LUTHERANISM IN THE SCANDINAVIAN COUNTRIES

Prayer
Scripture: Acts 20:32
Hymn: 642 "O Lord My God"

Martin Luther's influence spread far beyond Germany. By the end of the Reformation Period, Lutheranism had produced the imperial Lutheran Church of Germany. Outside of Germany the main conquests of Lutheranism were in the Scandinavian countries. Almost as soon as Luther broke with Rome the influence of Wittenberg began filtering into these northern lands. Lutheranism was first carried to Scandinavia by young men who had studied in Wittenberg, by men who had come across Luther's writings, and by German merchants who had settled in the large commercial centers of the Scandinavian lands. The Reformation in the Scandinavian countries was carried on and brought to a successful issue by rulers who saw in Lutheranism a means of furthering their own dynastic interests. They saw in the Reformation a way to deliver their people from the tyranny of the powerful nobles and great ecclesiastical lords, and they saw in the large possessions of the church a way to relieve their exhausted treasuries without overburdening the poor taxpayers. The spread of the Reformation in these countries was bound up with social, economic, and political considerations, even more than in other countries.

The Scandinavian countries were late in entering the main stream of European history and lagged far behind in civilization. Christianity had been introduced into these lands during the Carolingian Renaissance of the ninth century. There was still much paganism when the Northmen invaded England, Ireland, France, and Southern Italy. In the homelands and in the conquered countries Christianity became the religion of the people. Until the twelfth century Scandinavian bishops were under the see of Bremen. In 1104 Lund in Denmark was given metropolitan rank. As a result of the great mission work of the Cardinal of Albano, Nicholas Breakspeare (afterwards Pope Adrian IV) Trondhjem became the metropolitan see of Norway and Uppsala became the metropolitan see of Sweden. Population wise all three were considered small; they were poor; intellectually and politically they were only second or third rate powers.

In the Union of Kalmar of 1397 the nobles of the three countries agreed to unite under the leadership of the Danish ruler, with each country retaining its own laws and customs. The Danish kings found their role a very difficult one. There was no law of succession. At each election the king had to make large concessions to the nobles and clergy. The royal domain dwindled and the nobles and clergy increased in power. Both were exempt from taxation. By the time of the Reformation the free peasants had been reduced to landless peasants and serfs.

THE REFORMATION IN DENMARK:

In 1513 Christian II became King of Denmark. Christian II (1513-23) was a typical Renaissance king, planning to put together a strong territorial state that would be blessed with prosperity and learning. He was one of the best educated and most learned of
the princes of Europe—probably equalled in learning only by Duke George of Saxony. He was a man of great ability and vigor, but unscrupulous in method. He was dedicated to breaking the power of the nobles and the clergy. Having been reared in the household of a townsman he was very sympathetic with the common people. He was a nephew of Frederick III of Saxony and would become the brother-in-law of Charles V.

To the great displeasure of the nobles and clergy Christian surrounded himself with foreign and low-born advisers. His chief and most trusted bourgeois adviser was Sigbrit Willems, a native of Amsterdam, who was an inn-keeper in Bergen. She was the mother of his beautiful mistress, Duiveke (Dutch for Little Dove). Sigbrit was a woman of great wisdom, especially in commercial and fiscal matters. She retained her influence over Christian even after he married Isabella, sister of Charles V, in 1515, and Duiveke continued as his beloved mistress, until she died of poison in 1517. Suspicion fell on a noble, the royal agent of Copenhagen, Torben Oxe. Although a noble was supposed to be tried by his peers, Christian had Torben Oxe tried by a jury of peasants who condemned him to be beheaded. From this point Christian flouted the nobility and clergy and Sigbrit was his chief counselor.

One of Christian's early challenges was to force Sweden to accept his authority. In the midst of his planning to secure control of Sweden Pope Leo X sent his nuncio, Giovanni Arcimboldo, into Scandinavia, to sell indulgences and to collect alms for the construction of St. Peter's. Arcimboldo won his way into the confidence of Christian and then betrayed him, leaking all his plans against Sweden to the Swedes. The irate king confiscated all the money the nuncio had collected and the nuncio had to flee.

The Swedes were in the midst of a civil war. One party, led by Gustavus Trolle, archbishop of Uppsala, favored co-operation with King Christian. The popular party, led by Hemming Gad, bishop of Linköping, opposed the king and set up Sten Sture as administrator of Sweden. The Swedes deposed Trolle in 1517. Pope Leo excommunicated Sture. In January, 1520, Sture was defeated and mortally wounded by Christian's forces. Sture's widow, Christina, valiantly continued the defense of Stockholm until Christian persuaded her to give up in return for a general amnesty. Christian was crowned king of Sweden in Stockholm on November 4, 1520. After the coronation festivities, he broke his promise of amnesty and arrested the nobles and magistrates who had led the opposition to him. Ninety men were tried and beheaded. Their bodies were left where they fell for three days and then burned. This Stockholm bloodbath was the end of the Union of Kalmar. Sweden broke away and became independent under its own King Gustavus.

Christian in Denmark began working to build a state church. He ignored promises to the nobles and clergy and began taxing both. He set up a new royal supreme court to try both civil and religious cases. No appeals were allowed to the Roman Curia. Non-residency by clergy was forbidden. Clergy were required to marry before they could hold property. No person could be ordained unless he had studied at a university and could teach and preach in the Danish language. Nobles were deprived of their right to shipwrecked property. Serfdom was abolished. Municipal governments were reformed. Danish commerce and agriculture were encouraged and greatly improved.
Christian gave great encouragement to learning. The University of Copenhagen had been authorized by Pope Paul V in 1419 and was actually founded by Christian I in 1478 with professors in law, theology and medicine. Christian II founded a Carmelite House in the university and brought in the famous Paul Eliae (Eliaesen or Povel Helgesen), a student of the writings of Erasmus and Luther, an advocate of reform in the church, from Elsinore, to give daily lectures in theology. He has been styled "The Colet of Denmark." Christian ordered schools for the poor opened throughout his kingdom with compulsory education. He sought to improve textbooks.

Christian also wrote his uncle, Frederick III, to send him a theological scholar trained by Luther and Carlstadt. Frederick sent Martin Reinhard. He tried to teach and preach through an interpreter. He knew no Danish. He failed miserably. Some of the clergy dressed as children and imitated the gestures of the poor German. Christian had to send him back to Germany. He begged Luther to pay them a visit. Carlstadt did come for a short visit. The Edict of Worms (1521) put an end to bringing foreign preachers to Copenhagen for a time.

In 1522, while Christian II was faced by bitter enemies in Sweden, war with the city of Luebeck, and involved in a controversy with his uncle, Duke Frederick of Schleswig and Holstein, Jutlanders and some of his nobles revolted against Christian. He was too discouraged to decisively put down the revolt. In 1523 the Danish nobility and clergy deposed him and made Duke Frederick their king. Christian fled to the Netherlands. He and his friends continually plotted his return. In 1531 he was thrown into a dungeon where he was kept in solitary confinement for seventeen years. The last eleven years of his life were spent in less restricted confinement.

FREDERICK I. (1523-33):

Duke Frederick of Schleswig and Holstein, who became Frederick I, had become interested in Lutheranism before he came to the throne. He saw in Lutheranism a means to attain his political ends. He had promised the nobles and the clergy to respect their privileges and to prevent the preaching of heresy. Once he was king he began to work to drive a wedge between nobles and clergy, holding before nobles the prospect of enriching themselves by taking church lands. He gave encouragement to Lutheran preachers.

Paul Eliae (Eliaesen) spoke out against the corruptions in the old order but could not bring himself to go all the way with Luther. He did not want to break with the historic church but he translated Luther's writings into Danish, advocated holding worship in Danish, communion in both kinds and marriage of the clergy. Some of his disciples went much further. Hans Tausen, who became known as "The Danish Luther", was the son of a peasant of Fyen. He was sent abroad to study by the Johannite priory of Antvorskov. He studied and lectured at Rostock until he was appointed professor of theology at Copenhagen. His prior sent him abroad for further studies at Cologne and Louvain. On his own he went to Wittenberg and listened to Luther. His prior summoned him home in 1524 and imprisoned him for Lutheranism. He was sent to the Johannite house at Viborg where he gained the confidence of his prior who allowed him to preach to the people. He created a great sensation. He fled from the monastery and received protection in the house of a chief citizen. He became a powerful preacher of Lutheranism.
Joergen Sadolin, who had studied under Luther and who married one of Luther's sisters, became a very effective open-air preacher of Lutheranism. In Malmö, Klaus Mortensen the cooper, became another effective open-air preacher. In 1524 Hans Mikkelson printed a Danish New Testament. In 1529 a better version was brought out by Christian Pedersen, the father of Danish literature. He had been a canon of Lund but was exiled for Lutheranism. He returned to Denmark in 1531 and spent the rest of his life (d. 1554) writing for the Reformation cause.

In 1526 when Pope Clement VII recognized Jorgen Skodborg as archbishop of Lund, Frederick rejected him and appointed Aage Sparre to be archbishop. The king accepted the confirmation fee which usually went to the pope.

Frederick's son, Christian, Duke of Schleswig, became a confirmed Lutheran. Frederick's ties with Lutheranism were further strengthened when Albert of Brandenburg, head of the Teutonic Order, who had renounced Catholicism and accepted Lutheranism in 1525, asked for the hand of Christian's daughter in marriage. From this point on Frederick did all he could to promote Lutheranism in his kingdom. He appointed Tausen and others as his chaplains, exempting them from episcopal control and giving them his protection. When the Roman clergy demanded that he suppress Lutheran preaching he replied that the faith was free and every man should follow his own conscience. He supported the people in their refusing to pay tithes to the Roman Church.

In 1530 the bishops ordered the preachers to appear before the king and magnates to answer for their preaching. Tausen presented forty-three articles defending the Lutheran faith. The bishops tried to reply in twenty-seven articles. The bishops wanted a debate in Latin. The preachers demanded that it be in Danish. The people sided with the preachers against their bishops and Lutheranism continued to make great gains. Luther's Shorter Catechism was translated into Danish and became the manual of instruction.

Frederick's attempt to complete the Reformation was diverted by an attempt of Christian II and his followers to regain the throne. The bishops backed Christian II. He also had aid from Charles V and discontented parties in Denmark. Frederick joined the Schmalkaldic League. He died soon after this in 1533 before the war was concluded.

At Frederick's death the bishops began working to undo all that had been accomplished by the Lutherans. The Lutherans and most of the nobles backed Frederick's son, Duke Christian of Schleswign and Holstein for king. The bishops backed his half-brother, Hans, who was still a child. Christian II had backing from Luebeck, many townspeople and some of the peasants, as well as support from Charles V. Christian II and his forces took Copenhagen. The nobles and Duke Christian formed an alliance with King Gustavus of Sweden. Duke Christian's forces defeated the supporters of Hans and those of Christian II, retaking Copenhagen. The nobles proclaimed Duke Christian their king.

CHRISTIAN III 91536-59):
Christian III (Duke Christian) and his nobles accused the bishops of causing the civil war. They arrested the bishops and the price of their release was their agreement to give up all their property and privileges. A national assembly (1536) proclaimed Lutheranism
the state religion. The monasteries and all church property were
secularized and given to the crown—nobles were allowed to keep
the church property they had already seized.

In 1537 Bugenhagen crowned the king and queen—previously the
prerogative of the archbishop of Lund. The king appointed seven
superintendents to oversee the churches. They were ordained by
Bugenhagen who was only a priest. Later the superintendents became
bishops. The king was declared head of the church and the Augsburg
Confession was later adopted. A new Danish liturgy and a new
Danish translation of the Bible were prepared.

THE REFORMATION IN NORWAY AND ICELAND

In 1528 a Lutheran preacher named Antonius, came to Bergen
to preach to German residents. The next year Hermann Fresze and
Jens Vilborg came to preach Lutheranism. Those who became Lutheran
began a systematic spoliation of religious houses and churches.
Eske Bilde in 1529 became the most famous of the church burners.
The Danes of Frederick I joined in the pillaging of Danish churches,
carrying off the spoils to Denmark.

Archbishop Olaf Engelbrektsson of Trondhjem backed Christian II
when war came with Frederick I. After Frederick's death Arch-
bishop Olaf and the Norwegians backed Luebeck. When Duke Christian
won the war and became Christian III, Archbishop Olaf fled to the
Netherlands with the archives of the kingdom and all the treasures
he could take with him. King Christian III compelled Norway to
give up its status as a kingdom and made it a province of the Danish
crown. Lutheranism was imposed on Norway by the king. Superinten-
dents replaced Catholic bishops. Because of a lack of Lutheran
preachers who spoke Norwegian little was done to instruct the people
in the new faith. Norway was filled with strong resentment of
Danes and Lutheranism and there was great unrest.

Iceland, which had belonged to Norway, became a Danish
province. The Reformation had already been introduced by Oddur
Gottskalkson, who had studied in Germany and returned a Lutheran in
1533. He became secretary to the bishop of Skalholt, the southern
see of the country, and gained a secret following for Lutheranism.
He made an Icelandic translation of the New Testament that was
published in 1540. That same year, Gisser Einarsen, a Lutheran
educated in Germany, became bishop in Skalholt. When Christian III
attempted to impose the Danish ecclesiastical system, a strong
reaction was led by the bishop of the northern see, Jon Aresen of
Holum. Aresen was executed for treason in 1550. Lutheranism was
established by royal decree in 1554. Icelanders continued to detest
the new church until the Lutheran Gudbrandur Thorlakson became
bishop in 1571 and began to win the people over to a Lutheran
position. He translated the entire Bible into the Icelandic
language and encouraged the writing of Lutheran hymns. He was
bishop until his death in 1627.

THE REFORMATION IN SWEDEN

The establishing of Lutheranism in Sweden was closely connected
with the efforts of the new king, Gustavus I, to establish royal
authority. The bishops in Sweden were rich and powerful, possess-
ing vast properties and great judicial authority. The nobles were
rich, haughty, and independent. The free peasantry were very jealous
of their rights and determined to tolerate no restraint. The result was that the king's authority and income were very limited. The Danish kings had neglected Sweden while it was a part of the Union of Kalmar (1397). The Swedes formed a strong dislike of Danes. Denmark possessed the southern tip of Sweden and the Hanseatic League (German) dominated commerce. Faced with such challenges, Gustavus I, within a few years, created a modern monarchy, largely at the expense of the church. When Christian II, as king of Denmark, attempted to establish his authority over Sweden, he met strong resistance led by Sten Sture, viceroys of Sweden. Sture was a man of great ability who was determined to free his country from Danish bondage. Gustavus Trolle, archbishop of Uppsala, was very ambitious for power; he aligned himself with Christian II to further his ambitions. The papal nuncio, Arcimbaldo, who had won the confidence of Christian, sought to win the Swedes by revealing to Sture the plans of Christian and Trolle, compromising Trolle. Trolle was thought of as the Swedish Judas Iscariot. When he actively urged a Danish invasion of Sweden, the national diet deposed him in 1517. Sture defeated the invading Christian II and his Danes in 1516 and 1517. Pope Leo excommunicated Sture. Christian attempted to enforce the pope's ban. The Swedes considered the pope a meddler and ally of the national enemy. Christian inflicted a bloody defeat on Sture on the ice of Asunden Lake in January, 1520. Sture died of wounds suffered in the battle. His widow, Christina, won great fame defending Stockholm against the invader. The Danes were victorious in a bloody battle against the Swedish peasantry near Uppsala. Many Swedes were killed in the battle. Their bodies were left exposed to the elements on the battle field because Trolle refused to allow them Christian burial, declaring they were heretics. Stockholm surrendered on November 7, 1520, when Christian promised Christina a general amnesty. Christian was crowned king in the cathedral of Stockholm. Trolle urged the king to punish those who had opposed Christian and who had had a part in the deposition of Trolle as archbishop. Ninety nobles were beheaded in the marketplace in front of the people and left unburied for three days and then burned. The people hated Christian and Trolle. Great hatred for the church grew among the Swedes. One of those executed was the father of Gustavus Eriksson, later known as Gustavus Vasa (vasa being the sheaf on the family coat of arms).

Gustavus Vasa, a kinsman of Sture, had studied for several years in Uppsala, and was a fugitive in southern Sweden when the Stockholm massacre took place. Early in 1521 he gathered a force of peasants and began a national revolt aimed at driving out the Danes. His forces defeated the Danes at Västerås in April, 1521. On June 7, 1523, he was chosen king by a Swedish diet at Strenghem. A few days later he entered Stockholm in triumph, having driven out the Danish garrison. Frederick I, who followed Christian in Denmark, was never able to establish himself in Sweden. The war of independence was a success.

King Gustavus faced great difficulties. Most of his nobles had been executed. The peasants refused to allow an increase in their taxes. The king was heavily indebted to Luebeck for support from the Luebeck fleet in the battle for Stockholm. Luebeck demanded payment and extensive trading privileges in Sweden. The king saw in the vast wealth of the church the best possible source of needed revenue. He found support in the strong national resentment against
the papacy and Trolle for supporting the Danes. Pope Leo X had supported Trolle who had been deposed by the national diet and the pope had placed Sture under the ban. Pope Adrian VI, in 1522, sent Johan Magnusson, a Swede who had studied at Louvain under Adrian, to Sweden as his legate. The canons of Uppsala chose Magnusson as Archbishop but Adrian insisted that Trolle be restored. The Swedes were further displeased when Pope Clement VI appointed an Italian to the see of Skära. Gustavus forced the monasteries and the church to make him a large loan, refused to restore Trolle, and announced that no foreigners could serve in the Swedish church. Gustavus began encouraging the spread of Lutheranism. Olaf and Lars Petersson, sons of a Swedish blacksmith, converted many Swedes to Lutheranism. Olaf had studied in Wittenberg. On his return to Sweden in 1519 he met Lars Anderson, archdeacon and canon of Uppsala, and influenced him to attempt to cleanse the church of corruptions. Lars had travelled widely, visiting Rome. He was a capable theologian. Gustavus brought Olaf to Stockholm as city clerk in 1524, although Bishop Brask of Strengnäs was accusing him of heresy. Olaf had been teaching in the cathedral school at Strengnäs and had become dean. Lars Petersson was made professor of theology at Uppsala. Lars Andersson became archdeacon of Uppsala and royal chancellor. In 1526 Olaf defied the church by openly taking a wife. The king ordered Archbishop Magnusson to make a Swedish translation of the Bible. The New Testament was begun by Lars Andersson but was largely the work of Olaf Petersson and appeared in 1526. A translation of the entire Bible, based on Luther's Bible, was published in 1540-41. The people readily accepted the king's confiscation of church property. Gustavus seized the property of Bishop Brask and banished Archbishop Magnusson. Olaf Petersson was very active in spreading Luther's ideas among the people, both orally and in writing. The monasteries began closing. Lutheranism and Swedish nationality were closely related.

Gustavus was in great need of money when the diet met at Vesterås in 1527. The king proposed to increase the taxes on the peasants and nobles, and to confiscate church lands and income. Peasants, nobles, and churchmen led by the old but vigorous Catholic Bishop Brask of Linköping, refused the king's demands. The king announced he would resign, demanded that he be reimbursed for the money he had spent in the service of the country, and stalked out of the assembly. The peasants became alarmed by the threat and put pressure on nobles and churchmen to grant the king's demands. The Diet's agreement to yield to the king's demands became known as the Vesterås Recess. The Diet passed the Ordinances of Vesterås, providing for the confiscation of most of the church property. Surplus property and income not needed by the church was to be given to the king—the king was to decide what property was needed by the church. The nobles were to regain all tax-exempt lands given the church since 1454. All taxable lands were to be surrendered. The king would appoint the higher clergy. The lower clergy would be appointed by the bishops. From the confiscated church wealth schools were to be established with the gospel being taught in the schools. Compulsory confession was abolished. Royal courts would have authority over the clergy in all causes of a temporal nature. The diet would decide all pending religious matters. The preachers were to preach "the pure word of God." The bishops would be consecrated by the bishop of Vesterås without papal confirmation.
Twenty-two provisions forced reform in the life and work of the priests. Without formal doctrinal statements the Church of Sweden steadily became Lutheran under the leadership of the king.

In 1529 a Swedish book of services was issued. In 1530 a Swedish hymn book was published. The Swedish Mass Book was issued in 1531. The episcopal system was retained but bishops had lost former legal rights and economic privileges. Lars Petersson became the first Lutheran archbishop of Uppsala in 1531. He was ordained by Bishop Peter Magnus of Vesterås, who had been consecrated in Rome in 1524, enabling the Swedes to maintain apostolic succession. Ten years later Gustavus had Lars Andersson and Olaf Petersson convicted of treason and thereafter ruled the church through a superintendent directly responsible to the king.

Eric IV (1560–68), son of Gustavus, leaned toward Calvinism, but was dethroned by his brothers, John and Charles. John III (1568–92) leaned toward Catholicism, the religion of his wife, Catherine, daughter of King Sigismund II of Poland. He failed in his efforts to reunite Sweden with the church at Rome. He was succeeded by his son Sigismund (1592–99), a Roman Catholic who was already king of Poland (1587–1632). His uncle, Charles, called a national synod at Uppsala in 1593, that reaffirmed the Lutheran position, declaring that the bible was the sole source of doctrine. The synod adopted the Augsburg Confession as the doctrinal standard and adopted the church ordinances of Lars Petersson as authoritative in matters of worship. Sweden adopted the Lutheran Formula of Concord in 1686.

Finland, a possession of Sweden, shared its religion. Peter Sarkilahti, who had studied in Germany, began preaching Lutheranism in Finland in 1524. The work was carried on by Michael Agricola who had taught for a time at Wittenberg in 1539. Agricola published a Finnish translation of the New Testament in 1548 and Psalms and some of the prophets in 1551. He became "the father of Finnish literature." The administration of the Finnish church was under the archbishop of Uppsala. Two bishops in Finland were established at Abo and at Viborg.

Philip of Hesse worked to bring the Scandinavian Lutherans into the Schmalkaldic League until his bigamy and imprisonment forced the German Lutherans to end attempts at foreign alliances.