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The Battle Against Materialism:
Spiritualism, Civic Engagement, and Religious Polemics in Early Twentieth-Century Finland

Juuso Järvenpää

juuso.jarvenpaa@tuni.fi

Abstract

This article studies the first attempt to organize Spiritualism in Finland in the early twentieth century. The main visionary of the short-lived project was former labour activist Jaakko Jalmari Jalo-Kivi. He founded the first Finnish Spiritualist journal *Spiritisti* in 1909 and headed the Spiritist Society in Finland, which soon followed. The article examines Jalo-Kivi's Spiritualist activities as a form of religious civic engagement at the intersection of Finnish civil society and the religious field. It is argued that the main motivation behind these activities was the felt need to battle the spread of materialism, which Spiritualists – along with members of various other social and religious movements and institutions – considered a serious moral and societal threat. Jalo-Kivi's attempt to organize a specifically Spiritualist battlefront against materialism exemplifies how this widely shared opposition to materialism could encourage both religious cooperation and polemics. Methodologically, the article draws from biographical microhistory.

Keywords: Spiritualism; anti-materialism; Spiritist Society in Finland; religious civic engagement; religious polemics; Jaakko Jalmari Jalo-Kivi

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Introduction

In January 1909, a small journal was founded in Helsinki, the capital of the Grand Duchy of Finland.[1] The newcomer was titled *Spiritisti: Spiritualistinen aikakauskirja spiritismiä ja sitä lähellä olevien psykillisten kysymysten käsittelyä varten* (*The Spiritist: Spiritualist Journal for Spiritism and Related Psychic Questions*). In the February issue, readers were informed about recent discussions concerning the upcoming foundation of a Spiritualist society in Helsinki, one that would welcome members from all parts of the country. The plan materialized later in the spring as the Spiritist Society in Finland (fin. Suomen Spiritistinen Seura). It was founded with two local divisions — the first in Helsinki and the second in Tampere, the major inland industrial city in Finland. These undertakings were led by former labour activist Jaakko Jalmari Jalo-Kivi (1878–1937, until 1906 Jaakko Hjalmar Stén), who was the editor of *Spiritisti* and the chair of the Spiritist Society.[2]

These undertakings were the first of their kind in Finland. Spiritualism/Spiritism[3] had already attracted some positive attention in the Grand Duchy in the late nineteenth century as part of the growing interest in esoteric movements and ideas. However, for the most part Spiritualism had been confined to private and informal circles, which had done little to propagate the movement in

1. Finland, as a nation-state, formed gradually as an autonomous Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire, to which this formerly eastern part of Sweden was annexed in 1809. Finland was declared independent in 1917.

2. This article is mostly based on my dissertation *Kansan henkinen kehitys: Jaakko Jalmari Jalo-Kiven eletty kansalaisuus 1900-luvun alussa* (2024, *The Inner Development of the People: Lived Citizenship of Jaakko Jalmari Jalo-Kivi in Early Twentieth Century*).

3. In Finland, Spiritualism was initially known as "Spiritism." This was due to the well-known French Spiritualist/Spiritist Allan Kardec (Hippolyte Léon Denizard Rivail, 1805–1869), who preferred the latter term to separate the movement based on the practice of spirit communication from the broader philosophical meanings of "Spiritualism" (Kardec, *Henkien kirja*, 31–32). In Finland, "Spiritism" stayed the main term for the movement well into the twentieth century, but eventually it was replaced by "Spiritualism" to demarcate the religious movement from popular dabbling with the Ouija board and the like (Krohn, *Mitä on spiritualismi*, 3). In this article I follow the customary practice in the historical study of the movement and refer to it as "Spiritualism," even though the research subjects themselves used the term "Spiritism."

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public.[4] Unlike in the neighbouring countries of Sweden and Denmark, which had already witnessed public and organized Spiritualist activity during the latter part of the nineteenth century,[5] there were no Spiritualist journals or societies in Finland prior to *Spiritisti* and the Spiritist Society. Thus, the year 1909 marked the beginning of a new and important phase in the history of Finnish Spiritualism: the first attempt to form an organized Spiritualist movement. However, the attempt was short-lived. In 1913, *Spiritisti* was discontinued due to financial troubles, and the Spiritist Society faded into the shadows at the same time.[6] The second, more viable organization of Finnish Spiritualism was founded in 1946 as the Spiritualist Society in Finland (fin. Suomen Spiritualistinen Seura) and still exists today.[7]

Until the twenty-first century, Spiritualism was a virtually unresearched subject in Finnish historiography.[8] Recently, it has drawn an increasing amount of scholarly attention, mainly due to the growing field of (Western) esotericism.[9] However, the focus has mostly been on either the private circles of the late nineteenth century or the second organization of Spiritualism after the World War II, while *Spiritisti*

4. Kaartinen & Leskelä-Kärki, "Spiritualismi," 61–63; Kaartinen, *Spiritistinen istunto*; Holm, *Spiritualismin muotoutuminen Suomessa*, 75–87; Sohlberg, "Spiritualism in Finland," 500; Harmainen, "'Kaikki voin kestää, voin elää, jos tiedän että hänet kerran vielä tapaan'"; Boguslawski, "Teosofinen ja antroposofinen liike Viipurissa," 151–54.

5. Carleson & Levander, "Spiritualism in Sweden"; Faxneld, *Det Ockulta Sekelskiftet*, passim; Kragh, "History of Spiritualism in Denmark"; Kragh, "Spiritualism in Denmark."

6. Järvenpää, *Kansan henkinen kehitys,* 254–347.

7. Kaartinen & Leskelä-Kärki, "Spiritualismi," 64–68; Leskelä-Kärki, "Spiritualisti Helmi Krohn ja automaattikirjoittamisen mysteeri"; Sohlberg, "Spiritualism in Finland," 501–2.

8. However, see Juva, *Valtiokirkosta kansankirkoksi*, 291–93.

9. See the literature in footnotes 4 and 7. "Western esotericism" refers to various religious, philosophical, and scientific ideas, practices, and movements in Western culture, from — for example — Hermeticism in antiquity to modern occultism, Spiritualism, and New Age spirituality. However, it is a tricky and contested concept in scholarly use. It has been approached variously as a "form of thought" (Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism*, 10–15), a discursive element in Western religious history dealing with the possibility of "higher knowledge" (Stuckrad, *A Brief History of Western Esotericism*, 9–11), or a historiographical category for "rejected knowledge" (Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*). It has also been suggested that "esotericism" should be distanced from its usual prefix "Western" and brought into the wider context of global religious history (see, for example, the discussion in Asprem & Strube, *New Approaches to the Study of Esotericism*).

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and the Spiritist Society have gained little attention. Moreover, the subject has been studied mainly from the point of view of cultural history, while the political and societal aspects of Spiritualism have been left in the margins.

In this article, I seek to tackle both shortcomings by interpreting the first organization of Finnish Spiritualism as a form of *religious civic engagement*. The article is guided by two interlinked questions: *how* and *why* did Finnish Spiritualists seek to organize their activities in the early twentieth century? My aim is to understand both the form of their action and the motives of this action in the wider context of modernizing Finnish society. I approach these questions through a biographical lens by focusing on Jaakko Jalmari Jalo-Kivi's development as an active citizen and a Spiritualist protagonist.

On a broader level, my article takes part in discussions about the societal and political aspects of esotericism. A growing body of research has shown that modern esoteric movements such as Spiritualism, Theosophy, and Anthroposophy have had a strong impact on the formation of modern culture and society, both internationally and in Finland.[10] It has also been observed that they often have strong connections to various social and political movements. For example, historian Ann Braude has shown the close relationship between early American Spiritualism and the suffragette, temperance, and abolitionist movements. Historians Matthew Beaumont and Julian Strube, for their part, have pointed out the connections between nineteenth-century occultism and socialism. In Finland, historian Mikko Kemppainen has studied the intersection of Theosophical ideas and the Finnish Social Democratic Party in the early twentieth century.[11]

I follow these initiatives in the study of esotericism by situating the first organization of Spiritualism in Finland amid the societal, political and moral

10. In Finland, see especially Leskelä-Kärki & Harmainen, *Uuden etsijät*; Mahlamäki & Kokkinen, *Moderni esoteerisuus ja okkultismi Suomessa.*

11. Braude, *Radical Spirits*; Beaumont, "Socialism and Occultism at the Fin de Siècle"; Strube, "Socialist Religion and the Emergence of Occultism"; Strube, "Socialism and Esotericism in July Monarchy France"; Kemppainen, *Sosialismin, uskonnon ja sukupuolen dynamiikkaa*; Kemppainen, "Hilja Pärssinen and the Religious Grounds for Socialist Welfare in Early Twentieth-Century Finland." See also Harmainen, "Esoteerisuus ja politiikka."

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concerns and practices of early twentieth-century Finnish *civil society*. By this term, I refer to a sphere of active citizenship and practices of cooperation that are situated in a social space between the state, economy, and intimate personal life.[12] I suggest that it is useful to view modern esoteric movements as constitutive parts of this emerging sphere of civic engagement.

Methodologically, my article draws from biographical microhistory, which has emerged at the intersection of the microhistorical tradition and the new historical biography.[13] Beginning with Carlo Ginzburg and other pioneers in the 1970s, microhistorians have emphasized the fruitfulness of studying "small" and seemingly insignificant or strange phenomena in order to open new and perhaps unexpected pathways for historical research.[14] The empirically and contextually rigid new historical biography, which emerged by the turn of the millennia, has brought legitimation to the study of marginalized or less-known individuals and groups as well.[15] My focus on Jaakko Jalmari Jalo-Kivi, seemingly quite a strange man as well as a practical stranger in Finnish historiography,[16] follows these methodological impulses. Jalo-Kivi's fruitfulness as a subject for historiography lies in many ways in his "strangeness," which enables a new perspective not just on Finnish Spiritualism but also on the wider religious and societal circumstances of early twentieth-century Finland.

While I examine Jalo-Kivi's Spiritualist activities as a form of religious civic engagement, I pay close attention to the changing characteristics of the Finnish *religious field*. This Bourdieuan concept is used here to capture the entirety of agents,

12. For a brief overview of the various uses of the concept see Dekker, "Citizenship and Civil Society."

13. Of this intersection see Magnússon, "The Life Is Never Over"; Renders & Haan, *Theoretical Discussions of Biography*; Annola, *Säädyttömät*, 302–4.

14. See, for example, Magnússon, "The Life Is Never Over."

15. See, for example, Renders, Haan & Harmsma, *The Biographical Turn*; Renders & Haan, *Theoretical Discussions of Biography*; Caine, *Biography and History*.

16. Before I embarked on my long adventure with Jalo-Kivi, he was mentioned in only a handful of scholarly texts, none of which made any attempt to unveil him as a historical subject with multiple social roles and projects.

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discourses, practices, material settings, and power relations that are constitutive of the ways in which people practice and experience religion in their everyday lives.[17] The established Lutheran Church has traditionally been the towering figure in the Finnish religious field. However, during modernization, the field became increasingly pluralized and intertwined with the practices, milieus, and concerns of emerging civil society. These processes were accompanied with increasing *religious polemics* as different religious sects and movements rivalled with each other and the Church in their pursuit to define and secure their position in the religious field.[18] Among the important factors in these polemical dynamics were transnational liberal and social theologies, which influenced the religious life of the growing middle and working classes from the late nineteenth century onwards. Spiritualism and other esoteric movements were intricately connected to these currents of religious thought, which nurtured critical attitudes towards the Church, often seen as a conservative and oppressive power.[19]

The First Organization of Finnish Spiritualism

The modern Spiritualist movement was born in the mid-nineteenth-century United States. The core of Spiritualist beliefs and practices was rooted in the presumed possibility of communicating with the spirits of the dead. The content of the communications varied from reassuring messages from departed loved ones to broad religious, philosophical, and political teachings and revelations. Spiritualists believed in the constant moral evolution of individual spirits and the whole of humanity, and thus they were usually progressive in their religious

17. For a more in-depth application of Pierre Bourdieu's sociological work in the study of lived religion, see the work of Helena Kupari, for example "Lived Religion and the Religious Field."

18. Of religious polemics, see, for example, Hettema & Kooi, *Religious Polemics in Context*. In the context of esotericism, see Hammer & Stuckrad, *Polemical Encounters*.

19. See, for example, Harmainen, "The One and Only True and Salvational Faith." However, the relationship between the esoteric movements and the Lutheran Church was not straightforwardly oppositionary. There were a variety of nuances, which require more research. Cf. Harmainen, Kemppainen & Järvenpää, "Moderni länsimainen esoteria 1900-luvun taitteen Tampereella."

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and political outlook. Furthermore, many of them took part in progressive social causes such as abolitionism and feminism. Spiritualism quickly evolved into a popular transnational movement, best known for various paranormal phenomena and sensational public séances of celebrity mediums. However, at least for those Spiritualists who took its philosophical side to heart, the progressive and critical attitude towards religious and social authorities remained an important aspect of the movement.[20]

Novel Spiritualist phenomena were discussed in the Finnish press briefly in the 1850s, but the subject gained increasing attention only towards the end of the century.[21] Many people were drawn to Spiritualism out of curiosity, but there were also more serious motives: historian Antti Harmainen has demonstrated how Spiritualist beliefs and practices offered a rationally and emotionally satisfying way of coping with grief and loss among members of the emerging Finnish middle class.[22] Séances were held in small private circles during this period — for example at the house of writer and social activist Minna Canth (1844–1897) in Kuopio in the early 1890s.[23] There were no publicly working mediums in Finland, and foreign mediums rarely visited the Grand Duchy. An exceptionally famous occasion was the internationally discussed case of Elizabeth d'Espérance (1855–1918), a well-known medium specializing in the materialisation of spirits, who visited Helsinki in 1893 and held séances for a chosen few members of the local high society.[24]

These examples suffice to demonstrate that Spiritualism was already a well-

20. Of Spiritualism in general, see, for example, Guttierez, *Handbook of Spiritualism and Channelling*; Kontou & Willburn, *The Ashgate Companion to Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism and the Occult*. The progressive outlook of early American Spiritualism is demonstrated by Ann Braude in her *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America*. It should be noted, however, that the political outlook of Spiritualism varied according to the current social circumstances. For example, Robert S. Cox has also brought into discussion the conservative tones of Spiritualism in his *Body and Soul: A Sympathetic History of American Spiritualism*.

21. Boguslawski, "Teosofinen ja antroposofinen liike Viipurissa," 151–54.

22. Harmainen, "Kaikki voin kestää, voin elää, jos tiedän että hänet kerran vielä tapaan."

23. Kaartinen & Leskelä-Kärki, "Spiritualismi," 61–62.

24. Kaartinen, *Spiritistinen istunto*.

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known subject in Finland in the late nineteenth century, at least among the more educated people. However, it seems that few, if any, Finns were seriously interested in the Spiritualist movement as such at the time: there were no attempts to organize Spiritualist activities formally, nor were there specifically Spiritualist publications. Rather, I would argue, Spiritualist phenomena and practices were approached as elements in the wider *fin-de-siècle* "occulture," which was fascinated with everything occult, mystical, and exotic — that is, "esoteric."[25]

Moreover, Spiritualism was not the strongest esoteric current that arrived in Finland at this time. Far more noteworthy was the spread of the Theosophical movement, which had arrived in Finland quickly after the founding of the Theosophical Society in 1875. Finnish Theosophists took their first steps towards formal organization in the 1890s, and the Theosophical Society in Finland was founded in 1907.[26] At the turn of the century, Finnish Spiritualism was overshadowed by Theosophy. Spiritualist beliefs and practices were usually approached and evaluated from a Theosophical — and thus often critical — point of view (this will become important later in the article when I inspect the polemical relationship of the movements).

The Finnish Theosophical movement also began to gain followers among the labour movement in the very first years of the new century. This is a crucial context for my article, since it is among these circles of working-class Theosophists that the first scattered signs of interest in Spiritualism in the lower social classes are to be found.[27] Moreover, the first explicit call to advance a Finnish Spiritualist movement as such was heard from within these circles. The call was made by Jaakko Jalmari Jalo-Kivi in his 1906 article "Spiritism," which appeared in *Elämä* (*The Life)*, a recently-founded organ for the Theosophical socialists. The article introduced Spiritualism

25. "Occulture" as a scholarly concept derives from Christopher Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West I–II*. Art historian Nina Kokkinen has developed it further in the context of the *fin-de-siècle* Finland: see, for example, Kokkinen, "Occulture as an Analytical Tool in the Study of Art."

26. Granholm, "Theosophy in Finland"; Harmainen, "Teosofia"; Ahlbäck, *Uppkomsten av Theosofiska Samfundet i Finland*.

27. Järvenpää, "Uskonnollinen liberalismi ja työväenliike 1900-luvun ensivuosien Helsingissä."

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as a significant, but in Finland still almost unknown, movement (which as we have seen, was a bit of an exaggeration), and announced that there would soon appear a specifically Spiritualist journal in Helsinki.[28] The idea was most likely inspired by the founding of the first Finnish Theosophical journal *Omatunto* (*The Conscience*, from 1907 onwards *Tietäjä* [*The Sage*]) the previous year. However, due to unknown reasons, the plan was not executed until three years later.

The founding of *Spiritisti* and the formation of the Spiritist Society in Helsinki and Tampere in the spring of 1909 marked the beginning of the first attempt to organize Spiritualism in Finland. At this time, Jalo-Kivi also published a small book titled *Ääniä haudan takaa eli näkymätön mailma* (*Voices from Beyond the Grave, or the Invisible World*), which was the first book-length exposition of Spiritualism in Finnish. In his introduction, Jalo-Kivi touched upon the poor state of Spiritualism in Finland. According to him, there had been some prior interest in Spiritualism — the case of d'Esperance was especially mentioned — but the scattered Spiritualist circles had worked in isolation from each other and "without consciousness." He wished the situation would improve now that *Spiritisti* had been founded to unite the Finnish Spiritualists.[29] It is clear that Jalo-Kivi envisioned a self-conscious and organized Spiritualist movement, with *Spiritisti* as its organ and the Spiritist Society as its body.

As the editor of *Spiritisti* and the chair of the Spiritist Society, Jalo-Kivi was the main visionary and protagonist of the organized Spiritualist enterprise. His leading position is illustrated by the fact that when he moved from Helsinki to Tampere at the turn of the year 1910, *Spiritisti* and the operational nucleus of the Spiritist Society moved with him. Throughout the remaining years of these undertakings, the living centre of the Finnish Spiritualist network dwelled in Tampere. However, the network remained small in scale. The Spiritist Society never gained any other local divisions beyond Tampere and Helsinki, and even the latter

28. Jalo Kivi, "Spiritismi," *Elämä* 14.2.1906. Jaakko Jalmari Jalo-Kivi signed his Spiritualist and Theosophical writings with a sort of pseudonym "Jalo Kivi."
29. Jalo Kivi, *Ääniä haudan takaa*, 14–15.

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seems to have withered away soon after Jalo-Kivi moved to Tampere. The narrow scope of the organized Spiritualist movement is also clear from the fact that *Spiritisti* gained only between two and three hundred subscribers at best and battled with constant financial troubles, which eventually brought an end to it in 1913. The Spiritist Society seems to have been disbanded at the same time.[30]

Religion and Civil Society

As such, the first attempt to organize Finnish Spiritualism was a marginal phenomenon. However, it stemmed from and was — in its small part — constitutive of the emerging civil society and the modernizing religious field in Finland. To understand the practical and motivational characteristics of the undertaking, it is therefore helpful to briefly outline the historical formation of these larger societal structures.

The emergence of civil society in Finland was strongly connected to the process of nation-state building.[31] In the course of the nineteenth century, and especially from the 1860s onwards, the Swedish-speaking upper class of the Grand Duchy, inspired by nationalism and liberalism, sought to "elevate" the Finnish-speaking masses into the state of active citizenship.[32] The school system was developed, increasing numbers of newspapers, journals, and literature were put into circulation, and mass social movements such as temperance and youth association movements encouraged beneficial civic engagement and

30. For more detail, see Järvenpää, *Kansan henkinen kehitys*, 257–347. It has been tricky to study the Spiritist Society and *Spiritisti* as they left no archival documents. My main source has been *Spiritisti* itself, which is disappointingly silent about the inner workings of the Spiritist Society. Other contemporary journals and newspapers have provided scattered information. It should also be noted that the organized Spiritualist movement led by Jalo-Kivi is not the whole picture of Finnish Spiritualism at the time, since there were people — how many is an open question — who were interested in Spiritualism but chose not to join the Spiritist Society.

31. Alapuro et al., *Kansa liikkeessä*. Of the relationship between citizenship and nation-state building in general, see Kettunen, "Modern Citizenship and Nation-State Building."

32. Due to its long history under the rule of Sweden, Finland is a bilingual nation with a large Finnish-speaking majority and a small Swedish-speaking minority. Traditionally Swedish was the language of education and high society and Finnish the language of "the people," but the spread of nationalism elevated Finnish to the position of official and foremost language in the modernizing nation.

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self-cultivation.[33] Towards the end of the century, the sphere of civil society also began to spark more transgressive social and political projects of civic engagement. The major example is the labour movement. The first workers' associations in Finland were founded in the 1880s in the spirit of moderate social reformism to prevent the spread of Marxist socialism, but they ended up offering the basis for more radical socialist organization. The Labour Party was founded in 1899 and renamed the Social Democratic Party (SDP) in 1903.[34]

The emergence of civil society was saturated with religious concerns and polemics from the start. Historian Irma Sulkunen has suggested that lay piety movements, which spread in Finland from the late eighteenth century onwards, helped to introduce the idea of active and independent citizenship to the masses by challenging the authority of Church officials and emphasizing individuals' own religious experience.[35] Religious sentiments were important in the formation of early social movements, such as the temperance movement, which sought to elevate the social and moral standing of the people.[36] This mixture of social and religious concerns was strengthened by the influx of new religious groups and movements in the late nineteenth century. On the one hand, new evangelical movements such as the Free Church and the Salvation Army spurred especially upper-class women in projects of religious moral reformism.[37] On the other hand, movements such as Spiritualism, Theosophy, and Tolstoyism offered religious ingredients for a more progressive — and sometimes transgressive — social, political, and moral imagination.[38]

33. Alapuro et al., *Kansa liikkeessä*; Haapala et al., "Poliittiset voimat"; Karonen et al., "Vuorovaikutus ja poliittinen kulttuuri"; Stenius, *Frivilligt jämligt samfällt*.

34. A classical study of this development is Soikkanen, *Sosialismin tulo Suomeen*.

35. Sulkunen, "Paimentytön liikutus."

36. Sulkunen, *Raittius kansalaisuskontona*. Similarly, Michael Young's *Bearing Witness Against Sin* has demonstrated the significance of evangelical Christianity to early social movements in the United States.

37. Markkola, *Synti ja siveys*.

38. Tolstoyism was a social and religious movement based on the philosophical and religious writings of the Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910). Tolstoyism, which has been characterized as "Christian anarchism," was highly anticlerical and critical towards

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Religious practice and social engagement were also mixed on the level of civic organization. As religious movements and groups — whether affiliated with the Church or not — sought to reach and engage the public, they adopted the same principles of operation as social movements, organizing as associations and societies and founding publications.[39] They also competed for the limited free time of urban workers by organizing public lectures and other evening and weekend activities.[40] The same people often attended a variety of groups and events, which facilitated the intermingling of religious, social, and political dispositions.[41] With these developments, religion was increasingly lived in the midst of and according to the social principles of civil society.

The most important singular event in the early history of the Finnish civil society is the General Strike in autumn 1905. The strike was part of the First Russian Revolution that had begun earlier the same year. It ended the so-called "first period of oppression" (1899–1905), during which the Russian government had tightened its control of the Grand Duchy, and resulted in the founding of the Parliament of Finland. The strike was followed by a brief period of unforeseen civic activity. For example, the labour movement and the SDP grew rapidly, and other political parties organized quickly in anticipation of the first parliamentary elections in 1907. Although political activity cooled down during the "second period of oppression," which began hampering the work of

industrialized society. Tolstoyism was very influential in Finland at the turn of the twentieth century: Turtiainen & Wahlroos, *Maaemon lapset*.

39. See, for example, Heikkilä, *Kirkollisen yhdistysaktiivisuuden leviäminen Suomessa*. For the most religious movements and groups, association/society was also the only possible form of organization. At the turn of the twentieth century the Finnish religious field was restricted by The Dissenters Act of 1887, which legalized dissenting Protestant congregations. However, the Act was so strict that only Methodists and Baptists left the Lutheran Church. Everyone else in Finland — excluding small minorities of Orthodox and Catholic Christians, Jews, and Muslim Tatars — remained officially members of the Church, since it was not possible to leave the Church without simultaneously joining some other congregation until the Freedom of Religion Act of 1923.

40. Markkola, "Working-Class Women Living Religion in Finland at the Turn of the Twentieth Century."

41. For this point in the context of esoteric movements see Harmainen, Kemppainen & Järvenpää, "Moderni länsimainen esoteria 1900-luvun taitteen Tampereella."

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the Parliament in 1908, civil society had gained a more lasting momentum.[42] These years were also a time of lively religious polemics. The established Church was challenged with vocal criticism, freedom of (and for some from) religion was demanded, and all sorts of religious questions were widely debated in the public.[43] Also, as I already mentioned, Finnish Theosophists organized their movement properly during these years.

The first organization of Spiritualism in Finland took place in this milieu of mixed sociopolitical and religious concerns, activities, and polemics. The networks of *Spiritisti* and the Spiritist Society make clear that many of those who joined the new Spiritualist undertaking were — or at least had been — active in a variety of social and political movements and projects.[44] Jaakko Jalmari Jalo-Kivi himself is a case in point, as he had been active in the labour movement throughout the first decade of the twentieth century. Although his career as a labour activist was not a success story — as we will see — and he was not politically active during the years of the Spiritualist organization, the "civic skills" he needed as the editor of *Spiritisti* and chair of the Spiritist Society, and the motivational dispositions that pushed him in these Spiritualist activities, had all been constructed during his earlier civic engagement in the labour movement. In the following two sections, I seek to demonstrate that at the heart of Jalo-Kivi's Spiritualism lay an intensive experience of the need to resist the — as he saw it — morally detrimental influence of materialism, and that this experience was also central for his sociopolitical views.

Materialism as a Societal Menace

In her study on German occultism at the turn of the twentieth century, historian

42. Anttila et al., *Kuriton kansa*; Haapala et al., *Kansa kaikkivaltias*; Kujala, *Vastakkainasettelun yhteiskunnan synty*; Tikka, *Kun kansa leikki kuningasta*.

43. See, for example, Murtorinne, *Taistelu uskonnonvapaudesta suurlakon jälkeisinä vuosina*.

44. Järvenpää, *Kansan henkinen kehitys*, 261–84.

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Corinna Treitel has pointed out that "[o]ccultists saw themselves as part of a counterculture, locked in battle against a dominant materialist tendency of the age, and this self-understanding gave their movement its dynamism and appeal."[45] This is true also for the first organization of Spiritualism in Finland. Jalo-Kivi made it repeatedly clear that *Spiritisti* and the Spiritist Society were founded to confront materialism, which was rampant in Finland and especially – an important specification, as we will see – among the lower socioeconomic levels of the Finnish society. It was this *experience of an ongoing battle against materialism* that gave Jalo-Kivi and other organized Finnish Spiritualists a sense of purpose and identity.[46]

This experience was widely shared at the turn of the century, both in Finland and abroad. It was often accompanied by pleas for spiritual cooperation against the common enemy. An illustrating example is a small news piece published in 1910 in *Helsingin Sanomat,* one of the major newspapers in Finland, and republished in *Spiritisti*. The piece, suitably titled "The Battle Against Materialism," reported a recent occurrence in Paris. A variety of religious groups had gathered to form an alliance to combat materialism in all areas of culture and society. The miscellaneous party included – or so it was told – well-known French adherents of Spiritualism and Theosophy, accompanied by esoteric Christians, Swedenborgians, "all the Christian sects," Muslims, Jews, and Hindus. It was further remarked that Parisian newspapers regarded the enterprise as "a significant societal phenomenon."[47]

But what was "materialism" and what made it so opposable? Jalo-Kivi gave his analysis of the matter in *Spiritisti*. According to him, there were two main forms of materialism. The first was "scientific materialism," which claimed that "everything is matter, explainable through matter, and the human being

45. Treitel, *A Science for the Soul*, 16.

46. See, for example, Jalo Kivi, "Spiritismi," *Elämä* 14.2.1906; J. K., "Valoa levittämään!" *Spiritisti* 6/1909; J. K., "Spiritismin leviäminen," *Spiritisti* 37/1912. See also "Uusi spiritualistinen aikakauslehti," *Tietäjä* 1/1909.

47. *Helsingin Sanomat* 6.4.1910, "Taistelu materialismia vastaan"; *Spiritisti* 16/1910, "Taistelu materialismia vastaan."

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is merely a highly developed animal in a 'technical' sense, a 'social animal'."[48] Here, Jalo-Kivi was attacking a rationalist and secularist worldview that naturalist/materialist/positivist scientists and popularisers of science had been propagating from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. Historian Egil Asprem has argued that although this intellectual movement formed a minority in the scientific community, it created a popular conception of mainstream (natural) science as an anti-religious enterprise. This conception of "scientific materialism" was further nourished by Spiritualists, occultists, and psychical researchers/parapsychologists in their polemical pursuit to push the boundaries of science to include the study of the paranormal and spiritual.[49]

However, for Jalo-Kivi, scientific materialism was not the primary threat posed by the "dominant materialist tendency of the age." He was convinced that materialist science had been disproven by the study of Spiritualist and paranormal phenomena, and that the baseless scientific doctrines would fade away in time. For him, it was the second form of materialism that was of more concern:

> In addition to scientific materialism, which, however, now seems to be retreating, there exists an even coarcer form of materialism, one that lies unconsciously within people. For many here, all their actions are guided solely by selfish desires, money is their God, they believe in nothing but themselves, whom they also love above all else; they expect nothing beyond the grave, because for them, the sensual pleasures of this material life are everything. This kind of materialism is the most dangerous to faith, and it spreads quite easily, since it requires no scientific foundation, but instead finds support in human passions and in both of humanity's 'original sins', pride and selfishness.[50]

48. Jalo Kivi, "Spiritismi (kansantajuinen esitelmä)," *Spiritisti* 12B/1909: "kaikki on ainetta, aineen kautta selitettävissä, ja ihminen ainoastaan 'teknillisessä' suhteessa korkealle kehittynyt eläin, 'seurusteleva eläin'."

49. Asprem, *The Problem of Disenchantment*, 68–73, 86–89.

50. Jalo Kivi, "Spiritismi (kansantajuinen esitelmä)," *Spiritisti* 12B/1909: "Paitsi tieteellistä materialismia, joka nyttemmin kuitenkin näyttää olevan peräytymässä, löytyy vielä karkeampaakin materialismia, sellaista, joka piilee ihmisissä tiedottomasti. Täällä on useammalle kaikessa toiminnassaan määrääjänä ainoastaan itsekkäät pyyteet, sillen on raha Jumalana, hän ei usko mihinkään muuhun kuin itseensä, jota myöskin rakastaa ylinnä kaiken; hän ei odota haudan tuolla puolen mitään, koska hänelle ovat tämän aineellisen elämän aistilliset ilot kaikki

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As the various participants at the Paris gathering show, these concerns were not restricted only to the "esoteric" circles of Spiritualists and occultists. The egoistic materialism Jalo-Kivi described was widely seen as a consequence of the individualistic and competitive lifestyle of urban, commercialized societies. In Finland, the clergy had lamented "the materialist spirit of the era" from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, and by the turn of the century the purportedly demoralizing tendencies of modern life were criticised by a multitude of evangelical societies.[51] As already noted, these religious and moral concerns were an important factor in early social movements.

However, the perceived threat of materialism resulted in a variety of responses. In the labour movement, the situation was especially complicated due to the increasing impact of Marxism, which suggested that perhaps materialism — at least in some sense of the term — was not that bad after all. The relationship of materialism and socialism was debated in the Finnish labour movement, especially in the early years of the twentieth century, and it was in this context that Jalo-Kivi first began to formulate his own ideas of anti-materialism in public.

Battling Materialism in the Labour Movement

The anti-religious sentiments of the early Social Democratic Party were polemically exaggerated by those who disliked the spread of socialism in Finland. This view has been reiterated in historiography, which has emphasized the rationalist and secularist worldview of the early party leaders.[52] The party certainly included self-proclaimed Marxist materialists, who regarded religion as "the opium of the people." However, not all Finnish socialists were ready to

kaikessa. Tällainen materialismi on kaikkien vaarallisinta uskolle ja leviää varsin helposti kun ei siihen tarvita mitään tieteellistä pohjaa, vaan saa se kannatusta ihmisen omilta himoilta ja ihmisen molemmista 'perussynneistä' ylpeydestä ja itsekkäisyydestä."

51. Juva, *Suomen sivistyneistö uskonnollisen vapaamielisyyden murroksessa 1848–1869*, passim; Markkola, *Synti ja siveys*.

52. For a brief critical overview see Kemppainen, "Hilja Pärssinen and the Religious Grounds for Socialist Welfare in Early Twentieth-Century Finland," 2–4.

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give up religion, even if they were usually highly critical towards the established Church. Moreover, there were many of those who viewed socialism itself from a religious perspective. Many were inspired by Tolstoyism and Theosophy and drew inspiration from pre-Marxist "utopian socialism" — or "romantic socialism," to use historian Jonathan Beecher's term.[53]

Those who sought to lead the Social Democratic Party according to Marxist doctrines of class struggle and historical materialism regarded the spread of Theosophy in the labour movement a nuisance. Most adamant on this point was Edvard Valpas (1873–1937), editor-in-chief of the leading labour newspaper *Työmies* (*The Working Man*) and one of the main theorists of Marxism in Finland in the early twentieth century. In turn, the most vocal Theosophical socialist was Matti Kurikka (1863–1915), a predecessor of Valpas as editor-in-chief of *Työmies*. Kurikka had left Finland in 1899 to build a utopian colony, first in Australia and then in British Columbia. He returned to Finland just before the General Strike in 1905 and assumed a leading position in the SPD's Theosophical opposition. As already mentioned, Kurikka founded *Elämä* to counter *Työmies*, and — after he was kicked out of SDP in 1906 — founded the Socialist Reform Party (fin. Sosialistinen Reformipuolue). However, none of the reform candidates were elected in the first parliamentary elections in 1907, while the SDP formed the majority in the first parliament. The Socialist Reform Party was disbanded soon after, and *Elämä* was discontinued in 1908. Kurikka left Finland again in spring 1909 and never returned.[54]

Jalo-Kivi participated in these polemics over the ideological orientation of the Finnish labour movement. He was an assistant reporter for *Työmies* in the early years of the twentieth century but was kicked out of the paper and

53. Kemppainen, *Sosialismin, uskonnon ja sukupuolen dynamiikkaa*; Kemppainen, "Hilja Pärssinen and the Religious Grounds for Socialist Welfare in Early Twentieth-Century Finland"; Beecher, *Victor Considerant and the Rise and Fall of French Romantic Socialism*.

54. Pollari, "Vihan ja sovun sosialistit"; Pollari, "Kirjoittamaton luku."

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the inner circles of the Social Democratic Party in 1905.[55] Embittered from this exclusion, he began to assist *Elämä* and became an active supporter of the Socialist Reform Party. Echoing Kurikka, he claimed that the SDP's leaders had led the Finnish labour movement onto a dangerous path in the turbulent atmosphere of the First Russian Revolution.

In these emotionally heated circumstances, Jalo-Kivi urged all "Theosophically minded workers" to join together in "the battle against the anarchic darkness born of the materialistic worldview."[56] However, he himself left the minor party — which was troubled by constant inner conflicts — already before the elections of 1907 and joined the nationalist and social reformist Finnish Party (fin. Suomalainen Puolue) instead. For some time, he was active in the Finnish Labour Union, which was founded primarily to lure workers into the Finnish Party. However, he was kicked out of the union in 1908 due to unknown reasons.[57]

After these hardships, Jalo-Kivi left politics for a long time. *Spiritisti* and the Spiritist Society, which kept him busy during the next few years, took no part in day-to-day political discourse and were surprisingly silent about the political contexts of materialism. However, Jalo-Kivi's experiences in the labour movement were still very much in his mind during these years of Spiritualist activism. This is especially clear from the already-mentioned conviction he often repeated in *Spiritisti*, namely that materialism was especially rampant in the lower socioeconomic levels of the Finnish society. The main reason for his silence about Marxist materialism during these years — apart from his overall disappointment in "politics" — was that *Spiritisti* and the Spiritist Society sought

55. The stated reason for Jalo-Kivi's falling out of grace was his alleged activity as a police informant — an accusation which he strongly denied — but the more serious reasons were related to political disagreements and power struggles in the party. For detail, see Järvenpää, *Kansan henkinen kehitys*, 60–103.

56. Jalo [Kivi], "Käänteessä — uudelle uralle": "taisteluun materialistisen maailmankuvan synnyttämää anarkillista pimeyttä vastaan." See also *Elämä* 28.7.1906; Jalo Kivi, "Meidän tehtävämme," *Elämä* 23.8.1906; Jalo Kivi, "Veljeys, vapaus ja tasa-arvoisuus," *Elämä* 8.9.1906; Jalo Kivi, "Vapaus, suvaitsevaisuus," *Elämä* 16.10.1906.

57. Järvenpää, *Kansan henkinen kehitys*, 205–53.

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to battle materialism on a level beyond quarrelsome party politics.[58] Jalo-Kivi now confronted head-on the institution which he considered the root cause for the spread of materialism in Finland: the established Church.

The Materialist Church

The adherents of Theosophy, Spiritualism, and Tolstoyism usually viewed the battle against materialism as a progressive enterprise, which was intimately connected to battles against oppressive institutions—among them the Church. For example, Santeri Alkio (1862–1930), a follower of Tolstoyism and a leading figure in the Finnish youth associations movement in the early years of the twentieth century, reproached materialism, capitalism, and the Church all at once.[59] The same critical combination was present in Matti Kurikka's Theosophical socialism. Kurikka had already been widely known for his fierce anti-clerical writings in the late nineteenth century. He continued his crusade against the Church in *Elämä*, and in 1908 published a compilation of his anti-clerical writings under the illustrating title *The Godless Church* (fin. *Jumalaton kirkko*).[60]

Jalo-Kivi shared Kurikka's strongly negative attitude towards the Church, which he saw as a repressive power allergic to anything new and progressive. Already in his first Spiritualist article in *Elämä* in 1906, Jalo-Kivi claimed that the reason for the poor state of Spiritualism in Finland was the clerical "orthodoxy," which influenced the press and prevented all public discussion about Spiritualism.[61] Strongly felt — but evidently exaggerated — clerical suppression also fuelled the first organization of Finnish Spiritualism three years later. The issues of *Spiritisti* were full of fierce attacks against the Church, which was represented as the main obstruction not only for Spiritualism but

58. See, for example, "Spiritistisen seuran," *Spiritisti* 4/1909. For more detail, see Järvenpää, *Kansan henkinen kehitys*, 258–60, 290–303.

59. S. A. [Santeri Alkio], "Materialismista toistamiseen," *Pyrkijä* 9/1905.

60. Suodenjoki, "Irti kirkosta luonnon salaisuuksien lähteille."

61. Jalo Kivi, "Spiritismi," *Elämä* 14.2.1906.

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for any spiritual development of the Finnish people.

Jalo-Kivi lamented that the Church demanded blind faith in dusty doctrines, such as original sin and eternal punishment, which not only insulted enlightened reason and morality, but were also contrary to the original teachings of Jesus. Like so many reformers before him, Jalo-Kivi claimed that the Church had lost the living truth of Christianity and turned into a dead institution led by greed for power and wealth.[62] Spiritualism, on the other hand, constituted a progressive continuation of the Judeo-Christian chain of revelations. In his 1909 book *Ääniä haudan takaa*, Jalo-Kivi described Spiritualism as a God-sent "revelation of the spirits" on a mission to purify and complete the teachings of Jesus.[63]

According to Jalo-Kivi, the Church was also responsible for the spread of materialism. As people grew disillusioned with old doctrines but — due to the Church's resistance to religious reforms — had nothing better to turn to, they ended up in materialism. For example, in 1912 he analyzed the dire situation:

> It is quite disheartening to see the materialistic worldview that has taken hold of a large portion of the lower classes in our country. They are thorough, self-assured materialists, even though they have received nothing but crumbs of materialism, which have fallen from the tables of the 'scientifically educated,' without the slightest understanding of the theories upon which scientific materialism has ridden. But it has been easy to adopt, as it has freed them from humanity and the sense of responsibility. And the reason for the spread of this materialism has been our Church, which has had nothing to offer but entrenched dogmas that dull the human spirit.[64]

62. See, for example, "Lukijoille," *Spiritisti* 1/1909; J. K., "Spiritismin leviäminen," *Spiritisti* 37/1912; J. K., "Ovatko spiritistit kristittyjä?" *Spiritisti* 47/1912.

63. Jalo Kivi, *Ääniä haudan takaa*, 1–5.

64. J. K., "Spiritismin leviäminen," *Spiritisti* 37/1912: "Varsin ikävää on katsella sitä materialistista katsantokantaa mikä on vallannut meillä suuren osan kansan pohjakerroksesta, he ovat täysiä, itsetietoisia materialisteja, vaikka eivät ole saaneet kuin murusia materialismista, joka on putoellut »tieteellisesti sivistyneitten» pöydiltä, ymmärtämättä laisinkaan niistä teorioista edes joilla tieteellinen materialismi on ratsastanut. Mutta se on ollut helppoa omaksua kun se on vapauttanut ihmisyydestä ja edesvastuun tunteesta. Mutta syynä tähän materialismin leviämiseen on ollut kirkkomme, jolla ei ole ollut mitään tarjottavana muuta kuin piintyneitä, ihmishenkeä tylsyttäviä dogmejansa."

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According to Jalo-Kivi, therefore, the battle against materialism needed a battle against its root-cause: the hegemonic power of the Church. From this point of view, the Church and materialism were not actually far apart, since being a self-proclaimed materialist was not much worse than being a spiritually-dead Christian. This point was polemically formulated by Jalo-Kivi when he described the Church's view of Christianity as "materialist-theological," and claimed that the Church was not only incapable of battling the rise of materialism but had also itself "almost succumbed to materialism." Spiritualism, on the other hand, Jalo-Kivi claimed, was the perfect opponent to materialism. Unlike the Church, it did not base its claims of the afterlife solely on blind faith and tradition but delivered concrete and scientific proofs derived from practical work in séances.[65]

It should be noted that "the dogmatic Church" and its hegemony that Jalo-Kivi attacked were similar polemical constructions as "scientific materialism." Although it was true that the Lutheran Church of the early twentieth century was a conservative institution, it was not a monolith, and liberal theologies were gaining support especially among the younger generations of Finnish theologians.[66] These developments were poorly recognized by anti-clerical critics. A telling example is a debate over the relationship between Spiritualism and Christianity that took place between Jalo-Kivi and a young theologian Antti J. Pietilä (1878–1932) at the turn of 1910 in the comment section of *Aamulehti* (*The Morning Newspaper*), one of the largest newspapers in Tampere. Pietilä surprised Jalo-Kivi with his liberal interpretations of the doctrines of Hell and sin, even to the point that Jalo-Kivi had to deduce ironically that his opponent's views were more in line with Spiritualism than with the Church.[67] However, the encounter did nothing to change Jalo-Kivi's opinion of the Church as a major threat to the spiritual development of the Finnish people.

65. Jalo Kivi, "Spiritismi," *Elämä* 14.2.1906; Jalo Kivi, "Spiritismi (kansantajuinen esitelmä)," *Spiritisti* 12B/1909.

66. Veikkola, *Teologinen lauantaiseura*; Veikkola, *Nuorkirkollisen suuntauksen muotoutuminen.*

67. Järvenpää, *Kansan henkinen kehitys*, 313–16.

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The Polemical Relationship of Theosophy and Spiritualism

Jalo-Kivi viewed the Lutheran Church as the archenemy of Finnish Spiritualism. However, it was not the only competitor in the religious field that he attacked. Equally pressing and continued conflict ensued between him and the Theosophical Society. This may be surprising; after all, Jalo-Kivi had familiarized himself with Spiritualism in the Theosophical circles of the early twentieth-century labour movement and had presented himself as a "Theosophically minded worker" in *Elämä*. However, his opinion of Theosophy changed dramatically during the early phase of the first organization of Finnish Spiritualism. After a short attempt at cooperation in the battle against the dual threat of materialism and religious dogmatism, *Spiritisti* and the Spiritist Society suddenly cut all ties with Theosophists.

The difficult relationship between Spiritualism and Theosophy had its roots at the very beginning of the Theosophical movement. Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891), the main founder and ideologist of the Theosophical Society, began her public career in the 1870s as a Spiritualist medium, but quickly grew critical towards Spiritualism. The identity of the early Theosophical movement was built on polemical attacks against Spiritualist practices and beliefs. Blavatsky claimed that passive mediumship exposed the credulous Spiritualists to the dangers of the unseen world and denied that the entities whom they thought to be in contact with were the actual spirits of the dead. Blavatsky herself propagated a more sophisticated and active approach towards the invisible realms. In her books *Isis Unveiled* (1877) and *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), she also constructed complex cosmological and historical narratives to reveal some of the secret truths she claimed to lay behind all religious, philosophical, and scientific systems. She claimed this esoteric knowledge was guarded by a secret brotherhood of superhuman "Mahatmas" with whom she was in direct spiritual contact.[68]

The polemical construction of the Theosophical Society guaranteed the further relationship of Theosophy and Spiritualism was to be awkward.

68. The polemical relationship of the early Theosophical Society and Spiritualism has been meticulously surveyed in Jeffrey Lavoie's *The Theosophical Society*.

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However, the movements never drifted entirely apart. On the one hand, many well-known Spiritualists — some of which were active in the early Theosophical Society — agreed with at least some of Blavatsky's criticism and sought to distance "serious" Spiritualism from the light-minded dabbling of séances and the scandals of exposed charlatan-mediums.[69] On the other hand, Annie Besant (1847–1933), the successor of Blavatsky as the spiritual head of the Theosophical Society, took a much friendlier approach towards Spiritualism and applauded its achievements in the battle against materialism.[70] However, despite these endeavours the relationship of Spiritualism and Theosophy remained tense.

These international polemics also influenced the relationship between Spiritualism and Theosophy in Finland. It is clear that there was some interest towards Spiritualism among Finnish Theosophists, especially in the years surrounding the General Strike, and this interest led to experiments with séances. However, the usual tone in which the topic was discussed by Theosophists was condescending at best. A major example is Pekka Ervast (1875–1934), the leading figure of the early Finnish Theosophical movement and the first chief secretary of the Theosophical Society in Finland. Ervast was open about his interest in Spiritualism and mediumship but emphasized that these subjects should always be approached cautiously and from the "higher" viewpoint of Theosophy, which was the only path to true spiritual knowledge.[71]

Jalo-Kivi's 1906 article on Spiritualism, which introduced the movement, made clear that he took the subject much more seriously than most Finnish Theosophists. In the article, he touched on the relationship between Spiritualism and Theosophy only briefly, but his opinion was clearly that the former was at least equal to the latter as a path of spiritual development. For him, the

69. Deveney, "Man is a Spirit Here and Now."

70. See, for example, Besant, *Australian Lectures 1908*.

71. "Kysymyksiä ja vastauksia," *Omatunto* 18/1906. This approach to Spiritualism was common in Ervast's books and presentations during this period. See especially *Mitä on kuolema?* (1904, *What is Death?*) and *Salatieteilijän sanakirja* (1905, *The Occultist's Dictionary*).

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main difference between the movements was their pedagogical methodology: Theosophy taught spiritual truths on a theoretical level, whereas Spiritualism used practical means.[72] It is important to note that this remark was made in the Theosophically-oriented *Elämä,*[73] and in an article that — as mentioned earlier — disclosed the plan to found a Spiritualist journal in Helsinki. Jalo-Kivi clearly meant the difference in method as a basis for friendly coexistence and cooperation. He wanted to present Spiritualism in a more positive and independent light than was common in Theosophical circles, but he also wanted to signal that the new and explicitly Spiritualist journal would not challenge Theosophy, which had a much more prominent position in Finland.

This friendly approach was put to the test three years later with the first organization of Finnish Spiritualism. The start was promising: some well-known members of the Theosophical Society took part in the founding of the Spiritist Society and assisted with the early issues of *Spiritisti*.[74] However, it was also evident from the beginning that there were serious underlying tensions. For example, Spiritualist endeavours were mostly ignored in the Theosophical journal *Tietäjä*, which was a telling sign of the Theosophists' precautions. It did not take long for these tensions to crumble the basis for cooperation. Jalo-Kivi lost his temper at the end of the first year of the Spiritualist organization. In late 1909, he made the conflict public with a long article in *Spiritisti,* in which he recalled the polemical history of the movement since Blavatsky and claimed that Finnish Theosophists continued to depreciate Spiritualism.[75] Theosophists denied the accusation in *Tietäjä*, but in a condescending manner that only

72. Jalo Kivi, "Spiritismi," *Elämä* 14.2.1906.

73. Besides Jalo-Kivi's article, there are only a few mentions of Spiritualism in *Elämä* (and not all of them positive), while Theosophy was explicitly present in practically every issue.

74. For example, Veikko Palomaa (1865–1933), a widely known Theosophical speaker and co-editor of the Theosophical journal *Omatunto/Tietäjä*, was chosen as the vice president of the Spiritist Society ("Spiritistisen Seuran," *Spiritisti* 4/1909). He also gave Spiritualist lectures in Helsinki during the first half of the year 1909.

75. J. K., "Spiritismi ja teosofia," *Spiritisti* 12B/1909.

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increased Jalo-Kivi's anger.[76] During the next few years he attacked Theosophists repeatedly in *Spiritisti,* claiming that Theosophists were actively hindering the work of Finnish Spiritualists:

> Ever since 'Spiritisti' was founded and spiritualist activity began in Finland, we have also been subjected to covert opposition from the Theosophists, which has manifested itself in various forms, and to constant 'sneaking' around us. This has been painful to experience, but we have tried to endure it quietly, thinking only of the best interests of the cause. As unpleasant as it is to say, we must nevertheless point out that this opposition has been directed from the very headquarters of the Theosophical Society's General Secretary [Pekka Ervast].[77]

Although Ervast and other Theosophists were often critical towards Spiritualism, there is little evidence of an active opposition. Also, Theosophists usually ignored Jalo-Kivi's continued attacks, at least in public. Even if there was some truth in Jalo-Kivi's accusations, they were also heavily glazed with his predisposition to polemical exaggeration.

Theory and Practice in the Battle against Materialism

As was the case with the Church, the relationship between Spiritualism and the Theosophical Society in Finland was evaluated by Jalo-Kivi in the context of the battle against materialism. The cornerstone of this evaluation was the already-noted interpretation of Theosophy as theoretical and Spiritualism as practical in spiritual matters. Jalo-Kivi developed this view further in *Spiritisti*. Already in the

76. V. H. V., "Spiritismi ja teosofia," *Tietäjä* 1/1910; J. K., "Spiritismi ja teosofia," *Spiritisti* 14/1910.

77. J. K., "Spiritismi ja teosofia," *Spiritisti* 43–44/1912: "Jo siitä asti kun 'Spiritisti' perustettiin ja spiritistinen toiminta alkoi Suomessa, niin olemme myöskin saaneet osaksemme teosofien taholta salaista vastustustyötä, joka on ilmennyt yhdessä ja toisessa muodossa[,] ja alituista 'hiipimistä' ympärillämme. Tämä on ollut tuskallista kokea, mutta olemme koittaneet hiljaisina kärsiä ajatellen ainoastaan asian parasta. Niin ikävää kun onkin sanoa, niin täydymme kuitenkin huomauttaa, että vastustustyötä on johdettu juuri teosofisen seuran ylisihteerin päämajasta käsin." See also "Toimituksen työpöydältä," *Spiritisti* 15/1910; "Toimituksen työpöydältä," *Spiritisti* 22/1910; "Toimituksen työpöydältä," *Spiritisti* 28–30/1911; J. K., "'Toisten härillä' kyntämistä," *Spiritisti* 37/1912; J. K., "Teosofit ja me," *Spiritisti* 40/1912.

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first issue of the journal — when there was still hope for cooperation — he stated that Theosophy had encouraged the study of spiritual topics among the educated classes but had not influenced the masses, among which the spread of materialism "in its crudest form" (fin. "raaimmassa muodossaan") was most rampant. This was because the uneducated folk could not understand Theosophical theories. Instead, they needed "more practical, concrete teaching about immortality and spiritual planes." According to Jalo-Kivi, Spiritualism alone could provide this kind of teaching.[78] Thus, he claimed that Theosophy had its own, educated audience — which was fine — but only Spiritualism could battle materialism where it mattered the most: among the uneducated working class.

After the rift at the end of the year 1909, Jalo-Kivi reiterated this thesis many times in much more polemical terms. For example, in one of his most fierce articles against Theosophy, published in 1912, he wrote:

> Spiritism and Theosophy have entirely different pursuits. The former works, acts, and investigates, supporting its words with evidence — the latter builds theories from the comfort of the chamber, and in times of need uses the former as a hobbyhorse, otherwise mercilessly whipping it. For the softened chamberlains and ladies of the 'upper class,' Theosophy is a typical form of 'free-thinking,' and apparently from this — from a habit — comes the harsh treatment of those who are active and engaged — that, after all, is nowadays the fate of the 'common folk' at the hands of the upper class, whose interests Theosophy primarily serves.[79]

It is surprising that Jalo-Kivi presented Theosophy as an upper-class enterprise, which had no influence on the lower classes. After all, he had been active in the circles of Theosophical socialists and was well aware of the wide following Theosophy had gained among workers — a phenomenon which Finnish

78. "Lukijoille," *Spiritisti* 1/1909.

79. J. K., "Spiritismi ja teosofia," *Spiritisti* 43–44/1912: "Spiritismillä ja teosofialla on vallan erilaiset harrastukset. Edellinen tekee työtä, toimii ja tutkii, todistaen sanojansa — jälkimmäinen rakentaa teorioita kamarista käsin käyttäen hädän tullessa edellistä keppihevoisenaan, muulloin sitä armottomasti ruoskien. Veltostuneille 'yläluokan' kamariherroille ja naisille on teosofia ominaista 'vapaa-ajattelua' ja siitä kait — totutusta tavasta — johtuu tyly kohtelu toiminnan väkeä kohtaan — sehän se on nykyään 'syvien rivien' kohtalo yläluokan puolelta, jolla teosofiakin etupäässä ajaa."

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Theosophists proudly regarded as exceptional in the whole Theosophical movement.[80] Again, the picture Jalo-Kivi painted of his contestant was essentially a polemical construction crafted for his situated purposes. By presenting Theosophy as an upper-class movement and emphasizing its speculative nature, he tried to make room for a Spiritualist movement which would appeal to the workers' class-consciousness.

It is noteworthy that although *Spiritisti* and the Spiritist Society took no part in political discussions, and although the class sympathies of the Spiritualist enterprise were rarely explicitly stated, at least for Jalo-Kivi, the first attempt to organize Spiritualism in Finland was intimately connected to his earlier civic activities in the labour movement and party politics. As had been the case in these endeavours, his Spiritualist activism was also primarily concerned with the social and spiritual development of the Finnish working class.

Conclusions

In this article, I have studied the first attempt to organize Finnish Spiritualism through Jaakko Jalmari Jalo-Kivi's religious civic engagement. For Jalo-Kivi, leading the Spiritualist organization was both religious practice and civic engagement with the social, moral, and political concerns of the era. From his point of view, the Spiritualist enterprise had deep societal significance as part of the God-sent modern Spiritualist movement: the spread of Spiritualism in Finland via *Spiritisti* and the Spiritist Society would hasten the moral development of the Finnish people and save them from the religious and societal threats of materialism and religious dogmatism.

I have also emphasized that practicing Spiritualism as religious civic engagement was — at least for Jalo-Kivi — highly polemical activity. Jalo-Kivi was adamant that only Spiritualism had the power of evidence and the practical means to conquer materialism, especially among the uneducated working people. Other actors in the

80. See, for example, "Toimittajalta," *Tietäjä* 10/1910.

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religious field were sceptical of his claims, and religious polemics inevitably ensued. The Spiritist Society and *Spiritisti* became locked in various battlefronts, most notably against the Lutheran Church and the Theosophical Society in Finland. In these struggles, Jalo-Kivi often resorted to polemical exaggeration, presenting his opponents in a conveniently simplistic and negative light.

The main argument in my article is that the forms and motives of Jalo-Kivi's Spiritualist activism as the editor of *Spiritisti* and the head of the Spiritist Society were in important ways connected to his earlier civic activities and experiences in the labour movement. More broadly, I suggest that the first attempt to organize Spiritualism in Finland followed the social practices, opportunities, and sensibilities of the emerging civil society, which had evolved in close interaction with the modernizing religious field. I hope this article is helpful in further emphasizing the importance of studying Spiritualism and other modern esoteric movements in close contact with the changing landscapes of civic engagement in modern societies.

Lastly, it should be noted that the biographical focus of the article has restricted the scope of analysis, as Jalo-Kivi's polemical Spiritualist activism is not exemplary of the multiple ways Spiritualism could be part of peoples' lives in early twentieth-century Finland. However, studying his unique case is crucial for understanding the specific way in which the first attempt to organize Spiritualism in Finland occurred. In addition, in the article the intertwined formation of Jalo-Kivi's active citizenship and Spiritualist worldview has been analysed in relation to the larger societal contexts of the socio-politically turbulent civil society and the polemically constructed religious field in early twentieth-century Finland. This combination of close attention both to individual, unique lived realities and to their situated social and cultural contexts is what makes biographical microhistory methodologically fruitful. This viewpoint is also useful in the historical study of esotericism, as it makes visible the concrete, multiple ways in which esoteric movements have been part of the situated lived realities of the past.

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