

Oxford and Uppsala

The English Roots of the Lutheran High Church Movement in Sweden and Beyond

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A paper submitted in partial fulfillment of unit

CH9163C: Newman and the Nineteenth Century Church

29 October 2021

Word Count:

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Introduction (500 words)

A handful of Swedish theologians have emerged from the twentieth century and found recognition outside their homeland. The World Council of Churches pushed Nathan Söderblom to the fore. The book *Christus Victor* was responsible for the successes of both its author, the Bishop Gustaf Aulén, and the genesis of renewed debates over the theology of atonement. Yngve Brilioth penned *Eucharistic Faith and Practice: Evangelical and Catholic*, a landmark in the field of liturgical studies. Quite apart from their nationality, the three have one thing in particular in common: they were all influenced to one degree or another by the ideas of the Oxford Movement across the Ocean in England. Owing in part to the geography of Europe, the Reformation arrived relatively late in Scandinavia. When it did, it was less explosive than in other parts of Europe, and instead it seeped out to the palaces and spread by royal decree in a more quiet and dignified fashion. What this meant is that the Scandinavian church had retained a number of more Catholic elements that had been purged by the Reformers elsewhere in Europe, and they avoided the characteristic Protestant iconoclasm. Church architecture survived relatively unscathed. Images were unmolested. Priests generally celebrated the reformed mass *ad orientum*. The Nordic folk churches therefore were uniquely primed to adopt the ideas of the Oxford Movement. They also adopted ideas that came from the stream of thought of the liturgical movement, which had at this point already spread out from Catholic cloisters. This burgeoning high church movement in the Scandinavian church became a reaction to modernism and the increasing liberalisation in the Lutheran churches, fears that the Oxford Movement was very much concerned with for the Church of England. Similar developments took place in Germany and other places, but the present work focuses on the established Church of Sweden, and the

impact that John Henry Newman and the Oxford Movement had on the Swedish clerics who discovered its ideals.

The Swedish Reformation

A typical framework for understanding the Reformation – even if it is split into categories such as ‘Lutheran’ or ‘Reformed’ is still an inadequate model to understand what was a complicated period of historical turmoil. While the folk churches in today’s Nordic countries are famously Lutheran, that descriptive is almost useless on its own. We might be aware of Martin Luther and the dubiously historical episode of pinning the *Ninety-Five Theses* to the door of All Saints’ Church in Wittenberg, and while the Scandinavian Reformation would not have proceeded the way it did without the German Reformation, it would be a mistake to equate the two without major qualifications. In general, we will limit ourselves to the Swedish church for the sake of brevity, but it is worth noting that similar patterns of diffusion took place across northern Europe. The geography of the matter deserves some attention. Sweden and Finland were part of the same empire at the time of the reformation, and similarly Denmark and Norway were part of the same kingdom. The dissemination of reformation thought in Scandinavia was spread not so much by famed clerics as by royal edict. By virtue of the slower and more careful dissemination of ideas, Scandinavian reformations were far less iconoclastic. It is not impossible to find churches with late medieval art still in situ. A comparison can be drawn – not a one-for-one metaphor, but a comparison at least – with English Protestantism. For political reasons, iconoclasm was a key feature of later Henrican reforms – famously the British monasteries were shut down and their goods forfeit to the crown. In the eventual slowing of post-revolutionary Protestantism, the Swedish Church eventually retained its episcopacy (the validity of which has been denied by Rome but it nonetheless an important piece of the Anglo-Scandinavian puzzle). There was less resistance

from the Roman church – perhaps because the Scandinavian Reformation took place years after the Lutheran Reformation had begun. Taking the year 1517 as a signifier for the ‘beginning’ of the Lutheran Reformation, it was not until 1536 that King Gustav I Vasa of Sweden established an independent Swedish state church. It was however a deeply political decision, and one that resulted from a successful war for independence from Denmark-Norway. King Gustav was able to use a popular Lutheran movement that was working away in Stockholm to leverage his control.¹ The Roman episcopacy was broken, and new Lutheran bishops were forced to be consecrated by those who had valid Roman succession.² The Swedish church was firmly Lutheran by the end of the century and we turn now to matters liturgical.

The Swedish reformation was driven by Laurentius Andreae and Olavus Petri, who had come in contact with Lutheran ideas in Germany. Andreae rose quickly in the ranks under King Gustav, driving the political aspects of the reformation.³ Petri was an alumnus of the University of Wittenberg, as was his brother Laurentius Petri. The majority of the nascent church’s liturgical output can be traced back to Olavus Petri. The primary service, which retained the title ‘*högmassa*’ (high mass). These services are discernibly Lutheran in character – that is to say they follow Luther’s form of prayer. Very little was prescribed early on, and the pace of change was too slow for some.⁴ The use of Latin in the mass was eventually banned – in Stockholm alone – in 1530.⁵ Senn provides an outline of Petri’s original Swedish Mass and makes a convincing case that this service was intended to be a ‘low’ mass, and was

¹ L. S. Hunter, “Historical Background,” in *Scandinavian Churches: The Development and Life of the Churches of Denmark, Finland Iceland, Norway and Sweden* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965), 34–43.

² *Ibid.*

³ Frank C. Senn, “Scandinavian Liturgies,” in *Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997), 400.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 405.

⁵ Senn, “Scandinavian Liturgies.”

able to be combined with the older Latin forms to provide a service with the fullness of pre-Tridentine ceremonial.⁶ Laurentius Petri appears to have finished the work, and the vernacular *högmassa* was finally complete in 1557.⁷ It should be clear that the Swedish church was significantly more careful in reforming its liturgical texts than other reformation churches.

John Henry Newman and the Oxford Movement (1325 words)

It is important to note at the outset that John Henry Newman was barely concerned with matters of 'ritual'. That is, his personal impact on heightened ceremonial is minimal. As an Anglican, Newman had integrity to the rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer⁸ which spoke to his deep integrity of character. It was a parallel movement arising from a region over in Cambridge that focused more intently on matters of 'ritual' and 'ceremonial'. While our focus is on John Henry Newman here, it's important to note that the Cambridge elements became indispensable in high church polity. Over time, and perhaps compounded over time by frustration at the 'prayer book crisis' of the early twentieth century, this led to the creation of translations and adaptations of the missals of Pope Leo XIII and successors. It was this Cambridge movement that emphasised the aesthetic – drawing the zeitgeist to gothic revivalism, and producing manuals for clergy and others serving at the mass, based entirely on Tridentine forms. So while this aesthetic dimension took things further than Newman and the Tractarianism, it will be indispensable in explaining the English influence on the Swedish church.

⁶ Ibid., 410.

⁷ Senn, "Scandinavian Liturgies."

⁸ Alan Jacobs, *The Book of Common Prayer: A Biography*, Lives of great religious books (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 125–130.

Anglican Use of Liturgical Movement Ideals (1325 words)

The Swedish High Church Movement: Heir of the Oxford Movement (1325 words)

Conclusion (300 words)

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