisations, variations,

and critiques are dealt with within the Finnish HR community as well as in relation to outsiders.

Practicalities that matter

Taking the form of a registered association was the starting point in launching Healing Rooms in Finland, as many religious movements and communities outside of the established churches typically do register themselves as an association. This is basically due to economic reasons; in Finland, a registered association is allowed to collect money in the form of membership fees and, for instance, by organising fundraising campaigns; the HR prayer service is free of charge for its clients, but even though it is based on voluntary work there are costs, including rents, salaries of 1–2 full-time workers at the central office in Espoo, materials, and teachers' travel costs, associated with arranging training courses. All of these costs are covered by donations and support payments, which can now be collected legally by HR under the auspices of the registered association. Anyone can join the association as a supporting member by paying the membership fee of 50 euros per year. Being organised as an association is also the means by which the lay network can be overseen and supported around the country, as the leaders outlined:

Everything goes through this association, and the function of this association actually is the aim of producing all supporting services, so that, for instance, in Turku, there is no need for them to found an association of their own in order to take care of money transactions legally. All that is taken care of here [at the Finnish HR central office in Espoo]. So, we provide all the materials and everything for making it really easy to open up local prayer clinics without the complicated bureaucracy and other things that the Finnish law requires.⁵

The practicalities in arranging the setting for a prayer clinic are carefully taken care of in terms of the optimal form for encountering the client. The basic idea is that a prayer clinic should be acces-

5 The citations are excerpts from the material that I compiled by interviewing Healing Rooms prayer team members in the spring term of 2011. The Healing Rooms interviews are archived in the Archive of Folkloristics at Åbo Akademi University.

sible to everyone, both physically and mentally. As the Finnish HR leaders reasoned, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland has traditionally had simultaneously both a distant and a dominating role in the Finnish society, so it is important to adjust the new idea to that culturally meaningful context. Even though the majority of the Finns (more than 70%) at least nominally belong to the Lutheran Church, most of them very seldom attend actual church services. For that reason, in Finland, a HR prayer clinic is never arranged in a church building because, according to the leaders, it is too institutional and official a place for many Finns. For them a more functional and ideal context for a prayer clinic is a cosy former vicarage. Nevertheless, a prayer clinic may also work in purely secular surroundings such as the premises of various associations. Several prayer clinics work in a local parish hall or the meeting houses of independent congregations.

There are explicitly formulated rules concerning the encounter with a client at a prayer clinic. The client must be treated in a calm and discreet manner. This is emphasised above all in two respects; first, even though HR has its roots in the Pentecostal tradition, praying in tongues is not allowed in the presence of clients because it may make some feel uneasy. It is also regarded as an important matter that a client understands what is being prayed for. After all, speaking in tongues does not belong to the 'official' Lutheran tradition and, despite its long history in the country, Pentecostalism is a marginal religion in Finland, so the tradition of *glossolalia* is not familiar to the majority of Finns. Ecstatic expressions are also not encouraged, so that, for instance, a client falling down as a result of being 'slain in the Spirit' during a prayer is rarely witnessed at a prayer clinic, according to my interviewees. Even though there are restrictions on expressions of *glossolalia* during the client work, the prayer team members are free to pray in tongues in their closed meetings before and after opening to the public.

In addition to the avoidance of speaking in tongues, the second theme to be emphasised, and which is carefully taken into account in the HR training, is a culturally specific set of rules concerning physical proximity. The anthropologist Candy Gunther Brown's analysis has recently characterised Pentecostal and charismatic Christian prayer practices as 'proximal intercessory prayer' for divine healing. Such a practice involves getting up close



physically to a sick person, laying hands on the head, a shoulder, or a diseased body part, empathising with their sufferings, petitioning God to heal, and commanding healing in the name and authority of Jesus (Brown 2012). Even though the 'laying on of hands' is a typically Christian ritual, especially for blessing or healing in Pentecostalism, at the Finnish HR prayer clinics a client is not touched physically without being first explicitly asked for his or her permission to do so. If permission is given, it is possible for prayer team members to keep their hands lightly on the client's shoulders during the prayer. Legs and arms are also regarded as relatively neutral parts of the body which can be touched, but touching the torso area of the body or the head is forbidden. These instructions are given in order to avoid any sexualised or eroticised touch as well as to avoid causing embarrassment by being too intimate or to creating the impression of inappropriate use of power. The rules for touching are also gendered even though men and women otherwise have equal authority within a prayer team.

Culture-specific interpretations

The issue of culturally specific understandings of the doctrine is regarded as important in prayer clinic work. The HR network has spread to every continent, so it is obvious that the actual implementations are culturally flavoured according to the religious climate of the environment and people who are involved. However, there is also an aim to encapsulate the universally valid core function, as the Finnish leaders outline:

There are Catholics involved, but this is not a Catholic movement. This is not a 'prosperity gospel' movement, this is not a Lutheran movement. Of course, there may be people who think that pure Lutheranism is the only right doctrine and this is just some freaking weird thing, so that they can't be involved in a thing like this. The roots are like this... If you look at the English websites of this activity you will notice a very English flavour, and likewise in Scotland.

The themes that I raise concerning the cultural understanding of the guidelines at the Finnish prayer clinics are: the standardised training course, the relationship with the 'spirit world' and miracles, and interdenominational pluralism.

The training course is designed to standardise the principles and practice so that the HR service is the same at every prayer clinic, irrespective of the backgrounds of the people who are involved. The two-day training course includes praying demonstrations and rehearsals as well as teaching the principles of the 'charismas': in other words, instructions on how to use the gifts of the Holy Spirit for the benefit of other people. The strict and explicit rules according to which prayer teams encounter a client are written down and handed over to everyone who wants to become a prayer team member. In fact, the HR training course has become quite popular among believers from different Christian backgrounds, even those who have no intention of joining a prayer team. Nevertheless, the standardised training is an absolute precondition for being authorised to act as an intercessor at the Finnish HR prayer clinics. For the most part, participants seem to come to take the course for personal reasons, as only a few of several dozen participants per course group will eventually end up as a prayer team member. One of the interviewed female intercessors explained her experiences as follows:

NN: In the course, we went through the background [of the practice], where it comes from. And then there was a lot about how we should pray. Like, we all should be very aware of the rules of game, and that we should go through the rules again from time to time so that no one goes solo, so that there are clear rules for the team. And that we don't do it by our own efforts but through the power of the Lord. And what else should I say? Yes, I think it was well

formulated in the course what the rules are and how we should act.

TH: There may be slightly different habits, people coming from various backgrounds.

NN: Yes, yes. For instance, speaking in tongues, [TH: Right, yeah.] because it may frighten people, and that's not what we want to do. [We must be] very, very neutral, self-possessed respecting the client so that our ears and eyes would be open to hear what the Lord wants to bring to that moment. So that it does not come from us but we can be open, like channels.

An example of the moderating policy concerning doctrinal issues in the Finnish HR is also the issue of dealing with the 'spirit world'. In proximal intercessory prayer, it is typical to use the practices connected to 'deliverance from demonic oppression' (Brown 2011: 18). However, many interviewees regarded it as a fact that the serious problems with the spirit world may be a part of everyday life in far away countries while demonic possessions are not a problem in contemporary Finland. Even though health problems, especially mental ones, can sometimes be interpreted in terms of a person being influenced by the devil or demons, there is, according to the prayer team members, very seldom – if ever – a need for exorcism. On the contrary, the prayer team members are rather advised to avoid it and reminded that they may not be competent to accomplish it. A man who obviously had more to say about handling evil spirits also saw exorcism and fighting with the demons by means of aggressive methods unnecessary. He regarded the above-described proximal principles as relevant in prayer work:

What we do not do is engage in a wrestling match. I mean we really don't need to grab or paw [the client]. No, Jesus didn't do anything else other than just command [the demons to leave].

Within the broad tradition of Pentecostalism there is the idea of culturally specific acts of the Holy Spirit. Depending on the cultural environment, different experiences, events and outcomes are interpreted as miracles. Several interviewed team members referred to the higher spiritual levels of people in the developing countries where, they say, people trust more in God and, as a result, can experience more impressive miracles, whereas the Finns, as

they argued, are 'not yet ready to receive miracles', or they have 'distanced themselves from the realm of miracles'. The skeptical or secularised mentality of the majority of the Finns is taken into account while aiming at launching the practice as effectively as possible. The prayer team members are advised to avoid excessively intrusive ways of evangelising in order to avoid provoking resistance in clients who may be uncertain in matters of religion. As the client writes a prayer request on the form that is handed over in the waiting room, there is also a question concerning their faith in the form – whether the person is a believer or not. It gives information to the prayer team members on how to encounter the client, as a prayer team leader explained:

TH: Then what do you do with a person who checks 'I don't know?'

NN: Well, we can perhaps ask 'do you want to know more?'... So we never push anything, everything goes as the client wishes. I mean, it's easy to see very quickly ... it's possible just to skip it [talking about personal faith] if it looks like the person is not at all [willing to listen].

But usually, people find the prayer moment as such positive.

There is also a certain pluralism in HR ideology. It is explicitly expressed that if one thinks that there is only one orthodox form of Christianity one cannot work for HR. The Finnish prayer team members emphasise the benefits of forgetting about the boundaries between different Christian groups and encourage cooperation rather than competition. Even though the service at a prayer clinic is free of charge, a neo-liberal and individualist flavour can be detected, especially in the adoption of the form of arranging the practice with a customer's comfort in mind:

... it all is based on the Bible, and of course, applied to the present day understanding of the culture where people come from, it is important. ... when we pray we ask if it is alright... like, during the prayer, we place hands on the person to be prayed for if he or she allows us to do so, but if not, we just pray on the client's terms, like in the customer oriented way [a laugh], if you can say so, it is quite important that a client whom we are serving is king; of

course we serve God, the clients come to receive godly love and help so that we would not injure them in a human way. It really happens in congregations. Being imperfectly skilled we all can easily make other people feel uncomfortable, just by not thinking about it even we don't mean it. It doesn't take much [a laugh].

It is permissible to pray only according to the client's request and it is not acceptable, for instance, to attempt to make a client feel guilty, in which sense HR differs radically from the old Pietism, which is more familiar on the Finnish revivalist scene. Individuality is emphasised at many levels in the HR, both among the prayer team members as well as regarding the clients at prayer clinics.

Particularisations, variety, and critiques

As Peter Berger has pointed out (2002: 2–14), globalisation does not necessarily involve massive homogenisation. At the national and local levels, there are particularisations and variety, as well as critiques. In the case of the HR prayer clinics, there are certain particularisations relating to the fact that the activity is taking place in Finland, but the arrangements do not vary locally very much. The systematic training course and the rather strict and prominent requirements and conditions are meant to homogenise the practice so as to make it more acceptable in the eyes of Lutheran Church authorities and sceptics. I have already talked about these particularisations as well as the approval of variety regarding the traditional backgrounds of the prayer team members and local contexts for prayer clinics. Lastly, I raise the points of criticism which are expressed by both outsiders and insiders.

External critiques come mostly from voices in religious institutions. As an example, soon after I had started working with the HR material I had a phone call from a very upset Lutheran priest from the Espoo parish. Some of his parishioners were involved with HR, which he didn't know much about yet, and which he did not like at all. He was concerned about lay people becoming involved in what are more properly 'priestly duties'. He had got an impression that the prayer clinics would provide, for instance, pastoral counsellors without formal education and training. Furthermore, at first, he was not willing to go to a prayer clinic to find out what was going on there in practice. Later on, I got another phone call from him

after he had been listening in for a while at the HR training course. He was no longer as upset, having got more information, but nor was he particularly convinced about the whole thing either.

There have also been various forms of criticism levelled at HR based on its having been imported from America, or on its being some kind of a conspiracy against the mainline church, or being the devil's work, depending on who is putting forward the critique. For instance, at one provincial prayer clinic, there had been rather active cooperation with local congregations, as well as with the Lutheran parish at the beginning. However, later on some unspecified difficulties arose. The interviewed local prayer team leader was somewhat reluctant to point out the exact reason for the difficulties and the source of criticism:

TH: From which party have these critical comments been given?

NN: Um... well... um... from everywhere.

TH: From everywhere?

NN: I can't name any particular... Well, I must say that quite a lot has come from the Lutheran side, from the parishioners. And then, of course, from the employees, too. Perhaps there is some critique also coming from the Free Church congregations but not as much. Anyway, they are more used to the manifestations of God's power.

TH: Like the gifts of the Holy Spirit?

NN: The gifts, that's right. ... And then there may be doubts about not having priests controlling the activity, like 'what's happening there?' They don't necessarily trust the trained lay people being able to take care of it without priests or other parish employees. Something like this. And then there is simply wrong information, like for example that we promise healing to people. But nobody promises that really.

Another interviewee from the same team elaborated on this particular controversial situation by describing the changes in the leadership in the local Lutheran parish. The new vicar could not accept any interdenominational activities, let alone a lay-based intercessory service like the Healing Rooms. The new vicar had, for instance, criticised the straightforward way in which prayer team members go out and ask people if they believe in Jesus on an ordinary market day, or in other similar situations. The interviewee

himself could not understand why it was considered negative. He saw no reason for the HR organisation to modify its visibility at various public events simply because of negative feedback.

Some prayer team members may be quite critical of what is taught by the leaders. Such insider criticism is typically directed towards certain doctrinal details that are experienced as strange in comparison with the teachings of the home church. Despite the systematic training course there are sometimes idiosyncratic or even contesting interpretations of the doctrine within the community of the prayer team members. All team members cannot agree, for instance, on the idea of anointing the client with oil during prayer. An elderly Seventh-day Adventist man had difficulties with anointing the sick with oil which is justified in the HR in a different way from what he was familiar with:

...the anointing with oil is not really consistent with my understanding of the Bible, well, [in the HR] they anoint almost anyone and for any reason, and the person has not called [the elders] but has just entered [the prayer clinic] and they pray something for this person. I have had to think about this a little bit. I mean, the original idea of the Bible that I have learned over decades ... well, this is a little bit of an odd thing, but I try to act [according to the rules], and keep my mouth shut.

Furthermore, some team members found it difficult to accept the idea of falling ill being the result of committing a sin. For many interviewees, the idea of God afflicting people with illness or punishing them in that way is not an acceptable explanation. Instead, they want to see God as a benevolent healer.

Both insiders and outsiders have criticised the name 'Healing Rooms' because it sounds New Age. The fact of HR arranging for prayer clinics to be run at annual New Age events does not reduce this impression. The leaders have justified the participation in such an exceptional context by explaining that the concept of healing is originally a Christian idea, because it was what Jesus did. They regard introducing HR into the New Age sector as important missionary work:

The thing is that the real healing comes from Jesus Christ, but the New Age movement has stolen it. We want to bring it back to its original

context. And another reason why we are accused is that we work in the New Age sector, we go to these New Age events and introduce a prayer clinic there, too. That's the place, if anything, for the people who seek.

So, there is a strong tendency in HR towards intentionally effecting a re-enchantment by broadening the realm of Christian spirituality in everyday life, regardless of traditional boundaries and even outside the Christian sphere.

Conclusions

Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity functions as a 'contact zone' for many ideological and practical principles which, among other things, characterise the post-secular. The intercessory prayer service Healing Rooms is an interesting case as a boundary-transcending network within the Pentecostal scene. Even though HR basically represents a form of conservative biblical fundamentalism, it is at the same time both rather flexible and modern in its management techniques, strategic planning, customer orientation and in its interest in engaging in a new type of border-crossing cooperation. Thomas Csordas has associated two characteristic features with a 'well-travelling religion': it must have a portable practice and a transposable message (Csordas 2009: 5). As an example of a well-travelling religion having been accepted and accommodated practically all over the world, the HR intercessory prayer service seems to easily bring these two principles together. With prayer as its portable practice and the channelling of God's healing power, which transcends cultural borders and boundaries (simultaneously forging new ones, though) as its transposable message, it obviously has an appeal in the contemporary world. The experiential emphasis and the doctrinal message of the fact that Pentecostalism at large is focussing on healing simply meets the needs that cannot be met by modern biomedicine and its technological solutions (Brown 2011: 8; see also Anderson 2010).

The culturally modified concept of an intercessory practice in Finland is the result of an intentionally organised implementation on the part of the Finnish HR leaders who are, by profession, a life coach and a physician. They have invested not only their religious interest but obviously also their professional know-how in launching the practice, taking into account

both organisational and practical, as well as doctrinal and social issues. Finnish legislation, medical science and national Lutheran culture are respected. The functional focus is on prayer and healing. However, the clients are not promised miracles, and in cases of diagnosed illness, the clients are also encouraged to keep taking their medication and to consult specialists in the medical sciences and psychiatry. Being a registered association facilitates its aim of being a systematically organised and controlled practice. Along the lines of the health centre model, a prayer clinic is meant to offer well-focussed spiritual aid. The standardised training is an absolute precondition for acting as an authorised intercessor in the HR. The requirement of obtaining a recommendation from an authority within the applicant's home church is meant to maintain the prayer clinics' levels of good organisation and also means that they are acceptable to the home churches of the prayer team members.

Regarding the motives for serving at a prayer clinic, the search for both personal and collective agency is an obvious reason for becoming a committed prayer team member. For the lay volunteers at HR, engaging in acts of prayer and worship in a coherent and democratic community of believers provides a chance for personal spiritual self-actualisation in a supportive spiritual community which is focussed on a structured mission – rather than merely sitting in a pew as a passive receiver and observer. It offers an opportunity for more active agency for those believers who find their role and subjectivity restricted in one way or another as lay members in their own hierarchical churches. Healing Rooms also offers new forms of participation and belonging; the clinical practice type of intercessory prayer service seems to bring about a symbiosis between two involved groups – the members of the prayer teams and their clients. By serving as 'clinic practitioners', trained intercessors enact their subjectivity and are able to occupy a spiritually more rewarding role. This aspect of the practice was mentioned by prayer team members in the interviews as being the most important one. For a client, a prayer clinic serves as a form of practice which is to be used when it is needed, without involving any obligation to commit oneself to anything permanently. It offers a tailor-made package of support, involving discreet and individual spiritual care which is easy to access and does not take much time – and it is free of charge.

Healing Rooms in Finland has from the very

beginning of its existence in the country sought the approval of the mainline church in order to allow the practice to take root. The most significant contextual factor for launching a new practice on to the Christian scene in Finland is obviously the dominant role of the Lutheran Church in the religious landscape. Besides being the state church⁶ it has a visible role to play in society, and for instance, in societal debates the Church's position is often asked for and simultaneously heavily criticised. It is a very different precondition compared to the American scene which is characterised by denominational pluralism and heterogeneity. The same goes more or less for all the Nordic countries (cf. Coleman 2007: 8–9). Cal Peirce, the leader of HR Ministries in the United States, gives a videotaped introduction on the website of the HR headquarters in which he says that in the local HR clinic in Spokane, 60 churches altogether are involved in the local prayer clinic (see the website of Healing Rooms Ministries). The strategy of respecting the cultural significance of the Lutheran Church in Finland has been adopted as key by the Finnish HR leaders as they have launched the idea of an interdenominational prayer service run by lay people; there is no attempt to change the existing structures and balances amongst the Christian communities in the country. As Peirce points out, this is also the central idea at the headquarters of the HR Ministries in the United States. However, the Finnish HR leaders have modified the HR principles and moderated its practices in order for it to be more easily absorbed into a society where Lutheranism is an important element of the Finnish cultural identity but as religiosity rather reserved. In order to keep the lay practice unambiguously at the grassroots level the prayer clinics are deliberately kept apart from the actual church buildings.

Interestingly enough, in spite of its rather neo-charismatic Christian way of interpreting the doc-

6 Being a part of Sweden until 1809, there was a tradition of state church also in Finland, and the Lutheran Church held that position until 1870. This means that the separation between the church and the state had already taken place in Finland before its national independence, during its period as an autonomous region under the Russian regime (1809–1917). The corresponding separation of church and state in Sweden was carried out only 130 years later, in 2000. (Website of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland: Kirkko ja valtio)

trine of the Holy Spirit, HR is not connected with local independent neo-charismatic communities in Finland. Rather, it aims at being connected with the more established forms of Pentecostalism and the Lutheran Church. By means of systematised training, a regular reporting in system and recommendations from the local pastors as a qualification for every prayer team member also serves the purpose of signalling the serious aim of achieving the status of a well-established, generally accepted Christian activity instead of being something unregulated and obscure – or something ‘too American’.

In Finland, Healing Rooms has brought Pentecostal faith healing out of its traditional congregational and revival meeting contexts, and refined it as a down-to-earth, Christian, well-being practice. The plantation mission of the Finnish HR's leaders has also resulted recently in a few prayer clinics springing up in neighbouring Estonia and Sweden. There are plans to open up a prayer clinic in Norway, too. As the case of Healing Rooms indicates, religious movements, traditions, or ideas do not travel, develop and become global by themselves; not even Pentecostal ones. They need culturally sensitive agents and actors, as well as a suitable timing and the right social setting in order to be introduced into new contexts. Localising and acculturating HR in Finland serves as an example of such a process. ■

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