

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary

The Birth of a Church Body

**- A Look at the Factors Contributing to the Formation of the
Lutheran Confessional Church of Scandinavia Focusing on the
Role of the Bible Institute Biblicum**

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CONTENTS

Preface	4
Historical Background	5
The Bible Institute Biblicum	11
Exodus Preferred	17
Exodus Deterred	21
The Forming of the LBK	26
Bibliography	28

Addenda

Addendum 1: Interview with Pastor Alvar Svensson.

Addendum 2: Interview with Theol. Dr Seth Erlandsson and Birgitta Erlandsson.

Addendum 3: Essay by Pastor Alvar Svensson, "Vid 25-årsminnet av Lutherska
Bekännelsekyrkans bildande".

Addendum 4: Paper by Theol. Dr Seth Erlandsson, "Stiftelsen Biblicum –
historik över åren 1968-1986".

Addendum 5: Paper by Pastor Stefan Sjöqvist, "Från Olaus Petri till Lutherska
Bekännelsekyrkan – en vandring genom femhundra år svensk
kyrkohistoria".

PREFACE

When I was five years old, the Lord, through my good Christian neighbours, put me in Bible classes for children held by S:t Jakobs Evangelisk-Lutherska Församling. Ten years later I was confirmed in that congregation, and today I am studying to serve my church as a called worker of Christ. Without any family ties to the church, I have still grown up in it, often taken it for granted. This year, when we celebrate the 30th anniversary of the formation of the Lutheran Confessional Church of Sweden, it seems timely that I would try to learn more about how my church came into being. That is the general purpose of this paper.

The more specific purpose is to trace the different ecclesiastical movements, political events and people who contributed to the formation of the Lutheran Confessional Church of Sweden (LBK) with a special focus on the Bible institute called Biblicum. I intend to do so through a brief historical background, a look at the role Biblicum played and through interviews and the study of unpublished sources provided by members of the LBK.

I would hereby like to acknowledge the invaluable help provided by Theol. Dr Seth Erlandsson, Pastor Stefan Sjöqvist and Pastor Alvar Svensson. Without their help this paper could not have been written.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

On the one hand, Sweden was one of the last European countries to become Christian. On the other hand, Sweden was one of the first to officially become Lutheran. The Swedish king Gustav Wasa (1496-1560) is the one who is credited for making the transition from Romanism to first Protestantism and then Lutheranism. Until his ascendance, Sweden had been part of the Kalmar Union, together with Denmark and Norway. At this time, the Danish king was officially the regent also of Sweden, but as an effect of the revolt initiated by Gustav Wasa (or Eriksson), Sweden withdrew from the union, threw out the Danish military presence, and proclaimed its independence on June 6, 1523. This date now serves as the birthday of Sweden as an independent and united nation. Most historians agree that King Gustav did encompass the general tenets of Lutheranism, he did include the principle of Sola Scriptura in his very first official edict, but it is also clear that breaking with the Roman church was a way to finance the brand new federal government as well. By breaking with Rome, appointing himself head of the church, and confiscating the properties of the Roman church, King Gustav was able to get the new national state up and running.¹ It was not until 1544, however, that the cult was reformed and the church officially ended relations with Rome and the pope.² After the death of King Gustav, he was succeeded by his sons, first Erik XIV and then Johan III. King Johan had strong Roman leanings and wanted to make the Swedish church subservient to the pope again. The Lutheran priests were quite successful in their opposition, however,

¹ Jakob Bincks, "Gustav Wasa", available from http://sv.freeglossary.com/Gustav_Wasa; Internet; November 26 2004.

² Anders Olsen, "Reformasjonen i Sverige", Available from <http://lademannsleksikon.dk/ns/link>; Internet; November 26 2004.

and at the Diet of Uppsala in 1593 (one year after King Johan's death) the unaltered Augsburg Confession was accepted as the official doctrine of the Swedish State Church.³

The Swedish Church had defeated the powers hoping for reunification with Rome, but that did not mean that the orthodox teaching was safe. Rather, it would take a long process to get first the priests and the teachers at the universities, and then the people, to encompass Lutheran doctrine. By the 17th century, however, the orthodox influence was strong enough to influence a rather exclusive edict made by the Swedish parliament. It was decided that the priests would enjoy a variety of benefits, including that the entire offerings, given in church, would actually go to the church (King Gustav Wasa had, during his reign, insisted on getting a piece of the pie). The catch for the priests show the strong influence by the orthodox Lutherans. The conditions for the granted privileges were that the priests became responsible for guarding the true doctrine, that all children had to be baptized by a priest, that no Romanists or Calvinists were to hold church service in the country, that heretics were not allowed to be sponsors at baptisms and were to be buried without any tolling of the church bells, and that all services were to be held in the church buildings and not in private homes.⁴ In this edict by the Swedish parliament we see both the good and the bad side of Swedish Lutheranism, which would accompany it up until the 20th century. On the one hand, there is a real zeal to defend the believers of the country against false doctrine, on the other hand there is the

³ Elisabeth Lundqvist, "Reformationen i Sverige", available from <http://www.hgo.se/renaissancestudies/elisalund/reformationsverige.html>; Internet; November 26 2004.

⁴ Stefan Sjöqvist, "Från Olaus Petri till Lutherska Bekännelsekyrkan – en vandring genom femhundra år svensk kyrkohistoria", Unpublished paper, p. 32.

false assumption that this is the responsibility of the government, and that false doctrine can simply be outlawed and thereby rendered impotent.

The first heterodox influence that was able to gain a major foothold in Sweden was Pietism. The German Lutherans, the German Universities and a German training all were held in very high regard in Sweden, and perhaps that is why Pietism was allowed to gain a footing. The resistance at first, however, was vehement. King Karl XII sanctioned raids against the Pietists, and forbidden books by men such as Spener, Francke and Arndt were confiscated. Theology students were questioned thoroughly to find out whether they had been influenced by any of the new teachings, and if they went on trips, representatives of the church government demanded to know if they had studied at foreign universities, and if so which universities they had visited.⁵ Even the people were on the look-out. When Reverend Nils Grubb somehow slipped through the net and was assigned to Umeå, a city far away from the capitol, he might have thought that he was now free to preach the tenets of Pietism. Not so, several of the parishioners promptly reported him for promoting heresy.⁶ It was clear, however, that Pietism had come to stay. Some of its early proponents were sentenced to death (although later pardoned), but the movement has survived until our day and it has a serious impact on the events that are the main focus of this paper.

The 19th century ushered in a more lenient approach by the authorities towards heterodoxy, although Sweden was still, at this time, a Lutheran country. The new law, established in 1809, made it mandatory only for the king, the judges and other

⁵ Ibid, p. 37.

⁶ Ibid.

representatives of the federal government to subscribe to the unaltered Augsburg Confession. No longer was there any specific mention of all Swedish citizens having to do likewise.⁷ During the 19th century, there are a host of different revivals inside the church. Often a priest who seems less than committed to his call (there are several examples of drunkards who see the light), has a life-altering experience and ends up getting quite a following. These priests preached sermons that were charismatic in style, and rather legalistic in content. The inspiration often came from Pietistic writers. But there were also other, larger and more influential movements, like those of Lars Levi Laestadius and Carl Olof Rosenius. All these movements can be said to have one or both of the following motivating factors: either there was a disappointment with the lack of “life” in the congregation, and a pursuit of a more dedicated community of believers, or there was a concern for the increased theological liberalism that was clearly seeping into the church. Some revivalist preachers emphasized a pious life, while others saw as their main mission to preach the free gospel, going back to Luther’s credo Sola Gratia. Despite their different beliefs, they all had one thing in common – they all remained in the State church, and they really did not have much of an option. Although the church law of 1809 supposedly allowed the individual to practice his religious beliefs, that did not mean that you were able to start a new, free church if you so desired. Those who tried were prosecuted.

If Pietism is the first heterodox influence to gain a foothold in Sweden after the Reformation, the Baptists are the first non-Lutherans (if we see Pietism as part of Lutheranism) to organize themselves in the country. Fredrik Olaus Nilsson re-baptizes 49

⁷ Ibid, p. 44.

people (according to his own claims) and organizes congregations in different parts of Sweden from 1848-1849. The reaction of the government clearly shows its schizophrenia when it comes to religious freedom. On paper, the church law from 1809 permits the exercise of ones religion as long as this does not cause public disturbance, in reality the government sees to it that the children of the Baptists are baptized by force and F.O. Nilsson is exiled.⁸ In the new dissenter laws of 1860 and 1873, there is more of a move toward limited religious freedom. These laws state that it is permissible to leave the State church and join another church or congregation that is already legal or has received approval from the king.⁹ Do note that civil government is still very much in control of what is acceptable when it comes to religion. The late 1800's are characterized by the growing number of free church bodies. Baptists, Methodists and the Salvation Army are some examples. The orthodox Lutherans, however, stay within an evermore liberal State church. They seemed to have believed that the solution to the growing problems was to stay with "mother church" and try to win converts within the congregation.

Two of the movements that are the most influential for orthodox Lutheranism are both examples of such in house revival. Evangeliska Fosterlandsstiftelsen (EFS), founded in 1855 by followers and sympathizers of Carl Olof Rosenius, spreads the unconditional gospel and the message of universal justification. Rosenius himself, however, is strongly opposed to orthodox Lutherans acting outside of the State church. The members of EFS meet on Saturdays to avoid any conflict with the regular services, and much like pietistic prayer groups, do not consider them selves to be outside the State church, and generally do not make any waves. The other movement that is of special importance to this paper is

⁸ Ibid, p. 52.

⁹ Ibid, p. 54.

Bibeltrogena Vänner (BV), founded in 1911. The movement was formed as a protest against the liberalism seeping into also EFS an organization that (ironically) was founded because of the liberalism and apathy in the State church. BV subscribes to the Lutheran Confessions, and vows to “remain true to the truth that the church of Christ, throughout time, has relentlessly clung to, namely that the entire Bible is God’s inerrant word, with unlimited authority, and work for the spreading of Christ’s kingdom and fight against all kinds of unbelief and denial, while fully submitting to the Evangelical Lutheran confession” (translation mine).¹⁰ It is made very clear from the outset that BV does not wish to be a new church body. Originally, in 1909, they envisioned being a group within a group (EFS) within the State church. Only after being excluded from EFS do the members form a new mission society. In general BV, like EFS, try to avoid holding services that conflict with the regular church service in a nearby State church¹¹, but it still keeps its distance to the State church in a more pronounced way, and is more openly critical of it than is EFS.

The 20th century in Swedish Lutheranism is a rather dismal chapter. Heresy and outright paganism go from being tolerated to being the norm at the theological faculties. The message being preached from the pulpit in the State church revolves mostly around social gospel and the ethics of Christianity.¹² This state of affairs sets the stage for the main focus of this paper.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 59.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid, p. 63.

THE BIBLE INSTITUTE BIBLICUM

The forming of the Bible Institute named Biblicum is likely the most important historical factor to consider when looking at how and why the Lutheran Confessional Church of Sweden (later the Lutheran Confessional Church of Scandinavia) came into existence. The two most influential people in the formation of Biblicum were Theol. Dr David Hedegård and Theol. Dr G.A. Danell. Hedegård had a background in free churches and his knowledge about negative criticism and his concern about its effects stemmed at least in part from the training he himself had received at the faculty. Danell was dean of the cathedral at Växjö and as a clergy in the Lutheran State church he saw many of the problems from the inside. Hedegård had been working to supply believers with theological literature and training that were in accordance with the Bible ever since the 1930s. He had also translated the New Testament into Swedish because he was unhappy with the extant translation, and through the society “För biblisk tro” (promoting biblical faith) and the magazine bearing the same name, he had been fighting to preserve the true Christian faith in a country swiftly turning its back on God’s word. As far as he was concerned, Danell had shown his displeasure with the apostasy of the State church, and that stand together with his position in the church, made him an informal leader for people who were still members in the State church but were alarmed by the doctrinal developments.¹³ In 1970, a booklet about the formation of Biblicum defined the motivation for its foundation in this way:

¹³ Seth Erlandsson, “Stiftelsen Biblicum – historik över åren 1968-1986”, unpublished paper, p. 1-3.

The background of Biblicum is the present theological and spiritual situation in our country. The knowledge of the Bible has decreased in a catastrophic way, even among active church members. Furthermore, the view of the Bible and the teaching about, both in the school and the church, has to a large extent been predicated by the relativism and skepticism of liberal theology. There is likely no book that has been subjected to such intense criticism as the Holy Scriptures. The doubting of the reliability of the Bible has sprung up in wide circles of society – even in Christian churches. All of this – both the deficient knowledge about, and the widespread distrust in the Bible – is a deadly peril for all true Christendom, since the Bible is the only true source of knowledge about God and salvation, as well as the only authority for Christian faith and Christian life. Knowledge of the Bible and faith in the Bible are disappearing among our people. No signs of change are to be found, neither in the schools and universities nor in society as a whole. The theological faculties are controlled by the government and are to this day imbued by a liberal theological attitude. The scientifically advanced conservative scholarship that actually exists cannot gain a hearing in these contexts (translation mine).¹⁴

The Bible institute was founded October 8, 1968, and aside from Hedegård and Danell, the first governing board included Sune Svensson, Pastor Torsten Josephsson, Pastor Ingvar Hector, Ingemar Franck and Pastor Lars Engquist.

The newly founded institute was not connected with any particular movement within the State church or with any free church. In a memorandum written before the inaugural meeting, Hedegård had made this clear: "It has to be made clear from the very beginning that the institute does not represent any particular church movement, and that those who contribute belong to different movements - High church, Low church and Old church – but have this in common that they want to completely hold on to the Bible and the confessions" (translation mine).¹⁵ Still, right from the start at least some of the founders harboured thoughts about a free Lutheran, confessional church. In an article in the newsletter "Fria Väktaren", Danell writes an article entitled "How and why Biblicum was formed" (translation mine). In it he relates how he had taken part in a public debate

¹⁴ Idim, p. 2.

¹⁵ Idim, p. 3.

with the topic "Is the Bible always right", and how leading representatives of the theological faculty at the University of Uppsala had plainly rejected the historical facts of the Bible, the image of God that the Bible presented, and the ethics of the New Testament. This experience had led him, Danell wrote, to write Hedegård and propose the forming a Bible institute. In this article, Danell also writes that it is untenable to keep hoping that an alternative faculty will provide a fallen church with confessional priests, the only solution then would be a free confessional church.¹⁶ Hedegård agreed, and in an article in "För Biblisk Tro" he quoted Danell on the subject and added, "a free confessional church is, without a shadow of a doubt, necessary if any true Christianity will be preserved in our country" (translation mine).¹⁷

Although this concept of a free church was far from foreign to the founders, it was nevertheless a delicate subject. In 1970, the protocols give testimony to this fact. The issue of fellowship had been discussed during the board meeting, and first the board members had expressed their full support for a group in Uppsala, that was sympathetic to the views of Biblicum, that had started renting facilities to celebrate services apart from the State church. The protocol was later changed however to include the words "the board members who were present declared their full support this fellowship, but the Biblicum institute as such is not responsible for this fellowship, but rather, now as before, an institute for Bible research and teaching" (translation mine).¹⁸ The group later called Dr Hedegård and Dr Erlandsson to serve them and this small group developed and in September, 1973, S:t Matthew's Evangelical Lutheran congregation was founded.¹⁹

¹⁶ Idim.

¹⁷ Idim, p.7.

¹⁸ Idim, p. 6.

¹⁹ Sjöqvist, p. 68.

The institute did provide teaching and literature for anyone who was interested in what the Bible had to say. Biblicum offered courses all over the country for anyone who was interested, and so became important to laypeople and clergy alike. Another forum was the magazine "För Biblisk Tro" which was handed over to the institute, became its official magazine, and changed its name to "Biblicum" with Theol. Dr Seth Erlandsson as its editor and publisher. After the board had decided to call Erlandsson as superintendent, the institute also began publishing books of which "Ditt ord är sanning" (your word is truth), 1971, was the first. During the 1970s and well into the 1980s, the institute published a large number of booklets and books on a large number of wide-ranging topics, some on Bible books and some on particular doctrines.

Aside from the teaching and publishing, the thought of a free, confessional church was still alive within the governing board. Per Jonsson, who had been elected as one of the members of the board, contacted Theol. Dr Siegbert Becker already in 1971, and in the invitational letter from Jonsson to Becker, we see what some of the concerns were at this time:

It ought to be possible to form free, Lutheran congregations, but the obstacles are great. The concept of a "free church" is in the Swedish language synonymous with a Reformed sect. The loyalty with the old, established church is great... We in the governing board of Biblicum have discussed the possibility of you coming to our country for a couple of months as a guest lecturer, invited by Biblicum. In connection with this visit you could hold discussions with leading representatives for Swedish confessionalism (translation mine).²⁰

Becker graciously agreed and in 1972 he traveled through Sweden giving lectures on Justification and Church fellowship. These lectures proved very valuable, both to the people who eventually formed the Lutheran Confessional Church of Sweden, and to

²⁰ Erlandsson, p. 11.

those who took a little longer to take the leap of faith required to leave the seeming security of the State church.²¹

The issue of leaving the State church proved more and more explosive even within Biblicum's governing board. In October of 1972, the board held a meeting where one of the issues being discussed was the situation within the State church. Erlandsson expressed that he found it increasingly difficult to combine the full fidelity to the Bible, which his membership on the Biblicum board required, with membership in the church that was openly denying the truths of the Scriptures. He also brought the likelihood of him leaving the State church to the attention of the other members. The minutes read, "During the conversation it was emphasized that the institute neither can nor wants to prescribe the members of its board anything when it comes to their church membership. However, members who leave the State church should notify the institute in advance" (translation mine).²² Only a month later, Per Jonsson complied by sending a formal letter to the board. Attached was the letter of resignation he had sent to Lunds Domkapitel of the State church (comparable to a WELS district, or a diocese). The letter to the Biblicum board included this motivation of his actions:

By the grace of God, I want to hold fast to the Bible as God's infallible word in its entirety and with unlimited authority. By the grace of God, I also want to openly confess the truth of the Bible. Since the Church of Sweden is fighting the doctrine of the Bible which Biblicum represents, which also is the foundation of Biblicum's very existence, I see it as consequential to completely distance myself from the Church of Sweden. Therefore, when I intend to resign from my office as priest, effective on June 1st 1973, I see this as an act of loyalty towards Biblicum. It is, however, of vital importance to me to emphasize that what I have here adduced is the motivation for *my* decision, and it does not mean that I want to pass judgment on any other board member's conscience (translation mine).²³

²¹ Alvar Svensson, "At the 25th Anniversary of the Lutheran Confessional Church of Sweden", unpublished lecture, p. 4.

²² Erlandsson, p. 15.

²³ Idim.

With this letter, Jonsson presented the board with an accomplished fact. On the one hand, he had told them in advance of his actual leaving of the church. On the other hand, by already having written to Lunds Domkapitel, he did not leave the matter open to debate, or give the other members a chance to give him any advice. Danell (chairman and co-founder of Biblicum), who up to this point had made statements about the necessity of forming a free church, reacted very negatively and together with two other board members he left Biblicum in 1973. Even after this crisis within the governing board, Biblicum reiterated that the institute remained independent of all church bodies, and that the membership of individual board members and the work they perform in their respective congregation must be kept separate from the work they perform for Biblicum.²⁴

In conclusion it is fair to say that no single movement or mission society played a more important role in bringing about the forming of a free, confessional Lutheran church, than did the Bible institute called Biblicum. First, it provided a forum for people who had grown despondent with the chances of effecting any real change for the better within the State church. Through the magazine and the lectures, and through the booklets and books, they were able to express their heart-felt concern with the false doctrine so prevalent in the Church of Sweden. Second, through its independency Biblicum was able to reach Christians of any number of congregations, preaching the gospel and teaching the entire counsel of God. This led people, who perhaps had never contemplated the fact that it might be unscriptural to remain in a false fellowship, to at least question their position. Third, by strengthening each other, the people who were involved with the

²⁴ Idim, p.16.

institute in different ways, were able to show each other that they were not the only ones contemplating the rather radical idea of leaving the State church. Aside from its role in the formation of the LBK, it should also be noted that Biblicum, by the grace of God, has continued to provide solid, biblical teaching through its magazine and courses up to this day. There are still a number of people in heterodox churches who benefit from the work being done at the institute. Perhaps the most important contribution that the institute has made was the modern translation of the Bible, “Folkbibeln”, that was spurred on by the work on the extremely liberal State translation, “Bibel 2000”.

EXODUS PREFERRED

One of the historical events that influenced the decision of the people who broke off from the State church to form the LBK was the new State translation of the Bible. At this time, the most recent translation into Swedish was from 1917, and its language was generally deemed archaic already when it was published. The State church decided that it would finance a new translation, and the first step was the Bible committee, named by the bishops, that published “Bibelsyn och Bibelbruk” (View and use of the Bible) in 1970. (The actual translating work leading up to the publication of the state translation started in 1972.²⁵) This book clearly stated that the church officially denounced the view that the Bible was given by God and credible. Instead, the historical-critical method and negative criticism were hailed as the correct way of studying and understanding the Bible. This

²⁵ Niclas Erlin, “Ny och modern svensk bibel tas i bruk”, available from http://www.abo.fi/meddelanden/artiklar/2000_17_bibeln.sht; Internet; accessed 11 December 2004.

was of course worrying for those who believed in God's word, since this also clearly stated what the coming translation would have as its presuppositions. Alvar Svensson states, "Personally, I am absolutely convinced that the deciding moment in the ecclesiastical development in our country came through the book 'Bibelsyn och Bibelbruk' ... of course this book became debated, but I think that Biblicum's book 'It is written' (1971), which was a reply to the aforementioned book, was what had the greatest impact on us who were following the debate" (translation mine).²⁶ Apart from the concern that was created among Bible believing Christians, "Bibelsyn och Bibelbruk" was also a rare example of an honest testimony to the heresies rampant at the higher levels of the State church. Most regular parishioners were likely not aware that their pastors had been taught not to believe in the Bible at the faculty. One can say that the clergy showed its true colors in this book, and that is why it was so important.

A contributing factor that should not be underestimated was the people who talked the talk but did not walk the walk. Also individuals who were never able to actually leave the State church themselves, nevertheless influenced those who did. Axel B. Svensson, whose sharp criticism of EFS was the main factor in the formation of the mission society Bibeltrogna Vänner, and who in 1930 became its chairman,²⁷ pleaded for a free church already in 1911. An article by him was re-published in 1973 and made an impact on members of BV who were faced with the question he had faced in the early 1900s.²⁸

Another man who never left the State church but who was an inspiration to those who did was G.A. Danell. One of the founders of Biblicum, and a respected teacher in the

²⁶ Svensson, "Anniversary", p. 3.

²⁷ Sjöqvist, p. 59.

²⁸ Svensson, "Anniversary", p. 4.

church, he spent several years underscoring the fact that a free church was a necessity. Through the magazine "Nya Vaktaren" (The new guardian), he was able to reach out to a lot of people with his criticism of the liberalism of the church of which he was a called worker. One of LBK:s first pastors, Alvar Svensson, testifies to the importance of the work Danell did before he seemingly made a 180 degree turn, resigned as chairman of the Biblicum board, and started to argue publicly for remaining in the State church.²⁹

The support that the people associated with Biblicum received from the Wisconsin Evangelical Synod was also important. Many have talked about the great importance that Dr Siegbert Becker had, and how his visits and lectures helped people to see the necessity of breaking fellowship with the false teachers in the State church. As a Christian who himself had to go through a painful separation from a heterodox church (The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod), Becker was able to understand the problems, worries and fears that faced some of the Swedish Christians he talked to. The fact that he seemed like a brother in faith because of his teaching, but yet refused to have fellowship with those who were still members of the State church, made it clear to some that the position of not attending services in the State church and still remaining a member was a form of selective separation.³⁰ It can also be noted that these Swedish Christians in opposition to the State church received support and encouragement from WELS Mission Secretary Edgar Hoenecke, who was present when Seth Erlandsson submitted his resignation from the State Church.³¹

Although it was seen by many as a bold move to actually start a free, Lutheran church, we have to remember that it was not started out of nothing. As we have related

²⁹ Idim, p. 3.

³⁰ Seth and Birgitta Erlandsson, Interview, p. 1.

³¹ Idim, p. 2.

above, there was a group of Christians in Uppsala who called Seth Erlandsson and David Hedegård to preach and administer the sacraments to them. In 1973, they took it one step further by forming a free, Lutheran congregation and calling Sten Johansson (later Ryd) as their pastor. This free congregation gained members not only in Uppsala, and not only among people who had a reasonable opportunity to attend services. The list of members included people from Norrköping, Skellefteå and Öjebyn (some 1500 miles from Uppsala), and soon also a member from the island Åland.³² The preparatory work made in Uppsala has to be viewed as a large part of the foundation upon which it was possible to start a new church.

Another part of the foundation was built by Per Jonsson. We have previously mentioned how he was the first one from Biblicum's governing board to actually leave the State Church. As a pastor in this liberal church he had worked for many years publishing articles in the magazine "Kyrka och folk" (Church and People), advocating resignation by the people who, like himself, were so concerned about the gospel being lost in midst of all the Bible criticism. He was also, together with among others Dr Becker, one of the contributors to the book *Luthersk Bekännelsekyrka* (1973) which presented argument for leaving the State Church. When Jonsson resigned, in 1973, he was no longer able to publish articles in "Kyrka och folk". Instead he started his own magazine, "Lutherskt Sändebrev", which later would become the unofficial newsletter and theological magazine of the LBK. This magazine became an influence on those who were still struggling to come to terms with the situation.³³ In the summer of 1974, the congregation Vår frälsares församling was formed with Jonsson as its pastor.

³² Idim, p. 1.

³³ Svensson, "Anniversary", p. 5.

EXODUS DETERRED

When writing about why and how a small number of people formed a free Lutheran church, one has to ask the opposite question as well – why did so many decide to stay in the church they deemed as heterodox and even fallen? Considering the large number of revivals within the Swedish State Church, and the long period under which they took place, it seems peculiar that all these protests, all these movements, did not result in a free church earlier. There are of course many reasons for why people stayed but we will at least examine a few.

One of the most important, and perhaps the most biblical, revival movements in Sweden was that of Carl Olof Rosenius. With his emphasis on sin and grace, and his view of God as both holy Judge and loving and forgiving Father, Rosenius became very influential on later Christians who were appalled by the lack of sound preaching in the State Church. Add the fact that he taught Objective Justification despite his pietistic leanings, and it is easy to see why he was so revered and respected in orthodox circles.³⁴ Rosenius, sadly, had a negative impact on true Lutheranism in Sweden as well. When faced with the sensitive issue of the separatists (“Separatisterna”) in northern Sweden who celebrated their own services because of the liberalism that was influencing the State Church already in the 1800s, Rosenius came down on the side of the church. He claimed that by the power of the ordination, the pastor “owned” the office of the keys and the sacraments. No one who had not been ordained could administer the sacraments. This rather papistic view meant in effect that those who left the State Church cut themselves

³⁴ Sjöqvist, p. 53.

off from God's means of grace.³⁵ This stance proved to be a deterrent for people who later contemplated leaving the church. Many conservatives had themselves come to understand the Biblical and Lutheran doctrine of grace by reading Rosenius, and if he had advised against leaving the State Church, despite his own rather serious misgivings, it might be a bad idea.³⁶

Connected to the influence of Rosenius (although the thought by no means originated in his revival movement) is the doctrine of apostolic succession. This is not an official teaching of the Church of Sweden, but it is often found among people connected to the high church movement, and since the high church movement is relatively conservative, this false teaching has come to play an important part in the debate about whether one should stay with the heterodox church or leave. Perhaps the fact that the Church of Sweden claims an uninterrupted apostolic succession (unlike the Norwegian and the Danish Church) that survived the reformation, contributes to the weight some give this argument for staying in the church. Regardless, it is clear that a misunderstanding when it comes to what constitutes a church, is a main obstacle to overcome for people who want to leave the State Church, but are uncertain as to whether they would thereby cut themselves off from God's Church or not.

Another current of thought that is widely prevalent is that it is the obligation of the orthodox Christian to stay in the heterodox church and work for renewal at all costs. In Sweden this view is most prominently held by the organization "Kyrkliga förbundet för evangelisk-luthersk tro" which was formed in 1923. Its constitution describes its purpose as follows: "The organization has as its mission to work within our Swedish

³⁵ Idim.

³⁶ Svensson, "Anniversary", p. 2.

church for the preservation and furthering of Biblical Christianity according to the evangelical-Lutheran apostolic faith received from our fathers, and for the preservation and strengthening of our Swedish church against illegitimate and to this end opposite influences and violations” (translation mine).³⁷ The aforementioned magazine “Kyrka och Folk” became the chief means to this end. The organization remains true to its constitution to this day, expressing their disapproval of Christians who act according to the clear Bible passages that teach the doctrine of church fellowship.³⁸ This incorrect notion of the believer being tied to a church although it is teaching falsely is often presented in the form of an analogy. The church is the ship in which there is salvation. Christ has communion with believers of all time through this church. In an anniversary publication, Kyrkliga förbundet included an article by Samuel Adrian where he speaks of the State Church saying: “May it be our comfort that Jesus always lives and prays for us, although it may seem as if He mostly sleeps aboard the ship that is the church. But since this still is true, it would be wrong and unfortunate to jump off the ship to save oneself. Where would one end up then? In any case one would be separated from Christ” (translation mine).³⁹ The problem with this reasoning of course is that there is total confusion of the concepts church and Church. Just like the Romanists, Adrian imagines that his church is the same as the invisible Church of all believers, outside of which there certainly is separation from Christ. Another analogy sometimes used is that of the sick mother. The State Church is certainly in terrible shape, it is sick from all its denial of God’s word and all the negative criticism, but who would desert his sick mother whom once gave him life (through baptism) when she is in such dire need of help? This

³⁷ Sjöqvist, p. 64.

³⁸ E.g. Matt. 7:15; Rom. 16:17; Gal. 1:9; Tit. 3:10; 2 Cor. 6:14-18 etc.

³⁹ Sjöqvist, p. 64.

argument is used to give those who want to adhere to Christ's words from Matt. 7:15 a bad conscience.

Another reason is furthered by Seth and Birgitta Erlandsson in an interview which is one of the addenda, many had simply grown accustomed to being a protesters within their own church. To leave the seemingly safe confines of the State Church would mean a reversal of roles. In Sweden there is, as we have touched upon, a long-standing tradition of revivals within the church. Many of these organizations have out-lived themselves. At first there was a true zeal for change, but since there never was a cutting loose from "mother church" in the early days, it is in some ways too late for those who are 2nd 3rd or even 4th generation protesters.⁴⁰ Alvar Svensson advances a similar theory. Many people have grown up hearing the social gospel and do not see any real problem. For someone who has not heard the gospel of Jesus Christ, the preaching of the 3rd use of the law seems good enough, especially if the doctrine of hell has been thrown out, and it is not seen as too awfully serious when we fail to fulfill the law.⁴¹

When we as Christians try to explain a behavior that is not in accordance with God's word, we must not close our eyes to the most obvious reason of all – our sinful flesh. In Luke 9:57-62, Jesus speaks about the cost of following him. Different reasons are given by different people as to why they cannot follow Jesus, but they all make it clear that we do not naturally put Jesus first in our lives. The people who sympathized with the criticism of the State Church and even talked about the need for a free church, but failed to join it once it existed had something to lose by adhering to the word - perhaps a nice parsonage, a career, a livelihood. It must have been difficult to give that up

⁴⁰ Seth and Birgitta Erlandsson, Interview, p. 3.

⁴¹ Alvar Svensson, Interview, p. 2.

for a church that was renting a place for worship and was unable to pay its pastors a normal salary.⁴² In this case there was a very real price to pay for following Jesus, only a few were willing to pay that price.

The last reason for staying we will bring up is one that was common among the most conservative protesters within the State Church. Many of the members of the mission society Bibeltrogn Vänner had already distanced themselves from the church to the extent that they did not feel as if they were part of it. They had their own services, their own preachers, their own youth retreats, their own confirmations, baptisms and funerals. To them, leaving the State Church seemed superfluous since, in their opinion, they were not a part of that church. The view was that one was not sinning against the doctrine of church fellowship if one did not listen to the pastors in the State Church.⁴³ It seems as if this group were the ones who were most offended by the bold move to leave the State Church. There were many attacks on those who actually did leave, even by those who had previously agreed completely with the harsh criticisms of the state of affairs in the church.⁴⁴ Why this aggressiveness? We can only speculate, but it is reasonable to think that those who realized that it was wrong to be in fellowship with false teachers, and recognized that many of the pastors in the State Church were false teachers, simply did not want to be told that the degree of separation they practiced in their societies and organizations was not enough. The existence of a free, confessional Lutheran church is to this day a silent admonition to these people.

⁴² Seth and Birgitta Erlandsson, p. 3.

⁴³ Svensson, "Anniversary", p. 5.

⁴⁴ Idim.

THE FORMING OF THE LBK

During September 6-7 in 1974 a group of Christians gathered in Uppsala to form the Lutheran Confessional Church of Sweden. They represented three free congregations that were already in existence: S:t Matteus Evangelisk-Lutherska församling, Uppsala; Vår Frälsares församling, Landskrona and S:t Johannes församling, Yxenhult. The press release read:

A new church body was constituted on Saturday, September 7 in Uppsala by the name the Lutheran Confessional Church of Sweden (Lutherska Bekännelsekyrkan i Sverige). This church presently consists of three congregations with a total of ca 65 members who have left the Swedish State Church because of the great falling away from the Biblical doctrine and the confessions that have taken place there. In contrast to other groups who want to adhere to the Bible, the Lutheran Confessional Church of Sweden has found it as contrary to the Bible to remain in a church that accepts unbiblical doctrines... There were about thirty representatives of the Lutheran Confessional Church, from Piteå in the north to Landskrona in the south, gathered at the meeting in Uppsala. At this solemn ceremony, the constitution of the confessional church was signed... The Lutheran Confessional Church of Sweden is in close contact with other confessional churches abroad. Thus, the Evangelical-Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin had sent a representative to Uppsala who presented greetings and blessings from the Lutheran sister church body (translation mine).⁴⁵

From the constitution we read a definition of what this new church is all about:

The Lutheran Confessional Church of Sweden (LBK) is a free church that believes, teaches and confesses that the Bible is God's word and thereby completely trustworthy and infallible. It is the only norm, rule and guide for faith, doctrine and life. No other writings, whether older or younger, may be equated with the Holy Scriptures, but must be submitted to it, and are nothing more than witnesses to how the prophetic and apostolic teaching has been preserved after the time of the apostles. [---] The LBK also confesses all the symbolic books that are collected in the Book of Concord (1580), since these confessional writings agree fully with God's word.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Erlandssons, p. 2.

⁴⁶ "Vad är LBK?", available from <http://www.lbk.cc/index.htm>; Internet; accessed 12 December 2004.

A couple of years later the existing congregations realigned themselves and new ones were formed. Members of S:t Matteus in the north of Sweden formed both S:t Jakobs församling in Öjebyn and S:t Andreas församling in Ursviken/Skellefteå. Some members of the congregation in Yxenhult formed a new congregation in Ljungby, S:t Markus församling. There were also congregations consisting almost solely of new members. Pastor Lars Engquist left his pastorate in Råneå and took a large part of the congregation with him to form S:t Petri församling. Also Theol. Dr Ingemar Furberg left the State Church and helped found Heliga Trefaldighets församling in Gothenburg.

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