



Pentti Lempiäinen

* 18.9.1932 † 8.7.2021

Professor Pentti Juhani Lempiäinen died in Helsinki on the 8th of July 2021. He was born as the son of a sea captain on the 18th of September 1932 in Rauma.

Pentti Lempiäinen had an eventful career working as a researcher in practical theology and church history, an academic teacher of practical theology, a journalist and a nonfiction writer.

In the foreword to his third monograph Lempiäinen wrote: “For the parish offices, I have been a troublesome customer, but hopefully there are no hard feelings remaining”. The bibliography of his work entitled *Piispan- ja rovastintarkastukset Suomessa ennen Isoavihaa [Die Bischofs- und Probstvisitationen in Finnland vor dem grossen nordischen Krieg (bis 1713)]* (1967) notes that the author has bothered vicars and clerks at 121 parish archives, containing data dating back to the time Finland being under Swedish rule and had not been moved to the central archives yet. Pentti Lempiäinen was the first person to use the extensive data in the parish archives across the country as the object of study. His example was followed by researchers studying old church practice, namely, Pentti Laasonen, Eeva Ojanen, Olavi Rimpiläinen and Esko Häkli. Researchers

on local history have benefited especially from his work on visitations taking into consideration all the records remaining in existence.

In 1963 the Faculty of Theology of the University of Helsinki had its large scholarly promotion ceremony. As the *Primum inter Doctores* Pentti Lempiäinen answered, according to the protocol, the question which related to his dissertation on early confession and communion practice. He continued with research on baptism (1965) and ecclesiastical visitations (1967). Lempiäinen published the ecclesiastical visitation records from the Era of Russian domination during the Great Northern War (1973). This work shows how and in what form ecclesiastical work continued during this time of ordeal. Lempiäinen surveyed the old Finnish books and manuscripts that remained in the parish archives (1967), wrote a series of articles on early catechisms and published a facsimile edition of the first Finnish hymnal (1988). The study on churching brides and women after childbirth (1969) spans across the centuries from Finland being under Swedish rule to the 20th century and to the field of gender studies. As Lempiäinen did write about court services and court sermons

(1981) using modern statistical content analysis of the time he worked as the acting professor of Church Sociology heading the discipline as well.

In 1969 Pentti Lempiäinen was appointed the first Associate Professor of Practical Theology. The actual professorship would become available in 1984, but Lempiäinen did not wait for it. He accepted the invitation to become Editor-in-Chief of the Kotimaa ecclesiastical newspaper. Perhaps he realised that at the university in a small faculty the most difficult and laborious drafting tasks always fall on those with the least years of service sitting at the bottom of the meeting table.

It had been a long time since Kotimaa had been run by an academic who also had the capacity to write for the general public. Lempiäinen had received the Church Communication Award and had shared his expertise as Chair of the Hymn Book Committee and a member of the Service Book Committee of the General Synod. Several editions of his books on ecclesiastical services (1974) and the ecclesiastical year (1976) were published and eventually became classic works.

The new Editor-in-Chief had a firm grasp of his editorial staff who were joined by a skilled managing editor from the field of social democratic press. Lempiäinen did not forget the university, but commissioned his former colleagues to write articles for the paper. When a prominent Finnish biblical researcher took it upon to participate in the debate in the Letters to the Editor section, the editorial of Kotimaa pointed out that the research professor “should not squander his strength in all manner of squabbles in different arenas”.

All Lempiäinen’s expressions of opinion didn’t please the CEO of the Kotimaa

group. He was also concerned about the fact that the circulation took a slight dip – although the figures did not plummet until five years later. The more pressing issue was that Lempiäinen did not adequately assent to the prevailing opposition to women’s ordination in the Evangelical Revival Movement. The CEO advised him to adopt a more indifferent tone. The Editor-in-Chief did not appreciate the advice and applied for resignation in September 1986.

Pentti Lempiäinen continued writing nonfiction. He was a versatile expert in ecclesiastical culture and published works on ecclesiastical services, hymns, cemetery culture, church art, first names and birthdays as well as religious and other commemoration days. Religious publishers were replaced by major commercial publishers in his later works. His extensive work on symbols also extended outside Christian culture, although Lempiäinen “could see a Christian symbol even in a toothpick”, as his birthday interviewer noted.

Lempiäinen’s grandfather and father were sea captains. He was asked to write the 125th anniversary publication of the Finnish Seamen’s Mission. As the history of the organisation had recently been published, Lempiäinen focused on the Mission’s activities in the late 1990s. He studied all the overseas branches of the Mission and its branches in Finnish harbours. The book was published in Finnish and in Swedish in the anniversary year of 2000.

Over the course of his career, Lempiäinen worked as an auxiliary member and a member of the Matriculation Examination Board. After leaving Kotimaa, Lempiäinen returned to his faculty as Docent of Practical Theology and was

granted the title of Professor h. c. in 1996. He was a member of the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters since 1975. The

Finnish Society of Church History has published four of his monographs and made him an honorary member in 2009.

*Obituary by Markku Heikkilä
and Simo Heininen*