

The Preferability of Consensus: How the Church Built the Swedish Model

A European Case Study

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From heathendom to Christianity

“A.D. 793. This year came dreadful fore-warnings over the of land the Northumbrians, terrifying the people most woefully: these were immense sheets of light rushing through the air, and whirlwinds, and fiery dragons flying across the firmament. These tremendous tokens were soon followed by a great famine: and not long after, on the sixth day before the ides of January in the same year, the harrowing inroads of heathen men made lamentable havoc in the church of God in Holy-island, by rapine and slaughter.”

This entry from A.D. 793 in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle describes one of the first encounters between the Christian church and the Nordic peoples. It was not a happy one. The Vikings came as invaders from the sea. They were robbers on plundering expeditions. Soon they took power over England and Ireland. They extended their ravaging expeditions to France and even to the Mediterranean.

However, the gospel was preached in the domain that was later named the Kingdom of Sweden by Ansgar (who was eventually made archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen). He was sent to Scandinavia by the emperor Louis the Pious, son of Charlemagne, around 830, and a second time around 850. Ansgar celebrated the mass amidst foreigners living in the small town of Birka, not far from today's Stockholm. He preached the gospel and founded a small congregation. Sadly, it faded away after a few decades.

Of far greater importance for the process of christianisation was the Viking emigration to the British Isles. In England, the Norsemen came in contact with a superior civilisation and became Christians. Being merchants, they maintained connections with the homeland of their relatives. This is how the Christian influence found its way to Scandinavia.

From the eastern parts of Scandinavia, many Vikings travelled on the great rivers through domains that were later called Russia (a name derived from “Rus”, i.e. Roslagen, a coastal area north of Stockholm). Over the Black Sea they arrived in Constantinople, the capital of the Roman Empire, where those tall, blond men attracted attention. The emperor, after having baptized them, recruited them as his personal lifeguard. In the *Hagia Sofia* church (now a museum) in Istanbul their graffiti can still be seen, carved in runes upstairs in the gallery to the right. After their stint of service in Constantinople, many of them returned as Christians to Scandinavia, where they often built a small church on their farm.

The heathen country that is now called Sweden received influences both from the east and the west. Christianity was regarded as a superior culture, connected with the hope of a better life, as is the case today in China and other Asian countries. Hence, when eventually missionaries from abroad arrived, the soil was well prepared.

Sweden, by that time divided into provinces, so called *landskap*, was a battleground, as it were, between English and German mission, the latter from the diocese of Hamburg-Bremen. Each province determined for itself, at a local *thing* (i.e. governing local court assemblies), that all its inhabitants should be baptized and converted to Christianity. The old faith still had its strongholds in the Northern provinces, especially in Uppsala, but towards the end of the 11th century Sweden was united to form a Christian kingdom. Still every province had its own oral code of laws. In Västergötland (land of the Visigoths), the first christianised province, their code of law, *Västgöotalagen*, was written down about 1220. It is the oldest remaining complete book in the Swedish language.

Her byrias laghbok väsgöta.

Krister är fyrst i laghum warum. Pa är cristna var oc allir cristnir, konongär, böndär oc allir bocarlär, biscupär oc allir boclärðir män.

This is the beginning of the statute book of the Visigoths.

Christ is first in our law. Next in order is our Christian faith and all Christians, kings, peasants, and all resident men, bishop and all the bookish men.

Let's sum up! Scandinavia was (and is) a remote part of Europe, in splendid isolation beyond the Baltic Sea, on the same latitude as Hudson Bay. When travellers, the Vikings, went abroad, they were impressed by the Christian civilisation and so became Christians. By that time it was not possible to separate belief from society. When the times changed, their remote homeland was prepared for incorporation into the Christian community as represented by the Roman-Catholic church. The decisions necessary were taken by the chieftains. It was a matter of power, not just spiritual power but also worldly. The borders were opened to new influences, new technology and new ways of thinking. But the decision to be a Christian was not an individual one.

Medieval age

After a number of civil wars, which were, to be frank, just violent skirmishes between different family clans or groups of mafia, Sweden slowly became a united country. The kings and the noblemen were poorly educated, so they needed assistance from priests and monks for the administration of their power. Monasteries were founded as centres for education, medical care, social welfare, new techniques for farming, fish-farming, forging, construction etc. The mentality of the people was gradually transformed. They were no more allowed to take newborn unwanted children, especially girls, into the forest to feed the wolves. Elderly people did no longer feel the pressure to commit suicide. Those deeds were regarded as sins. In 1335 slavery was abolished, the result of a decision taken by king Magnus Eriksson that everyone born of Christian parents should be regarded as a free man or woman. Every parish built a church of their own. Each parish had a parsonage because the king decided that there must be a farm to support a priest. Sometimes the church was built by a nobleman but mostly it was a common undertaking by local peasants.

The country prospered until the climate changed and got colder. In 1350 the dreaded Black Death arrived. By that time, Sweden was the country covering the largest geographical area in all Europe, and its sparse population was radically reduced. In some districts just one of three people survived. There was a lack of people and a surplus of farming land, a fact that strengthened the position of the peasants. In the 15th century, a sort of parliament was developed. Unlike in France and other European countries, where the states of the realm were

three: the nobility, the clergy and the burghers, the Swedish parliament included the peasantry as a fourth state. In disputes between the king and the nobility, the peasants often took side with the king. As so often in Europe, the bishops played an important role for the administration of the state. With their castles and small armies of their own, they chose at times to support the nobility, at times the king.

Gustav Vasa

Beginning in 1397, the three Catholic kingdoms of Denmark, Norway and Sweden comprised a union under one and the same king. In the 15th century, discord arose between Swedes and Danes, resulting in a number of wars. In 1520, the Danish king Kristian II was crowned king in Stockholm by force, in presence of the Swedish aristocracy. After the coronation ceremony and grand festivities he closed the gates of Stockholm and killed about 80 persons of the nobility. However, a young nobleman Gustav Eriksson Vasa had been in Danish prison and unnoticed escaped to Sweden. He travelled the provinces and stirred up to rebellion. Having mobilized an army of peasants he succeeded in defeating the Danish army and proclaimed himself as the elected king of Sweden. By that the Nordic union was dissolved.

Gustav was a brutal and resolute man. He severely crushed all resistance and quenched all rebellion, making Sweden a centralised country. A young clergyman, Laurentius Andreae, was appointed his secretary, and Olaus Petri, the clergyman's companion became chancellor. These two men had studied in Wittenberg, where they had been deeply impressed by Martin Luther.

Because Sweden was a very poor country, the new king had to borrow money from the Hansa company in Lübeck to equip a navy able to resist Danish attacks. (Olof Eriksson, one of my forefathers, was the King's Admiral at that time.) From his secretary, Laurentius Andreae, and his chancellor, Olaus Petri, King Gustav gained the idea of confiscating property from the church. At the Diet of Västerås in 1527, he enforced the implementation of delivery of bishops' castles to the king. The bishops were allowed to keep only a small lifeguard, and were also obliged to hand over "an amount of money." The government took over the administration of the estates of churches and monasteries. From then on, the bishops were no longer members of the Council of the Realm.

It also was determined that the Word of God should be "proclaimed pure and clear." When bishoprics became vacant, the king appointed Lutheran priests as bishops without consent from the Pope in Rome. In 1531, Laurentius Petri, the brother of Olaus Petri, was ordained the first Lutheran archbishop of Sweden, and in the same year Olaus Petri edited a Liturgy in Swedish, influenced by Martin Luther's *Formula Missae* (1523). In that way the Swedish Liturgy book maintained more of the medieval mass than the Church of Denmark and Norway, where the *Deutsche Messe* (1526) became normative.

In the following years the king employed administrators from Germany, where bishops already had been abolished. A German, Georg Norman, was appointed Superintendent and regarded the King as the head of the Church. However, the Swedish peasants (a majority of the population) did not approve of the new order, and there were uprisings in the provinces. They wanted to keep the old way of celebrating the liturgy and were enraged when sheriffs confiscated their church bells for casting cannons and rifles or seized the Mass vestments to make dresses for the king's children.

In 1560 Gustav Vasa died, after having turned Sweden a hereditary kingdom. His eldest son Erik became king but was dethroned in 1568 by his younger brother John, whose wife was a Polish princess and a devout Catholic. John was a well-educated man and wanted a reformed Catholic Church. When in 1575 a new bishop was to be ordained, the king was eager to maintain the apostolic succession in Sweden, which was on the verge of being lost. That is why he ordered an elderly bishop from Finland (a part of Sweden until 1809), Paul Juusten (one of my forefathers), the last bishop consecrated within the apostolic succession, to effect the consecration. Through this single bishop, the Church of Sweden until now has kept the physical apostolic succession, if not the confessional.

In 1593 another of Gustav Vasa's sons, by then king Charles IX, called for a Synod in Uppsala. Four bishops and 300 members of the clergy were present at the ceremony, together with a number of noblemen and burghers. The decision of the Synod was that The Holy Scripture is the just and only guiding principle for the Church. Also, it was decided that the three ecumenical confessions – Apostles', Nicene, Athanasian – plus the Augsburg Confession are true expressions of the Christian faith. Furthermore, it was decided that Lutheranism be the only faith permitted in Sweden. Catholics and Calvinists were not accepted.

Thenceforward until this day, Lutheranism is still the confession of the Church of Sweden – at least in theory. In our new Church Order of 2000 it is thus confirmed:

The faith, creed and doctrine of the Church of Sweden, embodied in the worship and life, is established in God's Holy Word, as is given in the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and the New Testament, as are summarized in the Apostles', the Nicene and the Athanasian Creeds and in the unaltered Augsburg Confession of the year 1530, as is recognized and acknowledged in the Uppsala Synod decision of 1593, as is explained and commented in the Book of Concord and in other documents affirmed by the Church of Sweden.

Most of this is excellent. The only hitch is the last sentence, "in other documents affirmed by the Church of Sweden". Indeed, that phrase has become a major problem.

The 1593 Synod of Uppsala strikes the keynote of the Swedish mentality. The chairman of the Synod summed up with the following words: "Now the country of Sweden has become one man; all of us have the same Lord and God." Since then Sweden is a society of conformism. One people; one opinion; adaptation; trust in the state – these are the components of the Swedish mentality.

The son of Charles IX was the famous Gustavus Adolphus II. Under his command the Swedish army went into the Thirty Years' War against the Catholic German emperor. With economic support from Catholic France, and with arms cast in Sweden by Calvinist blacksmiths from Belgium, Gustavus Adolphus became a hero in Protestant Germany. For several decades Sweden was a leading military power in Europe. But his daughter, Queen Kristina, left Sweden in 1654, converting to the Roman-Catholic faith.

After long felt wish on the part of the clergy, the Government in 1663 determined that the Book of Concord should be a guiding principle for all pastors. From 1773 to 1829 the Book of Concord was also mentioned in ordination vows.

Under the rule of Charles XI Sweden adopted autocracy, as its ally France had done. In 1686 the king made his decision about a church canon which, at least in principle, was valid for more than 300 years, until 1993! By 1686 the church had become a tool of administration to the state. Another important decision was made, that of national registration of individuals. It is, in fact, the oldest in the world and is today a most useful source of information to genealogists. The purpose of registration of individuals was not just to list baptism, marriage and so forth but also to administer taxation and enlistment of soldiers for this small country with its huge army. Furthermore, it was decided that doctrinal examination and assessment should take place. At least once a year the pastor had to visit all villages in his parish to check the registration and test each individual's knowledge of religion according to Luther's Small Catechism. In this way the population of Sweden learnt to read very early compared to other European countries. For that reason Sweden already in the 18th century had become the most literate country in the world, which greatly contributed to the nation's rise in prosperity during the period of industrialisation.

Under the rule of Charles XII Sweden lost its position as an important military power. In 1709 Charles XII was defeated by the Russian Emperor Peter the Great. Many Swedish officers and soldiers were brought as prisoners to Siberia. In Tobolsk they organized a consistory, subordinated to a Swedish consistory in Moscow. During the harsh conditions they received books and letters sent to them from the German pietist August Hermann Francke in Halle. In Siberia the prisoners gathered in conventicles to study the Bible. Years later, back in Sweden, they continued with this habit, which in 1726 caused the government to institute a law, the Act of Conventicles. According to this act it was not allowed to gather in groups unless under the guidance of ordained clergy.

However, in many parts of Sweden there was a growing revivalism. There were pietistic groups who were loyal to the church, but there were also Moravians and others, who wanted to separate from the institutional church. One superpietistic anti-Lutheran group of 400 people, claiming they were without sin, in 1846 burned their books of Martin Luther and Johann Arndt. After that they emigrated to the US where they founded a colony, Bishop Hill, Illinois, between Rock Island and Peoria. Other people who were more moderate also emigrated to the US from poverty and religious oppression in Sweden.

Sweden was a country in transformation. People who were not farmers settled down in remote Swedish provinces. They arrived by newly constructed railways and moved into new municipalities. In the countryside, new cathedral-like churches were built to house the increasing population. We still have thousands of those architectural memories of an expansive era. However, at the same time Sweden's Grand Unified Society was under severe attack. In 1848 the first Baptist congregation was founded. Strange as it may sound, police force was used to bring the children to baptism in the church until about 1865.

Finally, in 1858, the Act of Conventicles was abolished. By 1860 individuals were allowed to leave the state church, which from then on was called *Svenska kyrkan* (The Swedish Church), but if so they had to enter another denomination approved by the government, either the Roman Catholic Church or the Methodist-Episcopal church. (Jews had been allowed to practise their faith since 1782.) It was impossible to be a Swedish citizen without belonging to a denomination, but there was insufficient control of the regulation. These were the circumstances until January 1st 1951.

In 1860 there also was a separation between local churches and mundane municipalities. The local parish got its own Parish Council; the municipality got its Municipality Council. But still, every citizen had to attend the pastor's examination in Luther's Small Catechism, and this was the case until 1895. Liberal theology gradually established itself. In 1919, when liberal theology was already predominant, the Small Catechism was removed as a basic text book from the schools, the result of cooperation between socialists and free-church politicians. Religious education in schools, it was said, should instead be founded on the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount.

Local pastors were continuously responsible for national registration of every citizen, and so it remained until 1991! And today, in 2011, the new national registration by the taxation authority still uses the same division into districts as the Church of Sweden. At present there are numerous mergers of smaller parishes into larger ones, and the national registration still follows those changes! Furthermore, the local parishes are still responsible for funeral activities and cemeteries for every citizen, even for atheists and Muslims (except in Stockholm)!

The split-up process in the 19th century wasn't in accordance with Swedish mentality, with the idea of Sweden as "one man", as expressed at the Synod in Uppsala in 1593. However, a new type of the Grand Unified Society was still to come. In 1889 the Social Democratic Party was established to promote the interests of the working classes and the underprivileged. Together with the unions, they gradually gained more power, especially after the common right to vote was decided, for men in 1909, for women in 1921. From 1932 until 2006, for more than 70 years, the Social Democrats were the predominant political force. Just five years ago, the Conservative Party took over after having copied parts of the socialist agenda. The chairman of the Social Democratic Party during the 30's and World War II, Prime Minister Per Albin Hansson, coined the expression *folkhemmet* (the people's home), an expression borrowed from a conservative politician, Rudolf Kjellén (also a member of The American Academy of Political and Social Science). The ideal was for every citizen to feel at home in his country, comfortable and safe. The state was the great home for everybody, responsible for the welfare of each individual. The state takes care of you, gives you what you need – that was the new ideology. To say that this ideology has formed the mentality of the Swedish people is by no means an exaggeration. In Uppsala in 1593 it was said that "Now the country of Sweden has become one man, all of us have the same Lord and God". Now all Sweden was still one man, but in a new way. The concepts of *Lord* and *God* had been replaced by *People* and *State*.

In the original socialist agenda, the struggle against "the Altar, the Throne, and the Purse", (i.e. the Church, the Monarchy, the Capitalism) was a strong driving force. However, in 1917 the Swedish Communist faction established their own party. Since then the Social Democratic Party is a party of Marxist revisionism, striving to transform society in a peaceful way.

The Social Democratic Party came to co-operate with "the Purse", especially capitalists and owners of large factories, where a majority of the socialist voters had their working places. "The Throne", i.e. the King was made powerless. He was made little more than a symbol, his face on coins and stamps, travelling around in Sweden and abroad, making speeches at inaugurations and various openings and events.

What, then, about "the Altar"? The Socialists' intention was to abolish the Lutheran State Church. But in 1909 the young pastor Harald Hallén became a member of the Social Democratic Party. His intention was to reform the church according to his liberal theology. In

1912 he became a member of the Parliament. Soon he became a close friend of the editor of the leading socialist paper, Artur Engberg. Engberg called himself “a heathen,” working towards an abolishment of the state church. However, Hallén managed to change his friend’s mind, and Engberg came up with a better idea: to keep state supervision over the church, especially the education and training of the clergy, to form pastors’ minds into taking politically correct views by having them influenced by liberal theology. In that way it would be possible to transform the church into a harmless body, or even a tool for transformation of Society.

In Parliament 1928 Hallén moved for a democratic church. In 1930, the age-old parochial church meeting in major parishes was replaced by a select vestry, where people representing the Social Democratic Party took office. Elementary school administration and supervision was transferred from the local church to the municipality. In 1932 Engberg was appointed Secretary of Church and Education in the socialist government. He then appointed his friend Hallén to a committee, changing the composition of the diocese chapters so that two of the six members were appointed by the government. Hallén also worked for a layman majority in the Church General Synod.

Already in 1923 Hallén had pledged to allow women priests, and he pledged again in 1950. The government set up a committee to that purpose, but in 1951 all exegetical experts at the universities of Uppsala and Lund declared that this was against the Bible. By that time there was a Church General Synod only every fifth year. Next Synod according to regulation was held in 1957. It had to deal with a proposal from the government about the ordination of women. This proposal was declined by the General Synod, which provoked an outcry in the media. Next year, the government called for an extra Synod, based on new elections. The government reminded the pastors that they were civil servants and that discrimination on the basis of sex was strictly forbidden. In the elections for this Synod, many laymen had been replaced by supporters of ordaining women. The bishops were put under pressure. So this extraordinary Synod, after a huge debate, passed the bill, exactly according to the wish of the government. When the decision was taken, Bishop Anders Nygren, world famous theologian, founding father of the Lutheran World Federation, rose from his chair and spoke these prophetic words: “Our church is now shifting onto a previously unknown track in direction of Gnostics and Sectarians.”

When the first three women priests had been ordained in 1960, the Social Democratic Party removed the issue of state church abolishment from their party programme. In 1963 the parliament passed a new law for electing bishops. From then on, not only pastors constituted the electorate, it must comprise an equal number of laymen as well. Since then elections of bishops gradually have become a political matter; hence there can be one candidate furthered by the Socialists, one by the Centre Party etc.

Bishop Bo Giertz (1905–1998) of Gothenburg, well known within the LCMS, organised the resistance against the state-promoted liberal theology. In 1970 Bertil Gärtner (1924–2009) was his successor. In those days the law was not yet wholly transformed according to the political agenda, so the government was forced by law to appoint Gärtner in Gothenburg. Until the last day before his death in hospital, 20th of September 2009, Gärtner was a real confessor, a uniting and inspiring charismatic leader for orthodox believers within the Church of Sweden.

Gradually, however, the orthodox body was pushed backwards. From 1993 candidates must promise before ordination to “be prepared to officiate with everyone ordained in the ministry without regard to sex”. On his 90th birthday in 1995 Bishop Bo Giertz said: “If I were a young student of theology today, I would never be ordained.”

In 1999, the liberal official weekly news magazine of the Church of Sweden arranged for a voting, the question being: “Who was the most important person in the Church of Sweden during the 20th century?” The result gave an overwhelming majority for bishop Bo Giertz. In the second place came Bishop Bertil Gärtner. Imagine the embarrassment of such a politically correct medium!

In 2000 the relations between state and church were changed. It is said that the church now is free to govern itself, but in fact things have become even worse. Since then the political parties can do anything they wish – as was the intention of Harald Hallén 90 years earlier. The bishops and most of the pastors are the puppets of political forces. Let me give an example: In 1998 the bishop of Växjö, Anders Wejryd, was asked by the RFSL (The Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights) about his opinion on homosexual pastors living in partnership, which was made possible according to law in 1995. “It would not be a good idea in my diocese”, he said. “It would cause great problems.” Because of the opinion he expressed, he was reported by the RFSL to the committee supervising bishops. Shortly afterwards Wejryd made a new comment. He apologized for “my way of expressing it; I was not clear enough. According to my opinion it is quite possible to have homosexual pastors living in partnership.” The government secretary for church affairs, the atheist Marita Ulvskog, told the RFSL she wanted the church to take a clear standpoint to the advantage of homosexuals.

In 2005 the General Synod decided that homosexual partnerships could obtain blessing in a church ceremony. In September 2006 Mr. Wejryd took over as archbishop after Karl Gustaf Hammar, a man who declared that “you do not have to believe *‘anything in particular’* in order to be a Christian”. In March 2007 the Church Council determined that same-sex couples for partnership could be blessed in church, approved by the General Synod in October 2007. However, according to Wejryd there was still an important difference, based on principle, between partnership and marriage. Marriage was for a man and a woman exclusively. In April 2009, the Swedish Parliament however decided in favour of permitting same-sex marriage. What would Wejryd do? His position, based on principle, was that there is a difference between marriage and partnership. But literally overnight he altered his standpoint. Same-sex marriages were suddenly OK. In a TV talk show a famous journalist read out from Matthew 19 and asked Wejryd if his new position really could be in harmony with the Bible. Wejryd answered: “The marriage is a good order for the society. But it is possible for us to expand it. We just make a new interpretation.” – “So you just make a new interpretation?” was the amazed response from the journalist. – “That is correct, we make a new interpretation!” was the cheerful reply from Wejryd.

In September 2008 presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church Katharine Jefferts Schori was an honorary guest when the Church of Sweden celebrated the 50th anniversary of the decision to ordain women. Among those present were the king, the queen and the crown princess. Archbishop Anders Wejryd described Jefferts Schori as the “most prominent woman in today’s world-wide church” and presented her with a specially made stole bearing the Church of Sweden's coat of arms. She made another visit to Wejryd on May 11th 2011. Wejryd wrote in his blogg that we will discuss “how we could act in a situation with challenges and

disagreement in our churches, both of them preserving a catholic inheritance in the context of individualism and postmodernism.”

This is the Church of Sweden in a nutshell. “No problem, we just make a new interpretation.” The major problem for an orthodox believer in Sweden today is not atheists like Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens and their Swedish adherents. Nor is the great problem that the majority of church members are non-believers. The most severe problem of all, and also the saddest, is the negative attitude among church authorities. They are doing what they can to get rid of orthodox theologians.

Recently I listened to a bishop in one of the most secularised parts of Sweden. He told his audience that the membership in his diocese is diminishing by 0.8 percent every year. Fewer children are baptized and confirmed. There are no teenagers or young adults in the churches. The great problem is the lack of living congregations, where the Christian belief can be passed on to the next generation.

In recent years, this bishop told us, mothers in many places have wanted to come together with their babies in the churches. Gatherings with different activities have spontaneously been organized by employed church staff. In one of these groups a secularised mother one day asked: “Why, here we are in a church – why not tell us a little about Jesus?” For the staff member, the situation was somewhat embarrassing.

This little glimpse from an ordinary Swedish parish can be seen as a partial fulfilment of Amos 8:11,12: “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor of thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord: And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it.”

Traditional orthodox believers in the Church of Sweden are reduced to taking confidence in the promises of The Holy Scriptures, such as in the letter to Philadelphia in Revelation 3:8: “I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.”