Spiritual and Ecclesiastical Biographies

Research, Results, and Reading

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Contents

*Anders Jarlert*: Preface 7

*Anders Cullhed*: Spiritual Autobiographies: Augustine as a Case in Point 9

*Carina Nynäs*: The Biographical Images of St Birgitta: Some Reflections 13

*Robert Swanson*: Moulding Margery: The Life and Afterlives of Margery Kempe 24

*Marie-Louise Rodén*: Conversion as a Biographical Problem: The Infamous Case of Queen Christina of Sweden 37

*Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin*: The Biography of Bishop Francis Kirwan: *Pii antistitis icon, sive de vita et morte Rni. D. Francisci Kirovani Alladensis Episcopi* 45

*Urban Claesson*: Olof Ekman (1639–1713) – An Ordinary Swedish Pastor as a Pioneer for Pietism. Perspectives on Writing Ecclesiastical Biographies in the Tension between Local and International Contexts 54

*Yves Krumenacker*: Protestant or Deist? Marie Huber’s Case 62

*Eva Haettner Aurelius*: Guilt and Identity. An Autobiographical Incentive in Christian Tradition with Special Emphasis on the Female Moravian Lebenslauf 76

*Daniel Lindmark*: Saami Exemplary Narratives, Transnational Print Culture, and Religious Reading Experience by the Turn of the 18th Century 82

*Oloph Bexell*: The Clergy – The most Biographed Profession in Sweden. On the Reference Books *Herdaminne* as a more than 200-year-old Field of Research 97
Janice Holmes: The “Absence” of Family in 19-Century Irish Presbyterian Clerical Biographies 105

Hartmut Lehmann: Different Lessons: Carl Hinrichs and Jochen Klepper as Biographers of the Prussian King Frederick William I 121

Joel Halldorf: Storytelling and Evangelical Identities 128

Jean-Marc Ticchi: The Biography of a Cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church: G. Sinopoli di Giunta’s Book Il cardinale Mariano Rampolla del Tindaro 140

Per-Arne Bodin: From Biography to Hymnography. On the Canonization of Patriarch Tikhon 148

Antón M. Pazos: Recent Biographies of 20th-Century Popes. Some Comments 166

Jonas Jonson: Between Objectivity and Hagiography. To Write the Lives of Gustaf Aulén and Nathan Söderblom 176

Regina Laukaitytė: The Holocaust Theme in the Memoirs and Biographies of the Hierarchs of the Catholic Church of Lithuania 182

Aila Lauha: The Cold War and Ecclesiastical Biography in Finland 194

Christian Sorrel: Episcopal Biographies and Religious Historiography of the French Contemporary Period 209

Rev. Enock Bongani Zulu: The Contributions of Bishop Dr Manas Buthelezi as a Spiritual and Ecclesiastical Leader from 1969–2012 217

Anders Jarlert: Writing Existential Biographies as Ecclesiastical History 233

The Authors 241
I have recently finished a study called *Kris och kristnande. Olof Ekmans kamp för kristendomens återuppvättande vid Stora Kopparberget 1689–1713. Pietism, program och praktik* (*Crisis and Christianization. Olof Ekman’s struggle to restore Christianity by the Great Copper Mountain 1689–1713. Pietism, program and practice*). In that report, my main task was to analyse the emergence of Pietism in Sweden. I chose to focus upon the Swedish vicar Olof Ekman, who lived between 1639 and 1713. One of the main problems I encountered in my research was how to properly contextualize Ekman. To put it very simply: as I related Ekman to the international context of research on Pietism, he appeared as an interesting pioneer for new thoughts. However, as I studied Ekman in the context of his ordinary duties as a vicar, he tended to appear as an ordinary Swedish priest of his time. His ways of conduct in most respects seemed to be in line with the general pastoral care of the era. In this article I will develop how I have dealt with this problem.

International context

In the first part of my study, Ekman is presented in an international context as a Swedish parallel to the German Pietistic pioneer Philipp Jakob Spener (1635–1705). Ekman was about the same age as Spener when he published a reform programme in 1680 that had many similarities to Spener’s *Pia Desideria* from 1675. Ekman’s programme is called *Sjönödslöfte* (*Promise at Sea*).

*Pia Desideria* was the starting point for the Pietistic movement as it emphasized reading of the Bible, conventicles, and a new belief in the future. Ekman and Spener both strove for the activation of the individual’s faith into social practice. The main difference was that Ekman published his text as an exhortation to the young ruler Charles XI (1655–1697), who became the sovereign and absolutist ruler of the Swedish
In the same year as Ekman's programme was published. For Ekman the road to improvement of public piety ran through a system of public education, financed by the state. Ekman believed in the transforming power of the new life in Christ that was received through baptism. In the baptismal water the old Adam had been drowned and a new life in Christ had been given. The poor state of Christian life during Ekman's time had, according to him, its cause in the fact that almost no one had maintained this new life. The covenant between God and man had been broken. In sinful ways the people had lost the new life in Christ and its transforming power to conduct a life characterized by love. The poverty of the ordinary people and the divide between the rich and the poor revealed that Christianity was dead. A real Christian would, according to Ekman, share his or her wealth with his brothers and sisters in Christ. However, there were opportunities for change. Ekman proclaimed that it was possible to reconnect to this new life in baptism through repentance. Through education, the fallen Christian would learn how to repent from her or his sins, and receive the power to live a Christian life, which would create a proper Christian society. It was for this cause that Ekman envisaged a system of public schooling. Ekman emphasized that it was important to refrain from corporal punishments in these schools. Instead he advocated friendly forms of persuasion. In his programme Ekman also elaborated ideas about new forms of positions in the church: he wanted deacons to take care of the poor, and elders to be responsible for church discipline. During this era, it was uncommon for a theologian in an Evangelical Lutheran church to offer laypeople the right to conduct church discipline. Another of Ekman's criticisms was that priests often preached dogmatically, far away from the realities of the everyday churchgoer. Ekman also developed ideas about introducing official confirmation of the baptism as a way for young people to strengthen their Christian life. Ekman believed that, through his reform proposals, in 10 or 20 years Sweden could become a society well known for its pious population.

In the politically fragmented Holy Roman Empire of Germany, Spener did not have similar possibilities to trust the state as a force for change. Spener had to rely upon the church as the key to reform. Interestingly, Spener shared Ekman's hope for Charles XI as an ally for creating a more pious life among the lay population in the Swedish Empire. However, *Pia Desideria* was apparently never meant for the kingdom of Charles XI, as Spener did not display ambition to drive his programme in this direction. It should be noted that Spener was very ambitious in sharing his ideas in other directions.

*Promise at Sea* was written as a promise to God after Ekman had survived a shipwreck on the Baltic Sea in 1679 while on his way home to Sweden after fulfilling his duties as a Field Superintendent for the Swedish Army in Livonia. In that part of the Swedish Empire Johann Fischer (1636–1705) was Superintendent for the church. Fischer was a friend of Spener's, had studied in Rostock, and was influenced by the Ros-
took theologian Theophil Großgebauer (1627–1661) and his book *Wächterstimme aus dem verwüsteten Zion (The Guardian’s voice from the deserted Zion)*. In the province of Livonia Fischer had received support from the Swedish king to realize Großgebauer’s ideas about popular education in schools, financed by the state. These schools were intended to raise the population from serfdom and place the peasants in Livonia at the same level as other peasants in the Swedish Empire. Serfdom did not exist in Sweden, but it is obvious that Ekman wrote his *Promise at Sea* with his experiences from Livonia fresh in mind and inspired by Großgebauer’s programme.

Ekman much later became recognized by Pietists around August Hermann Francke (1663–1727) in Halle. Joachim Justus Breithaupt (1658–1732) tried to arrange for a translation of *Promise at Sea* into Latin. Pietists in Halle had ambitions to translate Ekman’s programme that advocated a form of state Pietism, as they themselves received strong support from the state of Prussia. At the same time it is, as I indicated above, striking that Spener’s *Pia Desideria* was not translated into Swedish at the time.

To summarize, Ekman presented a form of state Pietism that foreshadowed the later Francke Halle Pietism in 18th century Prussia. At the same time, his very optimistic view of the future was much like Spener’s. In the same way that Spener hoped for a bright future for the Evangelical church, Ekman believed that a new pious Sweden would be an inspiring example to the rest of the world. However, Ekman differed from Spener in that he did not advocate conventicles. Instead, Ekman argued for state-financed public schools in every parish.

Local context

In the second part of my study I present how Olof Ekman fulfilled his duties locally as a pastor in the congregations near the Copper Mine in Falun. How did he preach, manage cases of discipline, educate, and support his congregation? For some years in the 17th century this mine produced two thirds of the total world production of copper, and for that reason it was a very important resource of wealth for the Swedish state.

In 1686 a new law for the Church of Sweden was announced. The law was a result of the new centralized power of the state, and stipulated that every Swede should be able to read the catechism. Ekman expressed his gratitude for this new legislation, as he saw it as a form of fulfilment of his reform programme of 1680. However, the new church law did not concern public schooling. The ability to read should be developed and cultivated at home. As we will see, Ekman struggled to keep public schooling alive in his town. He also organized for the enlargement of the sacristy in one of the main churches in Falun in order to have enough space for teaching and confessions.

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1 This text is built on Claesson 2015, pp. 11–127.
The results of my research show a picture of an earnest, very active, and emphatic priest. Ekman was reluctant to report cases of church discipline to the secular powers. Instead, to use his own words, he advocated forgiveness and sensitivity so as not to “harden the hearts” of his congregation. In the protocols from the conduct of church discipline Ekman explained that he wanted the sinner to continue listening to his sermons with an open mind. Ekman wrote that, if he were to punish the members of his congregation, they would start hating him, and thus stop listening to his sermons. It is also obvious that first and foremost, when dealing with church discipline, his approach was one of persuasion. For example, a certain member of his congregation in Falun, Olof Roos, a mechanic responsible for the clock in the church tower, refused to believe in the resurrection from the dead. Instead of simply sending Olof Roos off to court, Ekman tried to reach the heart of this heretic on a number of occasions by trying to persuade him of the error of his ways. Ekman could use the threat of secular punishment, but saw it as the very last step after strong efforts of persuasion. In certain cases of swearing and cursing Ekman, however, could show his temper and act very quickly in reporting for secular punishment.

In Falun the so called Trivial school provided additional ordinary classes for the children of the common people. Ekman tried to obtain funding from the king for wages for the teachers in these classes. A happy moment for him occurred when the king decided that the proceeds of four collections in the local churches each year should be destined to finance the wages of the teachers. Mostly, however, Ekman encountered many problems in his ambitions to finance the teachers.

As a pastor he also published a commentary on Martin Luther’s Small Catechism, specifically aimed at his parishioners at the Great Copper Mountain. The title was aptly called Kristendoms övning (The Practice of Christianity). This catechism was in use in 1690 but not printed until 1708. Ekman’s textbook was the first Swedish catechism that was based upon Spener’s catechism. Ekman was heavily influenced by Spener’s Latin version and by Johann Fischer’s so called Riga catechism.

With this book Ekman outlined the way of repentance back to the new life in Christ. For Ekman this could stimulate social cohesion and caretaking in his congregations that were so strongly plagued by poverty and social divisions.

This catechism also represented the attempt in Sweden to introduce a more elaborate version of what was known as the order of salvation in a textbook for ordinary people. This order consisted of a series of conceptual steps on the path to salvation.2

In my study I also present how Ekman developed a general theme of ordo salutis in funeral sermons, where the possibility of experiencing eternal blessings on this earth was put forward as a way to stimulate a holy life. The Biblical words from Isaiah 54:10, “For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not

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depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the LORD that hath mercy on thee”, were recurrent in Ekman’s preaching in front of his mining congregations as a promise of heavenly realities already in this life.3 Earlier studies have shown that, in an innovative way, Spener emphasized the possibilities of experiencing heaven on earth in his funeral sermons, and, interestingly, Ekman’s funeral sermons show a close similarity to Spener’s.4

A misleading conclusion

Since we know that Ekman belonged to the very first theologians in Sweden to introduce the principles of Pietism to a church heavily influenced by Lutheran orthodoxy, it is tempting to arrive at the interpretation that Ekman was a “softer” and more modern vicar in comparison with the other Swedish orthodox priests at the time. Those were more the “Old Testament type”, eager to put forward the threat of punishment, advocating corporal punishment of children who were unwilling to learn, defending pure dogma, and working for a strict discipline of obedience in their congregations. However, I will argue that this hypothesis is misleading, as it does not correlate well with previous research.

Ekman was no doubt influenced by Pietism, but he cannot be said to be very different from his contemporary colleagues in the Evangelical Lutheran church in Sweden. Ekman differed from many other contemporary Swedish priests in his striving for general schooling and in his strong emphasis on social responsibility and teaching of the inner path of salvation, but in other respects he was very typical of his era. When dealing with church discipline it was common to argue against corporal punishment of children, and also to persuade and support members of the congregation instead of meting out punishment. It was also common to argue against dogmatic preaching as being too distant from everyday realities. The negative picture of the orthodox priests of the 17th century was, to put it simply, in many respects constructed by later generations influenced by the Pietistic way of telling the story of Lutheran orthodoxy as something of the past – as something old, cold, dead, and dogmatic compared with Pietism, which represented a warm, authentic, and living faith in everyday life. Lack of source material concerning church discipline has also contributed to an unbalanced view in the historiography of Swedish church history. Records from the final instances of the secular courts have often been preserved in the archives. However, these only present the conduct of discipline at the final stage, after the earlier stages in church where the sinner had been persuaded by the pastor to repent according to the general pattern presented in the gospel of Matthew 18:15–18. There it is written that you must

3 Claesson 2015, pp. 201–202.
start by persuading the sinner in different ways before you exclude him or her from the church. Material from earlier stages of discipline within the church is generally lacking, and this has created an unbalanced view of the control of discipline in Sweden during the 17th century as being very hard and uncompromising. In the case of Falun, however, we still have these records preserved, which contributes to the picture of Ekman as a “softer” and more communicative priest.5

A more complicated picture: Pietism within Lutheran orthodoxy

How should we interpret Ekman’s different roles in international and local contexts? If we think beyond the stereotypes of orthodoxy and Pietism, we can see that even if Ekman represented a general pastoral strategy, in other respects he belonged to a certain type of priest within the Swedish Empire. It was possible to be both general and particular at the same time. Within a general theme you could as a pastor accentuate certain aspects of the common heritage.

Lutheran orthodox confessionalism seems to have been characterized by pluralism, where different pastoral strategies were adopted in different ways in different congregations, characterized by different challenges. Thomas Kaufmann has argued for the concept “Lutheran confessional culture”, which opens up possibilities to think along these lines.6 Thus, we may place Ekman in a more nuanced context.

In agrarian congregations where households were the successful integrating communities, the issue of discipline was quite different from urban areas, which were influenced by early industrialization and where the household was not the prevailing form in the same sense. For example, the miners in Falun started to see themselves as independent, outside the realm of the “bergsman” as the father of their household.7 The records from Falun render a picture of a population that was considerably emancipated from the authority of the church as early as in the 17th century. For example, to quote from the records, it was possible to proclaim that you did not need any priest for your salvation and that you could manage without them.8 In a situation like this, as a priest, you had to change the mind of the individual by argument and persuasion rather than anything else.

We can assume that we find local varieties of confessional culture within the Swedish Empire, and that a version in line with the main ideas of Pietism was successful in a town like Falun. Pietism represented new ways of creating communities on the basis of individuals. A town like Falun seemed to need these new ways of integration. There,

6 Kaufmann 2006.
7 Claesson 2015, pp. 46–53.
8 Claesson 2015, p. 166.
many children were fatherless because of the dangers of mining, and thus they needed public education. In a town characterized by lack of outer security, there was probably also a greater need for an inner path to salvation, such as the one Ekman outlined in his catechism.

The confessional pluralism mentioned above is in many respects still unexplored, but a study written by Einar Lilja as far back as 1947 about the pluralism of different editions of Luther’s small Catechism shows that there existed a wide variety of textbooks in Sweden, aimed at facing different local challenges. It is interesting that Ekman was inspired to write his own version of the catechism by the General Superintendent Johann Fischer in the province of Livonia. As mentioned, he was also inspired by Fischer’s school project in Livonia.

Ekman, in turn, inspired followers. In the bustling town of Umeå in northern Sweden Ekman’s reform programme from 1680 was very popular, and the Pietistic vicar Nils Grubb (1681–1724) wrote a similar catechism to Ekman’s in response to the local challenges of the church.9 Ekman may be said to have belonged to a group of theologians like Fischer and Grubb, which tried to meet pastoral challenges within a common Lutheran framework, through Pietistic inspiration.

Looking at how the Lutheran orthodox Swedish Empire was characterized by various theological impulses other than a strict Lutheran orthodoxy may contribute to a re-evaluation of the era. The Swedish church Law of 1686, implemented at the height of the reign of the absolutist ruler Charles XI, has been considered the high point of Lutheran orthodox confessionalism in Sweden. Ekman himself, however, interpreted this law as a form of victory for his own programme. Even though the Swedish kingdom has been known for its Lutheran orthodoxy, at the same time it was influenced by the same sources that created Pietism.10

Conclusion

Studying a prominent forerunner of Pietism in a general context of Lutheran orthodoxy may provide a key to a more nuanced view of theological pluralism in 17th and early 18th century Sweden. We already know that many Swedes who were expatriated to Siberia after the defeat at the Battle of Poltava in 1709 were attracted to Pietism. However, the picture of confessional pluralism can be broadened. There were many different and simultaneous “confessionalisms” in Sweden, even as early as the 17th century. The Pietism of the alienated Swedes in Siberia had forerunners within the Swedish Empire.

9 Lilja 1947; Claesson 2015, pp. 148; 194.
10 Claesson 2015, pp. 36–39; 132–133. For the concept of Pietistic confessionalism, see: Matthias 2004; Strom 2006.
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