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# On the Legacy of Lutheranism in Finland

Societal Perspectives

Edited by

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# Towards a Religion of Popular Sovereignty, Democracy and Equality: The Lutheran Sermon as a Nexus of Traditional and Modern Discourses on Political Values and a Collective Identity

## *Abstract*

The external forms of contemporary occasions of Finnish and Swedish national worship organized to celebrate political events differ little from those of early-modern Sweden. However, the expressions of the political values of the national community in them have been totally revolutionized. After discussing social theory on the relationship between religion, nationalism, modernization and secularization and introducing a long-term historical context, this chapter proceeds to analyse two sermons given in 2009 and 2010 to demonstrate the adaptability of the Lutheran religion to modernity: the national churches have turned from advocates of theocratic monarchy and uniformity to preachers of popular sovereignty, democracy and equality in multicultural societies. A gradually redefined religion has reconciled itself with radical societal changes. This development challenges simplifying secularization theses.

## *Introduction*

The external forms of Finnish and Swedish religious services in the observance of national days of commemoration or the openings of parliament in the early twenty-first century differ little from those held in early-modern Sweden. In the common realm of Sweden, such services were used to legitimate the Lutheran monarchy and to construct a shared collective political identity – one that associated the Finns, too, with the Swedish Crown. The occasions were organized in close cooperation between the monarch and the Clerical Estate.<sup>1</sup>

1 Ihalainen (2005b: subchapter 1.3). I am grateful to Gerard McAlester, Robert H. Nelson, Joonas Tammela and Jouni Tilli for their helpful comments. All translations from Swedish and Finnish originals have been done by the author.

Religious beliefs<sup>2</sup> and the content of the prayers and sermons of the services have changed dramatically since the division of the realm in 1809, however. This chapter focuses on the redefinitions of the national community and its societal values within national worship, inquiring into how and why modernity has changed the political content of public religion in two Nordic countries. What happens when long-term Lutheran trajectories such as the principle of unconditional obedience to secular rulers meet modern discourses of popular sovereignty, democracy and equality in a sermon (seen as a nexus, a meeting point of various discourses)? What kinds of new discourse consequently emerge, and how do they transform public religion as an element of national identity and a determinant of supposedly shared societal values? The analytical focus of my textual analysis is on the use of the concepts 'the people,' 'nation' and 'democracy' in political preaching.<sup>3</sup> I suggest that radical transformations in meanings assigned to them are related to the characteristic political flexibility of the Lutheran Church since the Reformation and to accelerating societal change especially after the Second World War.

I start by reviewing recent historical research and social theory on the relationship between public religion, nationalism, modernization and secularization. I then go two centuries back in time, to an age when the modernization of the content of political preaching began. The Protestant higher clergy, as part of the political elite, started to revise their discourse on the values of the national community to accord with the changing conceptions of this elite, communicating these via the lower clergy to wider audiences. Such revisions contributed to an evolutionary transition to modernity without open revolutions while simultaneously gradually secularizing the political theology of Lutheranism.

This adaptability of Lutheranism has maintained elements of an established church in the structures of the Swedish and Finnish polities, but it has led to these churches being politically little more than teachers of the prevailing state values. I demonstrate this by analysing two occasions of national worship that provoked some political debate in Finland and Sweden in the 2000s. The analysis shows that political and social changes related to modernization did not necessarily remove religion from public life though its relative importance may have decreased considerably. Lutheran teachings on obedience and uniformity have been replaced by an emphasis on the civil religion of nationalism, popular sovereignty and representative democracy and, in the Swedish case, even by human rights, equality and the deconstruction of the nation state. The Scandinavian Lutheran cases thus provide an alternative history of the transition to modernity in which gradual change has been reconciled with and assimilated into traditional structures and ways of thinking, with change taking place within the apparent continuity of the established order.

2 Hamberg (2003: 47).

3 For a discussion on the methodology of analysing multi-sited political discourse, including the concepts of trajectory and nexus, see Halonen, Ihalaïnen & Saarinen (2015: 5–6, 13, 15, 17–18).

*Public religion and nationalism in modern times*

Brad S. Gregory has emphasized the unintended long-term consequences of the politically supported branches of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation: the influence of Christianity in civic life has declined, theology been marginalized, pluralism increased, the modern Western world emerged. Gregory's interpretation suggests that, within Protestant churches, Christianity itself has become gradually redefined in revolutionary ways.<sup>4</sup> Yet as Hugh McLeod and his colleagues have shown, relations between church and state and experiences of secularization have been very diverse in different national contexts. This diversity gives reason to a critical review of sociological theories on any necessary connection between secularization and modernization – in the sense of the unavoidable disappearance of the social significance of religion in modern societies – and calls for empirical historical analyses of the changing role of religion.<sup>5</sup>

The relationship between secularization, modernization and the public role of religion has been reconsidered also by sociologists Hans Joas and José Casanova who recommend empirical (historical) studies on this interrelationship as opposed to simplistic teleological secularization theses that tend to view modernization processes as leading inevitably to the disappearance of religion. Joas and Casanova argue that secularization has been a contingent process caused by the intertwining of politics and religion characteristic of the European tradition of state churches;<sup>6</sup> it is not necessarily a universal phenomenon inevitably linked to modernization. The Lutheran Reformation contributed to this intertwining, leading to national churches becoming subordinate to their respective states.

According to Joas, the secular sphere had to be imagined before secularization became possible. Sacred concepts like sovereignty were not simply transferred to the secular ideology; rather, theology was gradually removed from modern theories of sovereignty. At the same time, the notion of sacredness has been frequently connected with secular content in the modern age. The sacralization of the person as opposed to that of the state – 'the institutionalization of the value of universal human dignity' – is a major feature of modern societies,<sup>7</sup> and one powerfully present in one of the sermons analysed below. Nationalism has also continued to award secular ideas a sacred status in modern times, as exemplified by another analysed sermon. Whereas human dignity does not have a cult of its own<sup>8</sup> – though perhaps one is emerging in some sermons – nationalism does have its cults, including the cult of popular sovereignty realized within a nation state. Associations between the sacred and the secular are at their strongest when made in national worship, in political sermons in which the national

4 Gregory (2012).

5 McLeod (2000); McLeod (2003: 13–16).

6 Joas (2008: ix–x, 5, 62); Joas (2009: 1, 4–5); Casanova (2009: 213).

7 Joas (2008: 68–70, 75, 134, 137).

8 See Joas (2008: 144).

identity is constructed, sacralised, secularized – and more recently even deconstructed.

The processes of first the sacralization and then the secularization of national identity both gained speed in the eighteenth century. However, a growing number of historians of eighteenth-century religion have rejected simplistic secularization theses based on the criticism of religion in the French Enlightenment and the French Revolution.<sup>9</sup> In the conventional version, popular sovereignty and democracy superseded religion after the French Revolution as part of the process of modernization.<sup>10</sup> An alternative interpretation has it that even seemingly secular values have been affected by traditional religious ones – either through the persistence of inherited patterns of thought or through their negation. Secularized societies in which the religious and secular spheres have become quite separate may still remain deeply religious in character.<sup>11</sup> Both the Finnish and Swedish polities, for instance, continue to organize occasions of national worship to celebrate political events and to argue over the political uses made of these, even though people's religious beliefs and participation in church services do not correspond with the high rates of membership of the national church in either country. The transition from a collective identification with the national church to one with the nation state<sup>12</sup> or even a multicultural and transnational community has not removed the need to ritualistically reproduce the notion of a common national church and state. The national churches have turned into advocates of popular sovereignty, voices of the people urging the political elites to carry out their duties.

Anthony D. Smith, too, has seen the religion-like elements of nationalism as crucial links between early-modern and modern forms of national thought. According to him, only religious-like sensations of the sacred can explain the survival of some of the strongest expressions of national identity. Many ways of thinking typical of modern nationalism either were constructed on the basis of the early-modern Biblical tradition of creating a collective identity or emerged as reactions against it. The decisive difference is that in nationalism the agent, object and goal of communal worship is the national community itself – no longer God or salvation. 'A sacred communion of the people' with a belief in a common origin, a unifying cult and a feeling of a moral community consisting of equals constitutes the essence of the political religion of nationalism. Within this sacred communion of the people, the voice of God is heard through the voice of the people. Smith has concluded that modern nationalism should be seen as a secularized version of the old myth of the holy chosen people.<sup>13</sup>

If the transition to modern nationalism required the introduction of conceptual innovations derived from the older framework of collective

9 Ihalainen (2012: 232–236).

10 See Casanova (1994: 7), and Casanova (2009: 219–220).

11 See also Casanova (2009: 228).

12 Casanova (2009: 214–215, 220).

13 Smith (2003: vii–viii, 3–6, 10, 15, 17–18, 32–34).

loyalties and identities, as Smith argues,<sup>14</sup> it is worth exploring – in retrospect and trying to avoid teleologies – conceptual transformations within the traditionalist forms of identity construction. Nationalism did not emerge merely as an alternative to religion or as a system of thought exploiting religious forms; it also emerged to some extent within public religion. The interaction between religion and nationalism (and democracy since the twentieth century) has also turned out to be surprisingly lasting in the Nordic countries. Political sermons that tell about the transformation of religious beliefs into national identities (and ultimately into democracy) and the coming together of a variety of political discourses have been produced in connection with national worship in a number of European countries for centuries. In them, evolving understandings of religion and changing discursive constructions of national identity and popular sovereignty have constantly come together, the speakers doing their best to formulate the supposedly shared values of the national community in ways that can be accepted by the majority of their audience. Ever since the late eighteenth century, we can find clergymen depicting the national community as an object evoking feelings of the sacred and even as an agent that can mould its own destiny. References to divine influence on that destiny have become more indirect and eventually been replaced by secular terms for popular sovereignty.<sup>15</sup>

### *Emerging redefinitions of national communities*

Empirical analyses of Protestant political preaching during the long eighteenth century show that a considerable number of conceptual redescrptions of the national community were introduced by the clergy of the national churches of England, the Dutch Republic and Sweden. In a long-term perspective, we can say that clerical formulations of the supposedly common values of these political communities were adapted to accord with the emerging more secular nationalism and, in the revolutionary era, to some extent also with weak notions of the sovereignty of the people, ones that reinforced inherited concepts of estate representation rather than of any modern representative democracy. Reflecting the evolving conceptions of the political elites, to which they themselves belonged, leading clerics increasingly presented the national community as an object of sacral sentience, allowing the nation, and rhetorically even the people at large, to play a more active role in the formation of their own fates.<sup>16</sup> In Smithian terms, the notion of the nation as a sacred community of the people was entering politico-religious discourse on national occasions and was being sacralised by means of traditional religion.<sup>17</sup> Religion and nationalism thus became amalgamated in the early

14 Smith (1991: 74–75).

15 Cf. Smith (2003: 17–18).

16 Ekedahl (2002); Ihalainen (2005b); Ihalainen (2007a); Ihalainen (2007b); Ihalainen (2009); Nordbäck (2009). For the Danish monarchy, see Bregnsbo (1997).

17 Cf. Smith (2003: 17–18).



phase of modern nationalism. This happened in all Christian churches, but it was reflected most distinctly in the Lutheran structures that made the established church part of the state. In the Swedish Diet, the Clerical Estate was one of the four decision-making bodies and the one that was officially responsible for coordinating political preaching as part of state propaganda.<sup>18</sup>

The potential to redefine the national community varied from country to country: the adoption of various secular political discourses led to much clearer reconceptualisations of the national community among the Whig bishops of the Church of England than among the Swedish Lutheran clerics. In England, a state that was a forerunner in modernization, the nation was increasingly described as an active political agent advancing the common good in this world as opposed to an Israel-like fallen nation awaiting divine judgment,<sup>19</sup> which was the traditional Protestant idiom.<sup>20</sup> As the relevance of the prototypical Israelite nation declined, Anglican religion became more nation-centred and more tolerant of other Protestant sects, and even its hostility to the old counter-concept 'popery' declined. The monarchy came to be viewed in less religious terms, while classical notions of patriotism, the rhetoric of liberty, the language of commerce and belief in scientific progress found their way into political sermons, though more distinctly in England than in the Dutch Republic or Sweden.<sup>21</sup> The rise of thought-patterns typical of modern nationalism thus took place not only parallel with and as an alternative to Protestant religion but also within it, as part of the process of the Enlightenment, which in Protestant countries was manifested as a development within the national churches rather than in opposition to them. Traditional religion was not merely replaced by modern national identities from the French Revolution onwards but turned into an increasingly secularized civil religion of nationalism – and later also of democracy. There were differences between Calvinist and Lutheran ways to modernity, and democracy in the sense of universal suffrage was realized in most Protestant countries only after the First World War. Catholic modernization would take yet another path, democracy becoming the source of legitimacy of the state more distinctly only after the Second World War.

Eighteenth-century preachers rarely spoke about popular sovereignty, though references to the supreme power belonging ultimately to the people were emerging in other areas of political discourse. As Smith has put it, nationalism was becoming 'a new religion of the people,' its objects of worship being the people and the fatherland.<sup>22</sup> And this new religion sometimes also possessed a democratic dimension.<sup>23</sup> In English and Swedish parliamentary and public debates, references to the will of the people were increasingly used by rival political groups to legitimate political demands long before the

18 Ihalainen (2005: subchapter 1.3).

19 Ihalainen (2005b: 579–580).

20 See Tilli (2012) and Ihalainen (2017) for twentieth-century examples.

21 Ihalainen (2005b: 581–597).

22 Smith (2003: 42, 45).

23 See Innes & Philp (2013) on the emergence of the discourse on democracy during the early nineteenth century.

outbreak of the American and French Revolutions. There were also some re-evaluations of democracy as an element of a mixed constitution, albeit with reservations.<sup>24</sup> There was a considerable time-lag in incorporating notions of popular sovereignty into political sermons in Anglophone Protestantism as well. Some clerics within the revolutionary Constitutional Church in France, by contrast, had no problem in viewing the nation and the people as objects of veneration and in justifying popular sovereignty, democracy and equality by appealing to both the Old Testament and the Gospels. Bishop Claude Fauchet might present political power as derived from the will of the people as being identical with that of God and insist on politicians being servants of the people. In France, the radicalization of the revolutionary church did not help in the conflict between the Revolution and the anti-reformist Catholic Church and Christianity more generally, as the Revolution ultimately sacralised the people and the nation over Christianity.<sup>25</sup> No similar confrontation between the church and the state ever occurred in Finland and Sweden, which explains the exceptional survival of political preaching in these countries. Revolutionary ideas, on the other hand, did not emerge in the political content of this preaching until the second half of the twentieth century.

The Swedish-Finnish clergy retained traditionalist ideas about a Lutheran national community that resembled that of Israel in the Old Testament up to the division of the realm in 1809 and beyond, particularly in Finland.<sup>26</sup> This challenges some over-interpretations concerning the radical influence of the Enlightenment on the Swedish clergy.<sup>27</sup> The continuities in Swedish political preaching are rather similar to those in Prussia.<sup>28</sup> As Sweden remained outside the direct influence of the French Revolution, no radical impulses were experienced there, although slight changes followed the fall of the Wasa dynasty, the reintroduction of a limited constitutional monarchy and the accession of the Bernadottes. Thus at the Diet of 1810, Bishop Gustaf Murray revised the Lutheran language of politics by advising the Swedes to take their fate into their own hands instead of merely imitating Old Israel. It was through the four estates that 'the voice of the nation' could be heard. The role of the citizen appeared as slightly more active as well: as they enjoyed such a high degree of law-bound civic liberty, the Swedes should love their fatherland and advance the common good.<sup>29</sup> However, the bishops continued to denounce a democratic political order as irreligious, seeing it as an attempt by the masses to constitute the law, a form of revolutionary anarchy that only led to terror and disasters of the French revolutionary kind.<sup>30</sup> Early nineteenth-century Lutheranism was by no means yet the religion of democracy and would not become such for at least a hundred

24 Ihalainen (2010).

25 Ihalainen (2008a: 32–39).

26 Ihalainen (2007a).

27 Winton (2006), for instance.

28 Ihalainen (2008b: 252–257).

29 Ihalainen (2007a: 30, 35–36).

30 Faxé (1818); Bregnsbo & Ihalainen (2011: 117).

years, when some Swedish clergymen became leading advocates of Social Democracy.<sup>31</sup>

In the Finnish case, the continuities in Lutheran political preaching are even more obvious. There was no change resembling the Swedish development when Alexander I of Russia became the Grand Duke of Finland in 1809. The Finnish political elite, including the bishops, aimed at conserving the Gustavian constitution and the Lutheran religion and opposing all Russian alternatives and set out to construct a national identity using the Lutheran Church to do so.<sup>32</sup> In the meantime, the message of political sermons remained in line with traditional Lutheran political theology. Professor Gustaf Gadolin's closing sermon at the Diet of Porvoo in 1809, while recognizing the need to dedicate oneself to public affairs at a diet to which the Emperor had summoned the representatives of the nation, emphasized Christian teachings that enjoined each estate to peacefully concentrate on performing its proper duties. The bishop continued to maintain a non-political understanding of the people as hard-working members of society, loving their monarch and happy with their lot.<sup>33</sup> This was far removed from any French revolutionary or later doctrines of popular sovereignty, democracy and equality.

By the early twenty-first century, however, Lutheran national worship in Finland and Sweden has been transformed so that it is now based on the sacralised principles of popular sovereignty, representative democracy and equality rather than on any original Biblical or Lutheran notions of politics. What has happened? Let us explore two cases to find out.

### *The contexts of preaching in 2009 and 2010*

A service on October 2, 2009 in Turku, initiated by the Finnish government, completed a series of events held over one and a half years to observe the bicentennial of the division of the early modern Swedish realm and the creation of a separate Finnish administration within the Russian Empire. In 1809, Alexander I pacified the conquered country by allowing it to retain the Lutheran religion, the Swedish constitution, its representative estates and the established legal system and to form a bureaucracy of its own.<sup>34</sup> The state service brought together the country's political leaders and, symbolically, through broadcasting, the nation as a whole. It was attended by the political, administrative, military and intellectual elite, including many members of parliament. It was held in Turku Cathedral – generally regarded as a major symbol of historical connections to Western civilization

31 Particularly interesting in this respect is Harald Hallén, a leading Social Democrat MP. Cf. the Lutheran clergy of the conservative National Coalition Party, who chastised the Finnish people for their sins that led to the Civil War (1918). Ihalainen (2017).

32 More on this in Ihalainen (2005a).

33 Gadolin (1809).

34 Ihalainen (2011: 77–78); Ihalainen & Sundin (2011: 189–191).

– and was exceptionally solemn even in comparison with annual services for the opening of parliament and Independence Day.<sup>35</sup> Even though this service was designated as ‘ecumenical’ and included prayers by Orthodox and Catholic bishops and a representative of the free churches, the Lutheran liturgy dominated.

During the service, Jukka Paarma, the Lutheran Archbishop of Finland, chastised Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen and the political elite as a whole for an ongoing scandal on election financing. This scandal had been escalating for a year and a half. The media had reported how private companies and charity foundations had secretly financed the election campaigns of mainly centrist and rightist candidates before the previous election of 2007, while trade unions had sponsored leftist candidates. While it was legal to sponsor and receive support for elections, some elected MPs had failed to report the sums to the Ministry of Justice in accordance with the law. There had been allegations that Prime Minister Vanhanen had abused his position as the chairman of a charity to arrange election financing for himself. A TV program on current affairs had also claimed that he had received free building materials as a bribe. At the same time, his government was being pressurized to introduce stricter legislation on party financing. Two months later, the Prime Minister would announce that he would step down from the leadership of his Centre Party the following summer. He was later exonerated by the parliament from charges of corruption,<sup>36</sup> but the scandal provided the Archbishop with an opportunity to express the *vox populi* against the government without being accused of populism.

A year later, on October 5, 2010, the Bishop of Stockholm Eva Brunne preached at the opening of the first session of a new parliament in Stockholm Cathedral, where such national ceremonies had been celebrated for centuries. The royal couple, the Crown Princess and many members of the parliament were present at this brief ecumenical service, which focused on the sermon.<sup>37</sup> While the Bishop, a known Social Democrat, was preaching, the MPs of the right-wing populist Sweden Democrats party marched out of the cathedral in protest. Though Brunne named no party, the protesters interpreted her speech as an inappropriate attack against them, particularly as the bishop had the day before participated in a street demonstration protesting the admission of the Sweden Democrats into the parliament. The protest by the Sweden Democrats was condemned by other party leaders as uncalled-for: the Centrist Maud Olfsson and the Social Democrat Mona Sahlin said that the bishop had merely spoken about the equality of all people in accordance with the teachings of the Church of Sweden. For Sahlin, the reaction only confirmed the existing general conception of the Sweden Democrats.<sup>38</sup> Brunne had not only addressed an issue that concerned core

35 The present author attended and observed the ceremony. The references provided here are based on written documents.

36 *Yle News*, January 30, 2013.

37 The program of the opening of the parliamentary session, October 5, 2010.

38 A news report in *Aktuellt* on October 5, 2010, including interviews with leading politicians and Bishop Brunne.

societal values but also participated in a political confrontation in which the other parliamentary parties strove to exclude the right-populists from all cooperation. While the King's speech was distinctively apolitical, hers was a contribution to an ongoing political debate.<sup>39</sup>

These two cases of present-day political preaching show how adaptable the Lutheran churches can be in redefining the political values of national communities: A twenty-first-century Lutheran Archbishop has no problem in declaring the voice of the people – rather than that of God only – to the Prime Minister. Another bishop can voice the 'politically correct' values of the majority of the political elite, promoting the exclusion of a dissident minority.

Both speech acts were legitimated by the inherited position of the church in a changing society and ultimately by the Word of God; however, they also illustrate the radically changed position of the established Lutheran churches: instead of merely declaring the views of the administrators and constructing a political community in accordance with their wishes, the church reminds the state of its values and has moved towards the civil society, becoming one of the pressure groups that try to influence politics in the name of the people, the majority of whom are still members of it.

Owing to its inherited status as the spiritual embodiment of the political community, the church should, in principle, have a powerful say. As a consequence of the secularization of the last fifty years, however, this is far from self-evident: the news coverage of the state service in Turku was limited and exhibited a lack of understanding of its historical background. Some papers pointed to the Archbishop's criticism of the morality of politicians and to the unwillingness of the Prime Minister to answer questions about the scandal, or emphasized the contrast between the power-holders celebrating and the people watching outside.<sup>40</sup> The content of the sermon in Stockholm Cathedral, by contrast, became a major news story because of its topicality. Even the political use of history surfaced when the other parties suggested that the bishop had merely defended the established values of the polity against their violators.<sup>41</sup> The political significance of the church as a forum for national worship and debate on values has evidently survived even in secularized Lutheran political communities.

39 The King's speech at the opening of the parliamentary session, October 5, 2010.

40 The service was broadcast about two weeks after it had taken place; *Ilta-Sanomat*, October 2, 2009; *Iltalehti*, October 2, 2009; *Turun Sanomat*, October 2, 2009; *Keskisuomalainen*, October 2, 2009; A report in *Helsingin Sanomat*, focused on the forms of the ceremony, the complicated security arrangements for a meaningless elitist event, the uncomfortable position of the Prime Minister and his failure to answer questions from the media. Piia Elonen, *Helsingin Sanomat*, October 3, 2009. A former minister sent a letter to the Editor, lamenting the fact that the leading newspaper had failed to see the importance of the event for the national identity and to consider the Archbishop's 'serious message to the holders of power.' Paavo Rantanen, *Helsingin Sanomat*, October 6, 2009. The countenance of Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen when leaving the service suggested to observers that he, too, had taken in the message.

41 *Aktuellt*, October 5, 2010; *Expressen*, October 5, 2010.

*Popular sovereignty from the pulpit*

Archbishop Paarma, a church historian of early-modern Sweden, viewed himself as a political theorist whose duty it was to express the supposedly shared values of the national community to its assembled representatives. His sermon opened with a passage that had been used on a parallel occasion in the Turku Cathedral two centuries previously: 'Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies. Whereby the people fall under thee' (Psalms 45:5). While emphasizing the timelessness of the quote, Paarma applied it in ways that would have been unthinkable in the small Lutheran Grand Duchy of Finland that had recently come under Russian rule. In 1809, the passage was obviously intended to flatter the conqueror.<sup>42</sup> According to Paarma, its equal relevance for Old Israel, the Grand Duchy of Finland in 1809 and the Republic of Finland in 2009 was to be found in the fact that it concerned 'the means, values and principles by which this country is to be governed' and in expressing 'what the people expect from their holders of power.'<sup>43</sup> This was a modernist reading of an Old Testament theocratic adoration of a new king, proposing that Biblical truths remained applicable to present-day political realities.

After recalling some principles of the Swedish-Lutheran tradition of law-based government, Paarma discussed the political values of the national community through the political use of history, summarizing the relationship between the Finnish people and their rulers during the two previous centuries:<sup>44</sup>

The people of Finland have always honoured and trusted their rulers when they have recognized that these serve the cause of truth and honesty. Grand dukes [emperors] were respected, and statues were erected in their honour as long as the people understood that the ruler was keeping his words and promises. When that was no longer the case, the trust was lost and a crisis followed.

Thus, if the citizens begin to suspect that the holders of power might be dishonest or that they are testing the limits of the law, the elements of crisis are at hand. If the atmosphere of administration and politics is not clear and transparent but is instead dimmed by doubts, there is every reason to act. If the law does not correspond with the common sense of morality, it must be changed. If there is reason for doubt, there must be repentance. The Finnish people have always been merciful to a contrite repentant.

Paarma's point was that the people wanted the ministry to prepare a new law on party financing as an act of repentance; thereby the politicians would earn the 'mercy' of the Finnish people (note: not of God). Following the

42 The text of the sermon of October 2, 1809 has not survived, unlike the opening and closing sermons of the Diet of Porvoo earlier in 1809. See Ihalainen (2011); The psalm refers to God's anointed one, who is handsome, gracious, blessed and victorious and in whom truth, meekness and righteousness are united. Ps. 45:2–7. Translation above according to the King James Version.

43 Paarma (2009).

44 Paarma (2009).



medieval premise *Vox populi, vox Dei*, the Archbishop was declaring the will of the people. He called on politicians to provide an ethically better example for the people:

[...] to show that a human being with a conscience lives and prospers here. We need such examples in the leading positions of the various sectors of our nation. They can strengthen the trust through which a nation can pull together.<sup>45</sup>

Paarma proceeded from the principles of popular sovereignty to the construction of a Nordic consensual national community, building on the secularized language of nationalism shared by the members of the political elite. For him, the Lutheran nation of the twenty-first century consisted of virtuous individuals and was itself the major political agent from which all political power derived. In the Finnish language, the semantic connection between 'the people' (*kansa* in Finnish), 'the nation' (*kansakunta* in Finnish) and 'citizens' (*kansalaiset* in Finnish) reinforced associations between ethnicity, democracy and citizenship.<sup>46</sup> This was a sermon on the civil religion of nationalism and representative democracy, not an expression of Old Testament theocracy.

The rest of the program reinforced the message: nationalist Lutheran psalms called for the divine protection of 'our people and land'<sup>47</sup>, and the prayers contained Old Testament references to 'the guidance and blessing which He has given to our people,' 'this good country which You have given us,' 'Your mercy which has led our people through many difficulties and struggles to this day' and 'the freedom of the state which You have given to the Finnish people,'<sup>48</sup> the emphasis being throughout on national liberty defended implicitly in the Winter War rather than on individual liberty. There were also calls for divine help 'so that we may take care of each other and act together' and an Orthodox prayer for divine support so that the Finns would 'use the national liberty which You have mercifully given us to develop our country in all possible ways and primarily to build Your realm.'<sup>49</sup> The Catholic bishop characteristically lamented the way in which human weakness and sin had divided Christendom into numerous churches and communities.<sup>50</sup> The representative of the Salvation Army echoed the Lutheran Archbishop's words by praying to God to make all religious leaders 'challenge governments and political leaders to set justice as the first priority for everyone [...] instead of trivial political interests, power and status.'<sup>51</sup> Thus a national community continued to be constructed discursively and

45 Paarma (2009).

46 Hyvärinen (2003: 83).

47 Psalm 55:2 in the Swedish-language psalm book, *Valtioneuvosto 200 vuotta* (2009: 19).

48 Dean Rauno Heikola, *Valtioneuvosto 200 vuotta* (2009: 5, 8).

49 Dean Rauno Heikola, *Valtioneuvosto 200 vuotta* (2009: 5); Leo, Archbishop of Karelia and All Finland, *Valtioneuvosto 200 vuotta* (2009: 13).

50 Bishop Teemu Sippo, Catholic Church, *Valtioneuvosto 200 vuotta* (2009: 14–15).

51 Colonel Dick Krommenhoek, Salvation Army, *Valtioneuvosto 200 vuotta* (2009: 16).

ecumenically, a Protestant feature being to advise political decision-makers on the proper policy. The external forms, the ultimate function and some of the content of the service were early-modern, but the emphasis on nationalism and popular sovereignty were distinctly modern.

### *Supporting the prevailing definition of democracy*

The political controversy which Eva Brunne's sermon at the opening of the Swedish parliament caused demonstrates that state religious services were more than mere ceremonial – that they indeed addressed the key values of the polity. It also illustrates how radically more modern the polity constructed by the Church of Sweden is than the Finnish conception. Eva Brunne herself, an openly lesbian, Social Democratic female bishop whose inauguration had been boycotted by some other Protestant churches, embodies this radicalism.<sup>52</sup> Brunne's understanding of her task, echoed by the interviewed party leaders, was 'to listen to and engage in a dialogue with our age and to make it accord with the Gospels [*stämman av det mot evangelierna* in Swedish].' The equality of all people had been her motto in her election campaign for the bishopry, and it was also the Word of the Scriptures, she emphasized. According to Brunne, she had merely encouraged the MPs to perform the duty they had received from the voters.<sup>53</sup>

Much of Brunne's sermon reiterated the principles of popular sovereignty and democracy, emphasizing the trust which the voters (referred to as 'we' and not 'the people') had demonstrated to the elected MPs and the responsibilities which that entailed. The concept of democracy was central in her argumentation, as in Swedish political discourse more generally, unlike the Finnish debate or Paarma's sermon. Like Paarma, Brunne adopted the role of the voice of the voters' will, recognizing the difference between the original and current audiences but viewing Biblical teachings as applicable today nevertheless. In the spirit of Social Democratic solidarity, she extended the political responsibility of the Swedish MPs beyond the nation state to concern the whole world; instead of 'the people' (*folket* in Swedish), she spoke about 'human beings' (*människor* in Swedish). This reflects a difference between Finnish expressions of nationalism and Swedish tendencies towards universalism and even distances itself from the Social Democratic idea of a 'people's church' (*folkkyrkan*, cf. the Swedish concept of society as *folkhemmet* [people's home]). Brunne's understanding of democracy included a readiness for direct action with God's help on behalf of human rights. This again went far beyond Paarma's conception of a community of a people trusting in their rulers. Brunne's conclusion, which provoked the Sweden Democrats to walk out, was that racism was irreconcilable with Swedish democracy. This not only questioned the justification of the name of the populist party but also endorsed the demonstrations against them. The bishop implied that the great majority of Swedes considered that the human

52 *Svenska Dagbladet*, November 15, 2009.

53 *Aktuellt*, October 5, 2010.



dignity of all persons was the same irrespective of ethnicity, gender, age or sexual orientation and that this majority was, in the name of democracy, ready to prevent any segregation of human beings.<sup>54</sup> She stood on the side of the majority opinion, which wished to exclude the Sweden Democrats from politics on account of their racist opinions. Her speech act was made possible by the prevailing understandings of the Swedish identity, in which the concepts of democracy, freedom, equality and universal solidarity play key roles. The references to Biblical teachings stemmed from the bishop's desire to make a political point relating to a current political debate, not from any Lutheran tradition of preaching. Historical continuity was much less prominent than in Paarma's rather more conventional though still modernist sermon.

### *Conclusion*

When related to the Nordic cases much of what Gregory, McLeod, Joas, Casanova and Smith have argued seems plausible: the analysed examples demonstrate the survival of religion-like elements of nationalism and even democracy, though in radical Swedish Lutheranism even the nation as a sacred community is relativized. The national community has nevertheless risen into an object of communal worship equal to God: it was on behalf of the nation that prayers were recited and hymns sung in Turku, while in the sermons the sovereignty, will, readiness to act and mercy of the people appeared to constitute the driving force behind the progress of the national community.

The political content of Finnish and Swedish Lutheran sermons has evidently changed dramatically during the past two centuries: the theocratic advice of political obedience has been replaced by democratic control of the government and encouragement of the voters to act to advance equality. Paarma and Brunne appear as downright revolutionaries within the Lutheran tradition of political preaching. In the Swedish case, even deconstructions of a uniform nation state have entered political preaching.

Nothing in Luther's writings or an empirical analysis of political sermons from the long eighteenth century suggests that such democratization would be an innate characteristic of Lutheran political theology. However, the political control of public religion that has been a characteristic of Lutheran establishments since the Reformation does explain the flexibility and even resilience of Finnish and Swedish Lutheranism in reconciling its political teachings with those of the current rulers and the opinions prevailing among the political elites. Since the political leaders' conceptions of the national community and the people's political role were transformed after the adoption of the republican constitution in Finland<sup>55</sup> and the introduction of universal suffrage in Sweden in 1919 and increasingly since the 1960s with

54 Brunne (2010).

55 See also Portman (2014).

societal change<sup>56</sup> that has strengthened leftist tendencies within the national churches, the bishops have indeed engaged in a dialogue with the society of their time and accommodated their political teachings accordingly. Thereby Lutheranism has become a religion of popular sovereignty, democracy and equality instead of being one of nationalism only, hiding the revolutionary change behind the trajectories of external form and radically reinterpreting Biblical passages. This change has been more dramatic within the radically modern Swedish political culture than in the rather more conservative Finnish one. The rise of nationalism did not imply the separation of religion and politics in Finland and Sweden, nor did modernization remove the political relevance of religion completely, though it obviously did in the long run secularize its political content thanks to the ability of Lutheranism to constantly redefine its relationship to political power.

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56 McLeod (2003: 16–19).

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