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## The dawn of the secular state? Heritage and identity in Swedish church and state debates 1920–1939

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This article provides a study of political positions concerning the role of religion in modern society in Sweden between 1920 and 1939. It aims to increase understanding of the Swedish secularization path, with special emphasis on issues related to heritage and national identity, by comparing the dominant perspectives on these issues in the Church of Sweden and in the Social Democratic Party during that period. It addresses how these positions have influenced policies during the period, as well as some of their implications for later path dependence. It explores relations between religious issues and the concept of national heritage, as well as how the fact that both were at that time commonly seen as legitimate tasks of the state came to influence the development of Swedish church-and-state relations and heritage policies. Special attention is given to the positions of the Young Church Movement, a movement within the Church emphasizing its role as a national church with a central position in national identity, as well as to the views of Arthur Engberg, the anti-clerical Social Democratic government minister responsible for church, education, and culture in the 1930s.

**Keywords:** heritage; secularization; Sweden; Church of Sweden; church and state

It is absolutely necessary to abolish the state church. If this is not done, the official lie will continue to mark the life of the state in religious matters. (Engberg 1945c, p. 251)<sup>1</sup>

When Arthur Engberg wrote this in the editorial of a Social Democratic newspaper in 1919, he considered the established church to have sided with the reactionary right in an ongoing class conflict. The Church included many who strongly identified church, nation, monarchy, and heritage as inseparable and positive values in the national culture. Thirteen years later, the Social Democratic Party (SAP) would be in power, with Engberg as the minister responsible for education, culture, and the Church. Yet, fully separating church and state, or adopting a consistently secular definition of the nation was not paths that Swedish secularization would take until the turn of the millennium, and this development was to be marked more by efforts to achieve consensus than by confrontation. This article suggests that the views and assumptions held in common by proponents of different perspectives during the interwar period may help explain the development of Swedish secularization; especially views and assumptions concerning the role of the state in relation to the spiritual welfare of the population and the maintenance of national heritage.

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Working from the assumption that national paths of secularization can be traced back to formative periods in history, this article is intended to increase understanding of secularization in Sweden with the help of a focused study of political positions concerning the role of religion in modern society in Sweden between 1920 and 1939. This period was, in many ways, the dawn of the later Swedish welfare society. While the large expansion of the welfare state came in the post-war era, it can be argued that its formative period occurred before World War II, at the time when democracy was introduced and the SAP started to establish itself as the dominant political party (Lagergren 1999). Unlike much of the previous research on secularization in Sweden, which focuses either on the role of religion and the church in a welfare state (e.g. van den Breemer *et al.* 2014), or on the purely ecclesiological implications of these developments (e.g. Blückert 2000, Claesson 2004), this article focuses on ideas concerning the role of the Church of Sweden in relation to Swedish national identity, especially in relation to the Swedish nation as an imagined community bound together by its history, although it does so in the context of more general ideas regarding the role of religion in a modern society and the relationship between church and state.

This article aims to compare the dominant positions taken on these issues in the Church of Sweden and in the SAP between 1920 and 1939. These positions have been identified with the help of previous research. Special attention is given to the Young Church Movement, a movement within the Church which emphasized its role as a national church with a central position in national identity. The views of Archbishop Nathan Söderblom, the highest clerical leader of the Church during a large part of the period, are also discussed. On the SAP side, special attention is given to Arthur Engberg, at first a spokesman for a radical approach, and later the responsible government minister. Harald Hallén, a priest within the Church of Sweden and a Social Democratic member of parliament, is also discussed as a leading proponent of a more Church-friendly position within the party. The article also addresses how these positions have influenced policies during the period and implications for later policies, providing a case study of how implicit cultural policy is created over time through path dependency, in the sense that certain policy choices result in a series of events that are especially hard to depart from (cf. Levi 1997, Pierson 2000).

The article combines results from previous research in several academic disciplines – including Theology, Sociology, and History – with studies of primary sources. These primary sources include traditional political genres, such as newspaper editorials, official reports, parliament motions, political speeches, and autobiographies, but also a hymn adopted by the Church of Sweden in 1939 and strongly associated with the Young Church Movement.

### Central concepts and background

The relationship between, on the one hand, government and politics and, on the other hand, religion and religious organizations is often seen as one of the central characteristics of the implicit cultural policy of any country, if by implicit cultural policy we mean ‘any political strategy that looks to work on the culture of the territory over which it presides (or on that of its adversary)’ (Ahearne 2009, p. 143). Secularization can then be described as a cultural change in how people relate to religious matters, but also as a change in the implicit cultural policy of the state (relating to religion, religious organizations, and religious institutions). Frequently,

governments have supported this change through implicit cultural policies, e.g. in the case of French *laïcité* policies, described by Ahearne (2009) as a countermeasure by which French secularists sought to limit the reach of the Church. This is, in many ways, the most common way of thinking about secularization, i.e. as a process opposing religion.

In contemporary studies of secularization, it is increasingly accepted that secularization can follow many paths, the most commonly observed alternative to the path of *laïcité* policies being that of the US, in which religion is largely considered to be a domain of civil society, which the government has historically treated as generally positive but did not involve itself in. van den Breemer *et al.* (2014) have suggested that Scandinavia might exemplify a third path of secularization, combining a relatively high level of secularization in cultural terms with an equally high degree of legal and organizational integration of the state and an established church. Sweden, being a clear example of this category, combines a population where only 45% of the population believes in God<sup>2</sup> with a law that specifically regulates the activities and faith of the Church of Sweden, which until the year 2000 was a clear example of a state church.

Since this article is concerned with ideas about the nation, or conceptions of it, it follows Anderson's concept of the *nation* as an 'an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign' (Anderson 2006, p. 6). The nation can thus be separated from other imagined communities both by being imagined as ideally limited – geographically as well as in terms of who is included – and by claiming political sovereignty as a nation-state, in contrast to e.g. Christendom, an imagined community which historically has striven to include all, but at the same time recognized that power in the world was shared with governments that were relatively independent of the Church. Correspondingly, nation-states can be defined as 'states claiming to be nations' (Smith 1991, p. 143). The *state* is thus treated as an institution which may, in order to legitimize itself, lay claim to represent a national community. In the present nation-state system, it is generally assumed that all states do this.

Since nations are commonly imagined not only in geographical terms or as communities of citizens, but also as (ethno-)cultural communities, cultural policy – both explicit and implicit, and especially on the national level – becomes linked to legitimizing nation states by being a way for the state to influence how national culture is imagined by the people (Harding 2007). Similarly, other levels of government, or organizations such as a church, may use cultural policy to present alternatives to the national cultural community and its narratives, and thereby potentially strengthen alternative power centers, such as regional governments, religious institutions, or the European Union. They may also – as national churches have often done – associate themselves with the nation-state and strengthen the national community (cf. Smith 2003). These implications are especially present in heritage policies. Historical narratives bind nations together as ethno-cultural communities. These historical narratives are often supported by cultural policies of nation-states and nationalist organizations; they are expressed in schools, museums, academia, art, and a number of other ways, including the physical preservation of national monuments and other representations of heritage that can be seen in collections, as well as in cityscapes and countryside.

As Blückert (2000) points out, a church can also be seen as an imagined community. In Christian ecclesiology, the Church is often conceived of as a universal

community of all (true) Christians, but ‘churches’ can also refer to a multitude of different imagined communities, separated through geography as well as by creed. As such, the Church is also an institution, as well as an organization. In this article, I will also utilize the Weberian distinction between Church and denomination, and thus use the term *Church* as referring to a religious institution claiming to be the only legitimate such institution in a specific territory, or anywhere. It is recognized that these terms are rooted in the social organization of Western societies, where churches held this position and self-identity during medieval and early modern times, and to a varying degree still do so in some respects, especially in European countries. In the same context, a *denomination* can be distinguished from a Church by being understood as one among many religious communities active in the same society (Casanova 1994, 2014). The distinction can be understood in the context of a secularization process in which society moves from recognizing one religious institution as *the Church* and assigning it a unique position in relation to the state, toward considering religion a part of civil society and private life, where it may play a more or less important and/or political role.

This article specifically focuses on the Church of Sweden, a Lutheran church separated from the Roman Catholic Church during the Reformation, and from that point in time strongly integrated into the Swedish state, though retaining its separate episcopal structure. In large parts of Sweden, between the end of the Reformation and the late nineteenth century, the parishes had been the only local government; and the parish priest was the closest representative of the state, simultaneously performing religious and governmental duties, from church services to the registration of parishioners for taxation and military service. Together with the monarchy and a sense of ethnic community, Lutheranism played a significant role in the development of Swedish identity, and thus in the legitimization of the realm as a nation-state (Blückert 2000, Nordin 2000, cf. Smith 2003). Church laws, concerning everything from organizational matters to articles of faith, were integrated in secular law and made by the King and the parliament, in which the clergy, until 1866, formed one of the four estates. After the parliamentary reform of 1866, the lost status of the clergy as an integrated part of the national parliament was compensated with the creation of a National Synod, which the parliament had to consult on legal issues directly concerning the Church of Sweden (Ekström 2003).

Legal protection of church buildings as part of a national heritage can be traced at least back to the first royal decree intended to protect historical monuments, issued in 1666, but the present legal protection largely dates back to the royal decree on public buildings published in 1920 (SFS 1920). This, latter, decree prescribed both that no additional church buildings should be erected by the Church of Sweden without government approval, and that no existing church buildings should be significantly altered without a government decision which should take both heritage and artistic value into account. At present, church buildings belonging to the Church of Sweden retain this legal protection, and the Church of Sweden receives government grants intended to cover the extra costs that this may lead to.

### **Views within the established Church**

In the early twentieth century, it was a widespread notion that the established Church was facing a crisis. The Church, based in the parish structures of the countryside, was facing the dual threats of urbanization and the spread of both

nonconformist denominations and secular popular movements. Much of its response to these challenges was channeled in the Young Church Movement, a movement consisting of both clergy and educated laity within the Church, aiming to recreate a central position for the Church in the new society that was being built.

Among its defining moments was the ‘crusade’ of 1909, when Young Church men worked to reach out to laborers through lectures and pamphlets. The Young Church Movement also became associated with the political right, and with conservative nationalism, a link which became firmly established through the Church services held in connection to the Farmer’s March of 1914 (less than a year before the outbreak of World War I), a demonstration intended to petition the King for a strengthened military deference, openly challenging the Liberal government on the defense issue, one of the central political issues of the day. By supporting the Farmer’s March, Manfred Björkquist and other central figures in the Young Church Movement became involved in a political crisis that temporarily replaced parliamentary government with a civil service government personally appointed by the King (Tergel 1974, Mitchel and Tergel 1994, Claesson 2004). In the minds of the growing Young Church Movement, nationalism and Christendom became closely associated through a strong association of people, King, and church, with the King seen as the protector of both the Church and the people, the latter historically identified with the free yeoman class that was in 1914 invoked by the farmers petitioning the King under the blessings of the churchmen (cf. Tergel 1974, Blücker 2000, Claesson 2004).

Much of this synthesis is expressed in the hymn ‘Church of the Fathers’, which was written in 1909 by J.A. Eklund and soon became the informal hymn of the Young Church Movement. In 1919, it was added in an appendix to the official *Swedish Book of Hymns*, fully included in the revision of 1939 and removed in the revision of 1986. It was, in other words, recognized as a hymn during the years with which this article is concerned. The active act of including this already well-known hymn (Eckerdal 1988, Blücker 2000) as one of the contemporary additions to the hymn book can be seen as an example of the continued integration of the Young Church Movement into the main stream of the Church of Sweden during this period (Blücker 2000, cf. Tergel 1974). In the following, this hymn will be used as an illustration of some of the main themes of Young Church Movement ideology.

Church of the fathers in the land of Sweden,  
Most loved of communities on earth!  
Widely she extends from coast to coast,  
Firmly she is founded by the hand of the Lord,  
Built to be his temple in the North.

All was consecrated in the embrace of the Church:  
The bridegroom’s vow to his bride,  
The home, the newborn’s Christian name,  
The warriors’ voyage to the last haven,  
The banner and the garb of the King. (*Den svenska psalmboken* 1937, p. 154f)

The hymn is concerned specifically with the national church; although it is described as the Church ‘in the land of Sweden’, rather than as an entity separate



from the universal Church, and as the most loved of communities on earth, i.e. in this world. The central metaphors in the first two verses (quoted above) concern the Church as a place coinciding with the territory of the nation ‘from coast to coast’, ‘in the land of Sweden’; as a building, a ‘temple in the North’; and as place where important events in the life of the individual and the nation are consecrated. The latter place may be the church building, as well as the Church as an organization or community. The Church is the – metaphorical and physical – place of symbolic events: the place of weddings, baptisms, and funerals, but also of royal coronations (Blückert 2000). The Church is thus a place that connects the local and the national, the home and the nation, the people and their King, as well as the present and the past, all within a sacral imagined community. Manfred Björkquist spoke of Sweden as a ‘home for the people’ (Claesson 2004), a phrase that was also used by his father-in-law, the nationalist political scientist Rudolf Kjellén, but which would later be taken up by the Social Democrat leader Per Albin Hansson as a metaphor for the democratic welfare state. Specifically important to note is that the organic Church-centered image of Swedish society described in the hymn is described in the imperfect form – ‘All *was* consecrated’ – indicating that this unity of Church, nation, and home is now in the past. The last verse is a call for a reawakening (cf. Eckerdal 1988, Blückert 2000); ‘Come once more to fight for God, the gathering meeting its King’ (*Den svenska psalmboken* 1937, p. 155).

The metaphor of the reawakening is a central theme in nationalist ideology (Anderson 2006), well in line with Young Church support for mobilizing the Swedish people in favor of military armament, seen by Björkquist as closely linked to moral and religious reawakening (Blückert 2000). There is also a noticeable focus on heritage and institutions, as well as a striking lack of biblical references. As Eckerdal (1988) has pointed out, references to the ‘church’ were, in themselves, relatively new in the context of Swedish hymns at this time; prior to the late nineteenth century, the community of believers had typically been metaphorically referred to as ‘Zion’ or as the ‘congregation’ (*församling*), and the later word had even been used as the main translation for the Greek ‘ecclesia’. This can be seen as a sign of increasingly viewing the Church as an institution – inviting a building metaphor – rather than as a community. The status of the church building as a focal metaphor for both the ecclesiastical and the national imagined community is also clear in the hymn quote above. It is significant that we see this emphasis at a time as public engagement in the preservation of church buildings increased, as evidenced by all such buildings being protected by royal decree in 1920 (SFS 1920).

Among the speakers at Young Church meetings before World War I was professor Nathan Söderblom, who served as archbishop 1914–1931, and thus as the clerical head of the Church of Sweden. As one of the leading churchmen of his time, his views on the role of the Church in society deserve attention. Much of his work as archbishop focused on international and ecumenical dialog, for which he became a Nobel Peace Prize laureate in 1930. His own views on internationalism were based in a view of nations – and of national churches – as separate parts of a plurality that made up a larger whole (Blückert 2000). God had given a ‘special task to every people in the peaceable community which is formed of the Church of Christ, a task which no other people can fulfill’ (Söderblom 1922, quoted in Blückert 2000, p. 300). The historical task of the Swedish people and its Church



was closely associated with the Lutheran reformation and with freedom of belief, as well as with international dialog. Many of these thoughts can be considered related to later secular ideas about a special role for the Swedish nation-state in world politics, as a voice for democracy and as a model welfare state (cf. van den Breemer *et al.* 2014).

Within Swedish society, the Church should, according to Söderblom, remain independent of political parties, but nevertheless stand for solidarity and a Christian spirit (Blückert 2000, Claesson 2004). As an archbishop, he rejected conservative politicians who sought to protect the Church for purely traditional reasons, without ‘taking personal notice of her message of judgment and salvation’ (Söderblom quoted in Ekström 2003, p. 23). This stands in some contrast to the Young Church Movement’s emphasis on the Church as a link between the present and the past in Swedish history. Sweden had, according to Söderblom, historically managed to avoid both supranational papism and national Caesaropapism, i.e. both the dominance of a supranational church institution over the nation and the total dominance of the state or the king over the national church. The Church had thus remained autonomous, but at the same time firmly connected to the nation-state (Blückert 2000). The central role of the Church in society was to offer spiritual support, Christian teaching, and the sacraments to the Swedish people, requiring the presence of the Church in parishes in every part of the country. This perspective was further developed by, among others, bishop Einar Billing, into the ecclesiological concept of the *Folk Church*, the ‘People’s Church’ or ‘Church for the People’, a concept that still has a central role in the self-image of the Church of Sweden (Eckerdal 2012). This perspective can also be understood as based on the earlier Lutheran doctrine of the Two Realms, according to which the Church as an institution was part of the earthly realm – not the heavenly – but where all earthly government was exercised by divine right and the Church had the specific responsibility of guiding every Christian in living according to divine law, regardless his or her vocation or social status (Lange 2014, Witte 2014).

Söderblom’s view of independent religious denominations in Sweden can also be related to his belief in the national Church: Swedish free churches could have a role to play as bearers of new thoughts and impulses, but this role was, as pointed out by Blückert (2000), understood within the larger community of the Church of Sweden, i.e. Christianity within the Swedish nation state. Denominations originating outside of Sweden – especially the Roman Catholic Church – were merely foreign, and had nothing to add to the ‘special task’ of the Swedish people and its Church. In contrast to his view of autonomous denominations within his own country, stands not only Söderblom’s internationalist ecumenical work, but also his, and the other Church of Sweden bishops’, position that Church membership should no longer be mandatory, a change that they considered to be necessary for the Church to continue to function as a community of faith (National Synod 1929).

### Views within the SAP

While the Social Democrats had been involved in the formation of several governments in the instable political climate of the recently democratized Sweden of the 1920s, it was in 1930s that they started to dominate Swedish political life. With the exception a few months before the election of 1936, all Swedish governments from 1932 until 1976 were headed by the leader of the SAP.

The minister chosen to head the Ministry for Ecclesiastical Affairs in 1932 – and thus to be responsible for education, culture, and church affairs – was the radical journalist and intellectual Arthur Engberg. He would hold this ministerial position until 1939, when the government was reorganized as a broad wartime coalition and the leader of the Conservative party became Engberg's successor as the head of the Ministry for Ecclesiastical Affairs. During the previous decades, Engberg had been both a member of parliament and an active voice in Social Democratic newspapers. He was often identified as belonging to the radical left of the SAP but, although openly inspired by the writings of Karl Marx, he remained within the Party when the radical – partially Communist – faction broke away to form its own party. As time progressed, he became increasingly opposed to authoritarian Communism, but there was always also another side to Engberg's worldview. Blomqvist (2006) has described how Engberg's anti-capitalism was originally combined with anti-Semitism, and how it was only after the establishment of the Third Reich in Germany that he started to distance himself from his earlier anti-Semitic views.

Engberg's writings include numerous references to Spengler's (1991) *The Decline of the West*. While Engberg questioned the deterministic aspects of this work, he appears to have shared Spengler's concerns about the decreasing vitality and increasing superficiality of Western culture. In contrast to Spengler, he considered the empowerment of the people – both in the democratic and in the ethno-nationalist sense of the word – to be the key to a possible reinvigoration of Swedish culture, and of Western culture as a whole (Engberg 1945b, 1945d, 1945e). As a member of parliament and as a government minister, he argued for an active cultural and educational policy aimed at increasing the cultural enlightenment of the people as a whole, regardless of class, a view that became highly influential in the formation of twentieth century Swedish cultural policy as a policy field focusing on supporting and increasing the access to high culture (Frenander 2005, Harding 2007, Vestheim 2014). This high culture had elements of both recognized high art and traditions, the latter being the relevant part to this article. In a radio lecture he gave in 1941, we can get an image of Engberg's views on tradition. He takes his point of departure in a poem by von Heidenstam (1915) directed at a Madonna image in a medieval parish church:

The world of tradition is the world of reverence. There, we approach the personalities of the past. There whispers voices from the graves. There, live story and memory. Family, neighborhood and people meet us. [...] We become a link in a development which has started before us and which will continue after us. [...] There, they made their deeds, their joys and their sorrows, fought and suffered. (Engberg 1945a, p. 292f)

Engberg was not unique within Swedish Social Democracy in building on the past. On the contrary, Prime Minister Hansson often described Social Democratic policies as a continuation of the long Swedish tradition of the free yeoman farmers and of the proto-democracy of the medieval *ting* (assemblies) and parish councils. With a term already used by both the conservative political scientist Rudolf Kjellén and the Young Church Movement, he described his vision as a *folkhem*, a home for the people, combining the levels of home, *demos* and *ethnos* (Lagergren 1999, Linderborg 2001).

While Engberg was not unique in his respect for Swedish traditions, he was unusually vehement in his rejection of institutional religion, if not of spirituality as

such. During the early part of his political career, his position could be described as anti-Christian, certainly as anticlerical, describing the position with which he identified himself as ‘heathen’. The radio lecture from 1941, quoted above, focuses on the tension between dogmatism and the wider spirituality represented by the Heidenstam quote Engberg chose as his headline: ‘He has faith for whom much is sacred’, widening the perspective to sanctify humanity and its historical striving, and stressing the need for a ‘religious humanism’ (Engberg 1945a). Significantly, the faith of the common people was not represented by a cathedral or national religious institution, but by a wooden statue in a rural parish church. In this lecture, Engberg presented the statue as having once been central to the Swedish monarchy, but now situated in a rural periphery that could also be imagined as more authentic.

In his earlier writings, Engberg made a sharper distinction between Christianity and a humanistic Western culture originating in classical Greece. The heritage on which the future Sweden was to be built was that of the Swedish tradition of free yeoman farmers and local democracy, as well as that of the European humanistic tradition beginning in classical Greece, and expressed in philosophy and in the established art forms (cf. Vestheim 2014), not the Lutheran heritage defended by the Young Church Movement. As he wrote in a newspaper editorial in 1919:

The free and manly heathendom which emanates throughout history from a Socrates is in need of a renaissance. But its victory, which is a victory for a higher culture, has to be celebrated on the ruins of the Christian view of life. (Engberg 1945c, p. 229)

This victory was, in his view, not far away. In a manner similar to Nietzsche’s (2013) reasoning in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, he argued that Neo-Protestantism, or Liberal Protestantism, represented a form of hypocrisy, where the religious establishment, faced with the scientific world view, had abandoned all claims to providing a factual description of the universe and thus become meaningless (Engberg 1945c, 1945e). He referred to this as ‘the official lie in religious matters’ (Engberg 1945e). To address the situation, he proposed a six-step program to abolish the state church (Claesson 2004).

- (1) The secular and the clerical municipality [the municipality and the parish] are merged.
- (2) Right to freely leave the state church.
- (3) The abolition of the veto of the National Synod [on legislation related to the Church].
- (4) The regulation concerning the pure evangelical faith [as a requirement for certain positions] is abolished from the Instrument of Government §28.
- (5) Religious education in school is reformed to conform to the same principles as other subjects in the curriculum.
- (6) The state church is abolished. (Engberg 1945d, p. 280)

In the above, Engberg argued for the separation of Church and state to be preceded by the merging of parishes and civil municipalities, thus by the abolition of Church autonomy on the local level, as well as by the abolition of religious education in the obligatory school system. The power of the Church over the people needed to be disarmed before it was freed from government control.

This program was presented to parliament, but was never approved, not even by Engberg's own party. Among Engberg's fiercest opponents within the SAP was the priest and Social Democrat agitator Harald Hallén. Hallén was one of the many Social Democrats who saw socialism and democracy as consequences of Christian solidarity and equality, an outlook which had more in common with that of British utopian socialists than with the mixture of Marx and Spengler that characterized Engberg's thinking. Instead of arguing for a separation of Church and state, Hallén adopted the idea of the *Folk Church*, an idea which was already becoming increasingly influential within the Church of Sweden. Like Söderblom and Billing, he viewed the *Folk Church* as a provider of spiritual support that should be available for the entire people. Much like the Young Church Movement, he considered the Church to be in a state of crisis, but unlike these proponents of more conservative perspectives, he agreed with Engberg and other Social Democrats that democracy was the key to a reawakening. In his view, the Church had distanced itself from the masses of the people when it associated itself with the ruling classes, but unlike Engberg, he did not consider this distance to be impossible to overcome. Instead, he argued for a democratization of the Church as an independent democratic organization parallel to that of the state, starting with a democratization of, and an increased mandate to, the parish councils, which Engberg had proposed to abolish (Ekström 2003, Claesson 2004). Claesson (2004) has argued that Hallén won the ideological conflict with Engberg and thus has had a much larger influence on consequent Swedish church policy. I will return to this issue after a closer look at the policy choices made during the interwar years.

### Policy choices

The issue of abolishing the state Church was raised almost immediately after the Social Democrats had first become members of a Swedish government in 1917. In 1918, the leading Social Democrat Gustav Möller submitted a motion to parliament proposing that a government commission should be appointed to present recommendations on how the state church should be abolished. Engberg was in the minority supporting this motion for abolition of the Church. In the plenary session, he and Hallén were on opposing sides, but the latter was almost alone among the Social Democratic members to vote with the majority, against the motion. Hallén argued that abolishing the state church would leave religious issues to divisive and potentially reactionary nonconformist denominations (Minutes of the Second Chamber 1918, p. 59, Claesson 2004, Ekström 2003). A similar conflict took place in 1920, concerning the program of the SAP, when the party accepted Engberg's line by demanding that the state Church should be abolished, with the state retaining the public properties presently under Church administration, as well as demands for the abolition of confessional instruction in schools (Claesson 2004, Ekström 2003).

As noted above, the consensus among the leading men of the Church was in favor of a continued strong connection between Church and state, but opposed to increased government authority over religious matters. In a common motion to the National Synod of 1929, the bishops added the right to leave the Church of Sweden to this consensus, although Archbishop Söderblom was hardly alone in believing that only a small minority would do so (National Synod 1929, motion 1, Ekström 2003). However, it would take until 1951 before leaving the Church of Sweden became a legal right. In 1929, the conservative government at the time

chose not to act on this recommendation, even after it was accepted by the National Synod. The issue of abolishing the state church would not be resolved during the interwar period, in spite of the government being replaced first by a liberal government, and later by a Social Democrat one (Ekström 2003, Claesson 2004). This appears to reflect a consensus among the political parties, supporting the role of the state as the protector of the spiritual welfare of the people over the freedom of belief.

The major policy changes made during this period would concern the three connected issues of local Church government, laity representation in Church bodies, and Church property. The issue of the local government of the Church came into a new stage in 1919, when discussions in the parliament led to the appointment of a government commission to present recommendations for the organization of democratically elected laity representatives to local parish councils. At the suggestion of K.J. Ekman, a conservative member of parliament, this commission would also discuss the possibility of increasing laity representation on the national level of the Church (Parliament Missive 1920, p. 191, Ekström 2003, Claesson 2004). The resulting report argued in favor of laity representation, especially at the local level, arguing from the long tradition local parish democracy:

Our present municipal government has some of its deepest roots in the societies, parishes, which already in the days of the Medieval provincial laws had crystallized around the 'houses of God' or churches. (SOU 1923, p. 123)

Directly elected parish councils became a non-mandatory option for parishes from 1925, and obligatory from 1930 (Ekström 2003).

The issue of the Church property would reach an important point just before the fall of the liberal government that lasted from 1930 until 1932. The responsible minister at this time was Engberg's predecessor, Bishop Stadener. This period was marked by intense work in government commissions, directed at producing, and achieving consensus around a government bill on Church properties and priest salaries. When it was presented to parliament in 1932, the bill tied significant portions of Church properties to the now relatively autonomous Church parishes, rather than to the national level of the Church, or to the state. The local autonomy and financial independence of the parishes was thus secured before the change of government in 1932. The bill easily won the support of the National Synod and Church leadership. It also passed through parliament, in spite of the objections of the Social Democrats. Hallén was one of few Social Democrats who abstained from voting. Engberg rejected the idea as destroying central authority within the Church (SOU 1931, Minutes of the Second Chamber 1932, p. 58, Ekström 2003, Claesson 2004). The ownership of not only nearly all churches, but also of a significant amount of other land property and buildings, was now tied to the local parishes of the Church of Sweden. These parishes were, as we have already seen, associated, by both Engberg and a number of government commissions, with an ancient legitimizing local tradition of democracy and popular spirituality.

Concerning the protection of church buildings as physical heritage, almost no major ideological conflicts accrued during this period. Despite practical difficulties, the government commissions dealing with these issues 1920–1939 all appear to have taken for granted that churches the Church of Sweden should be protected, which had indeed been confirmed as the legal obligation of the Church in 1920. At

the end of the period, the protection of physical heritage was reinforced and extended to private properties with the Heritage Law of 1942 (SFS 1942), but previous rules regarding churches were retained. Not only the major national monuments were considered to be in need of legal protection, but also every church building in every parish of the country. Later government commissions have considered 1939 to be a reasonable time limit; newer churches have never been given the same automatic protection. This suggests that while the concerns for the national and local heritage attached to these churches in interwar years remained, the same values do not appear to have been ascribed to newer churches. This may be explained by the connection between churches and preindustrial farm lifestyle which was already considered threatened at the time with which this article is concerned, but which would largely disappear in the post-war years. The time discussed in this article was also the time when the heritage decree of 1920 was given its first practical interpretations.

### **Concluding remarks**

In spite of fundamental differences, the positions described in the above, both within the Church and in the SAP, have several assumptions and views in common. The first is that all members of the nation could be expected to – and should – hold certain beliefs in common. Söderblom, Billing, and Hallén all agreed that making the Christian message available to the public was a legitimate task of the state, or at least one in which it should support the Church. They were non-secular in that they considered it legitimate to build their views of church-state relations on the assumption of the truth of the Christian religion, or more specifically of Lutheranism. In the tradition of the Young Church Movement, Söderblom, but even more so Hallén, agreed that this common belief was essential to keeping alive, and reinvigorating, the nation as a cultural and civic community. Shortly, they believed in the connection between Church and nation, even though they believed that the tasks of the Church required a certain degree of autonomy from the state, as well as a certain amount of freedom of belief for the individual.

Engberg, who was considered a radical even within his own party, did not agree that the tasks of the Church had a legitimate place in the politics of a modern state. He did agree that caring for the spiritual welfare of the people was a legitimate task of the state, but not that traditional Christianity should be the dominant perspective. This combination means that he had much more in common with concepts of secularization generally associated with the anti-clerical French and general Latin/Catholic trajectory than what has ever been common in Sweden, arguing for the state to step into the place of the church as teacher of the people, thus making school policy and explicit cultural policy central tools in a mission of public enlightenment and cultural reinvigoration. Unlike in the Latin/Catholic trajectory, the Swedish state was already there, through its control over the state church. At the same time, Engberg agreed with the Young Church idea of the history of the Swedish people as a part of what made it a nation, and like many others, he identified much of the Swedish tradition with its local parishes and parish churches. Like the Young Church Movement, he believed the nation to be in need of a cultural reawakening, and considered this to be a task for the state. The need of preserving the physical memories and monuments of the past was thus an issue on which he could agree with the churchmen, even though his views on that history were



somewhat different from theirs. The state that would, in the words of Prime Minister Per Albin Hansson, be 'a good home for the people' (Lagergren 1999) was considered by both, Engberg and Hansson, to be a product of a history which had started in a distant past and would continue its progress into a distant future. Indeed, when the freedom to leave the Church of Sweden was suggested by its bishops in 1929, the idea was rejected by the government.

If the Church of Sweden was to be a state church, and Sweden was to be democratic, either the Church would have to become democratic or it would have to be entirely under the control of the democratic state. Claesson (2004) has suggested that Harald Hallén's concept of a democratic *Folk* Church has come to have a large influence on the subsequent democratic development of the Church, thus downplaying the role of both Engberg and Söderblom. This article suggests that the role played by Hallén, Stadener, and others in laying the foundations for a democratic Folk Church was made possible by their position in the middle ground of the confrontation between the Church and the radicals within, and to the left of, the SAP. Engberg's main contribution to shaping the development of Swedish church-and-state relations appears to have been providing pressure. In this context, it is important to note that even this 'heathen' enemy of the Church, who was the minister responsible for education, culture, and church policies for seven of the more formative years in modern Swedish history, agreed with the concept of historical memory as a foundation for the national community, perhaps even more so than the proponents of the national Church did. That Engberg preferred keeping the state church to abolishing it before abolishing religious instruction in the obligatory school system, with the risk of strengthening potentially reactionary independent Christian denominations, also appears to have been a determining choice to keeping the state Church, and thus to forcing on its democratization as a means to legitimize its continued relative autonomy within the framework of the democratic state.

The decision to connect Church property to the democratized parishes has become determining for later developments of church-and-state relations in Sweden. The Church of Sweden developed into a democratic institution paralleling the democracy of the state. This is also the structure which it has kept, and been legally forced to keep, even after its separation from the state. The post-2000 focus on heritage preservation in official church-state relations can be understood in light of the still prevailing consensus concerning the importance of preserving Church heritage established in the interwar years, in combination with the local Church ownership of most of the physical Church heritage, an ownership that was originally legitimized by a widely accepted respect for the local and democratic traditions of the parishes.

At the time with which this article is concerned, both the religious and the cultural welfare of the nation were considered legitimate responsibilities of the state. While religion, national heritage, and local heritage were, as we have seen, thoroughly interconnected issues, the Church was successful in its demands for autonomy on religious matters, whereas practical heritage preservation was largely delegated to the parishes, under the professional supervision of secular government bodies. This has remained the case even after the Church of Sweden ceased to be a state church in 2000. Heritage issues were part of an explicit and implicit cultural policy, which at the time with which this article is concerned already had a much broader political consensus behind it than Lutheranism had as a state religion. This state of affairs may have contributed to the state being seen as less of a threat to



the Church when concerned with heritage than concerning explicitly religious matters, and therefore motivating less demand for autonomy. Something that we do not see as a major position in the Swedish material from the interwar years is a view of the Church of Sweden as a denomination among many. Such a perspective would become more common in Sweden at a much later date, and may indeed be the reason why a new consensus concerning the need to separate the Church of Sweden from the state emerged in the 1990s.

When, today, the Church of Sweden is beginning to enter the public sphere as a part of civil society, this process has to be analyzed keeping in mind its current double role as one religious denomination among many – even if it is by a large margin the largest – and as a keeper of tangible and intangible national heritage. It is worth noticing that the Church of Sweden in its search for a new role as a civil society actor, does not appear to focus primarily on its role as a maintainer of a national heritage, but rather on its roles in, for example, social policies, human rights issues, and spirituality (e.g. Wijkström 2014). A role presently claimed by the Church of Sweden which appears to be closer to those discussed earlier in this article is its role as a maintainer of churches as rooms for spiritual refuge, contemplation, and prayer. A similar role was emphasized in the government deliberations and decisions that preceded the changes made in church-and-state relations in 2000, when the Church of Sweden ceased to be a state church:

Through the historical position of the Church, it has come to both, mirror and constitute an essential part of the history of Sweden. We are concerned with a living cultural heritage, which through the centuries has continuously been used, and is still used, for the same purposes. This is also a cultural heritage which is available for all, regardless of, for example, church membership, age, gender and citizenship. Everyone has the same possibility to experience the church buildings and their contents as historical and antiquarian memories and monuments, to take part of art and architecture, to listen to church music, or to search for a moment of tranquility and peace. (Prop. 1998/99:38, p. 134)

The statement in the government bill quoted above contains some echoes of the spirituality of von Heidenstam, and even Engberg, in its concerns for making the churches available for those searching for tranquility, peace, art, and historical memory, regardless of religious beliefs or affiliations, but it also has some things in common with the Folk Church emphasis on openness to the entire population of the nation, which is still espoused by the Church. The government bills preceding the reform also underlined the continued popular support for maintaining the old parish churches, as well as the continued identification with them as local cultural heritage. These, too, are ideas that we can recognize from the 1920s to 1930s. At the same time, the government considered the increasing religious pluralism of Swedish society to have undermined the legitimacy of government support for a single state church, calling instead for a more general support for a multitude of religious denominations for their general role in society (e.g. prop. 1994/95:226, prop. 1998/99:38). In contrast, the Church of Sweden receives direct monetary support from the government mainly for its role as a maintainer of cultural heritage. The Church of Sweden may thus face an increasing distance between its new self-identity as a denominational organization in civil society and the expectations placed on it by a government which continues to subsidize its maintenance of tangible heritage. The state, on the other hand, is faced with issues of how to

interpret national heritage in an increasingly multicultural and multi-religious society. Meanwhile, nationalists, for example in the Sweden Democrat Party, are showing signs of reviving the old identification of church and nation, e.g. by naming the Sweden Democrat organization dealing with church issues 'Fädernas kyrka' – 'The Church of the Fathers' – after the hymn discussed previously in this article. These later developments – which are likely to offer parallels to developments in other societies with previously established churches – are, however, still in need of more research.

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### Notes

1. Quotes from Swedish sources have been translated by the author of this article.
2. Based on a national survey including the question 'Do you believe in God?' (Weibull and Strid 2011).

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