



How the Nineteenth-century Evangelical Revival Strengthened Faith and Undermined Christendom: A Swedish Case

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Abstract

This article deals with the paradoxical relationship between the nineteenth-century Evangelical Revival and secularization. It is argued here that the revival and its worldview played a role in increasing pluralism and choice in the nineteenth century – a process often related to secularization. The Evangelical movement both attempted to oppose modernity and rationalism and emphasized religious freedom, voluntarism, and individualism. It therefore induced and popularized self-reflection, doubt, and deconversion. It also favoured religious democracy in opposition to a state-imposed religious monopoly (at least in northern Europe). Furthermore, by dividing people into believers and nonbelievers, it emphasized religious polarization. This contributed to an undermining of established religious structures, fragmenting and pluralizing the religious landscape and giving people the option to abstain completely from religious commitment. The Swedish confessional (inner mission) revivalist denomination Evangeliska Fosterlands-Stiftelsen (EFS – approx. the Swedish Evangelical Mission Society), founded in 1856, is used as a case. The popular literature they published and distributed manifested an evangelical worldview. In this article four themes, based on the popular literature, are used to study empirically the changing role of religion in relation to nineteenth-century revivalism: ‘the dualistic worldview’; ‘conversion’; ‘activism’; and ‘self-reflection’.

Keywords: secularization, modernity, revivalism, evangelicalism, church history

Many attempts have been made to analyse and understand the transformation of religious faith and practices over time. Is there an overall process that can interpret and explain religious change, or are there many different processes and contexts that together formulate a framework to which

religion and religiosity relate and respond? This article acknowledges the complexity of intertwining processes over a long period. It focuses, however, on how the worldview of the nineteenth-century Evangelical Revival challenged and undermined established European protestant religiosity and its institutions. Not only did the revival contribute to the formulation and creation of new alternatives, adding to increasing pluralization but also (unintentionally) by introducing doubt, polarization, and deconversion. The revival promoted a situation in which religious faith became voluntary and one of several religious and nonreligious options. The Swedish confessional (inner mission) revivalist denomination called the *Evangeliska Fosterlands-Stiftelsen* (EFS – approx. the Swedish Evangelical Mission Society) is used as a case, or a prism, through which this development is studied. The EFS was part of the broader international contemporary Evangelical Revival in sharing worldviews and networks (for people, publications, tracts, and mission societies, etc.).

This article addresses the following questions: How can we understand the worldview of the Evangelical Revival in relation to the changing role of religion during the nineteenth century? How can we understand the seemingly paradoxical relationship between revivalism, modernization, and secularization?

The correlation between Protestantism and religious pluralism has been proposed before (not on the same ground as here though), going back to Lutheran thinking and the Reformation. For example, Goldman and Pfaff (2017) point to Luther as the key figure for an understanding of religious and social transformation after about 1500. Lutheran thinking individualized and relativized religious conviction by focusing on ‘*sola fide*’ (faith alone). It became possible for people to read and understand the Bible themselves (with a focus on ‘*sola scriptura*’/Scripture alone and vernacular language), and the church’s authority was scattered, contributing to a pluralist society. Likewise, Charles Taylor (1989) reasons along similar lines when discussing modern individualistic self-identity. According to Taylor, the Reformation paved the way for individualist thinking and hence for a pluralist society in which religious movements like the pietists, puritans, and evangelicals were part of this process. Brad S. Gregory (2012) sees Luther as the one who split the monopolistic Catholic Church and unintentionally introduced pluralism (see also, for example, Beck 2010; Berger 2014; Taylor 2007, on the Reformation and pluralism). Although Luther started the process, it gained momentum and was popularized through the nineteenth-century Evangelical Revival, thus, it is argued, affecting a wider stratum of society than ever before.

According to protestant and Evangelical theology, a true Christian devotee had to believe in the word and grace of God, and walk a righteous path through life to be saved. This was not, however, an easy path. This way of thinking was manifested and popularized, for example, by the popular and widespread allegory *The Pilgrim's Progress from This World, to That Which Is to Come*, written by John Bunyan in 1678 (Bunyan 2009), in which Bunyan (born 1628 in Elstow in England, died 1688), himself an unordained puritan preacher, describes how the main character, Christian, who is the pilgrim of the book's title, travels through life navigating temptations, having experiences, and aiming for eternal life in the 'Celestial City'. *The Pilgrim's Progress* illustrates how conversion, the path of the righteous, and doubt were intertwined with protestant Christianity. This worldview, expressed through protestant prints, had consequences for the role of Christianity in society and in the life of individual Christians (see, for example, Bassimir and Gelfgren 2023 on protestant print culture). For example, Candy Gunther Brown (2004) and David Morgan (1999) explicitly see tracts and the evangelical printing enterprise as part of the formulation of a specific culture and an evangelical identity.

Printing has also been seen as an integrated part of creating and maintaining a worldwide evangelical community (Edwards 2002; Moreshead 2015). Furthermore, according to David Hall (1990), for example, tracts are part of the expression and formulation of popular beliefs among the laity, and Kyle B. Roberts (2006) takes a similar approach. The various tract societies of the nineteenth century and their relations are also studied as part of the modern and marketized mass-media society by David Paul Nord (2004), for example. The role of the distributors of evangelical prints (such as tracts), the colporteurs, or itinerant preachers, has also been the subject of research. Sonia Hazard (2020) has studied the practice of colportage and how the colporteur used tracts to initiate discussions and ultimately conversion, and Sean Geoffrey Sagan (2017) has studied contemporary colporteurs, street preachers, and their use of tracts. This article therefore studies the worldview the revivalist literature expresses more than the framework of which they are part.

Modernity, secularization, and the role of religion

The relationship between societal developments and the changing role of religion has been well studied, often in terms of modernization and secularization (see, for example, Mouzelis 2012; Pollack 2015, for good overviews).

Modernity usually includes a period (approx. 1500–1950), societal changes (for example, technological developments, industrialization, urbanization, and functional differentiation), and related changes in values and world-views (for example, rationality, democratization, and individualization). These changes also affect the role of religion – a process often interpreted in terms of secularization, which includes the diminishing role of religion and is at the core of the ‘secularization thesis’ (proposed, for example, by Berger (1969) and Wilson (1966) in the 1960s and Bruce (2011), Stoltz (2020), and Stoltz and Voas (2023) more recently).

Since approximately the 1990s, however, the thesis has been contested (and nuanced), based on the notion that religion and religious faith prevail and adapt, and that the role of religion varies in different geographical areas and societal strata (see, for example, Beck 2010; Berger 1999; Casanova 2018; Martin 2010; McLeod 2000; Stark 1999; Stark and Iannaccone 1994; Swatos and Olson 2000). According to those who criticize the secularization thesis it is difficult or even impossible to find an overall theory that will once and for all prove the decreasing role of religion in relation to modern society.

The bottom line here, and the premise for this article, is that there is probably no single all-embracing model that explains the relationship between modernity and secularization. McLeod (2000) is inspiring here, claiming that ‘rather than one simple story-line, we need a narrative in which a variety of plots and sub-plots are intertwined’ (p. 286). However, even if it is difficult to pinpoint the exact reasons and models to interpret the process, something has happened, at least in the Western world between the 1500s and today. As Charles Taylor (2007) claims, whatever the definition of secularization is, there is a process that has affected religious faith, its associated practices, and its institutions: churches are now separated from political structures, people tend to participate less in institutional religious practices, religion or its absence is largely an individual matter (for believers and nonbelievers alike), and religious beliefs are today founded on personal preferences instead of institutionally defined doctrines. ‘The shift to secularity in this sense consists, among other things, of a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic [before 1500], to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace [today]’ (Taylor 2007, 3).

Meanwhile, Peter L. Berger has reversed his previous view of secularization (which was in line with the secularization thesis – compare with Berger 1969), stating that ‘we [the proponents of the secularization thesis] misunderstood pluralism as just one factor supporting secularization: in

fact, pluralism, the co-existence of different worldviews and value systems in the same society, is *the* major change brought about by modernity for the place of religion both in the minds of individuals and in institutional order' (2014, ix). He continues: 'if secularization theory must be given up, we need a theory of pluralism to replace it' (Berger 2014, ix). Both Taylor and Berger argue, in other words, that religious faith today is one belief/opinion among many others – that is, pluralization instead of secularization.

The changing role of religion in society is often measured in quantifiable terms through church attendance, baptism rates, self-expressed religious affiliation, membership of organizations, belief in God, and so on (see, for example, Stoltz 2020 or Voas 2009). In a reply to Stoltz (2020) François Gauthier (2020) calls for the need also to have a qualitative approach to religion and faith for a more nuanced understanding of the process of religious change. This article is inspired by such a qualitative approach.

This study adheres to and focuses on the idea that pluralization is key to understanding religion's changing role in relation to modernity.¹ Around the nineteenth century, the focus of this study, pluralization can be described both in terms of the societal functional differentiation that undermined the position of the majority churches as all-encompassing institutions and has been interpreted in terms of secularization. Yet pluralization can also be related to how the various revival movements pluralized and diversified religious expressions and faiths by increasing the number of options. While the worldview of the Evangelical Revival is mentioned in such a context, in the wake of the Reformation its paradoxical relationship with modernity and secularization is rarely empirically studied through the actual worldview of the Evangelical Revival, which is this study's aim. It is therefore also inspired by Ulrich Beck, who relates religion to individualization and pluralization, claiming that 'religion is the very *opposite* of individualization', and yet 'religion is the *source* of individualization' (Beck 2010, 79). This paradox is studied here and will add to the discussion of the relationship between modernity, secularization, and the role of religion.

1 In the long-time perspective, it is noticeable that Sweden is today a country with low degrees of institutionalized religious commitment, which is often mentioned, however, as related to the welfare state and the state church tradition, processes that are beyond the scope of this article (see, for example, Bäckström et al. 2004; Hamberg and Pettersson 1994; Kasselstrand 2015; Zuckerman 2009). For example, Bergfeldt (1997), Jarrick (1987) and Sanders (1995) touch on the relationship between alternative religious worldviews and secularization, but their studies focus on other periods and empirical material.

Source material and its contextual background

The relationship between the revival and the undermining of established Christendom will be discussed through the widespread and popular literature (tracts and books) distributed during the second half of the nineteenth century by the EFS. The literature was largely translations from English and German and was in line with international confessional protestant evangelicalism.²

The EFS was part of the Evangelical (with an uppercase 'e') Revival of the nineteenth century, sharing the idea of spreading the Word of God and the need for personal revival – as opposed to the evangelical (with a lowercase 'e') Lutheran church. To quote Bebbington: “‘evangelical’ ... is occasionally used to mean “of the gospel”, the term “Evangelical” ... is applied to any aspect of the movement beginning in the 1730s [with Methodism]” (Bebbington 1989, 1). The Evangelical Revival was indeed broad and geographically dispersed (originally in Germany, Britain, and North America), but shared many features (Ditchfield 1998). In the nineteenth century the Evangelical movement spread to other parts of the world, including Scandinavia and Sweden (see, for example, Hodacs 2003 on the British mission to Sweden in the early nineteenth century). Compared with its contemporary established (state) churches, the Evangelical movement tended to emphasize individual conversion and its moral implications, to which we will return (for an overview of the Evangelical movement see, for example, Bebbington 1989; Noll et al. 1994).

The EFS was inspired by and can partly be seen as a continuation of the English chapel in Stockholm, founded in 1840 and run by the Scottish pastor George Scott, initially for English residents of Stockholm. Scott left Sweden in 1842 after a riot in his church (which was considered a free church at a time when free churches were prohibited due to the Conventicle Act in place between 1726 and 1858 to prohibit religious gatherings without an ordained clergyman from the Church of Sweden). Thereafter Carl Olof Rosenius continued to run the chapel as a lay preacher. The EFS was founded in 1856, then as a board in Stockholm, with C. O. Rosenius the leading theological inspiration. It consisted of 12 men from the upper strata of society (including the nobility, clergy, royal court, and others) who were in contact with various tract and mission societies in Evangelical Europe and North America.

² I wrote my PhD thesis on a related subject (Gelfgren 2003), and this article seeks to deepen the argumentation on revivalism and secularization. I read approximately 60 tracts, ranging from four to 32 pages, for this article, though I do not refer to them all.

Inspiration was also found in the Free Church of Scotland (founded in 1843 based on Evangelical criticism of the established Church of Scotland). When the Conventicle Act was active, the board saw it as their mission to promote confessional revival on Lutheran pietistic grounds (rather than on Methodist grounds, for Methodism could be seen as a free church) (for the history of the EFS see, for example, Gelfgren 2003; Lundqvist 1977; 1982).

The EFS was critical of the state church for being moribund and too institutional, but was supportive of its Lutheran creed. It explicitly opposed contemporary Baptist/free church initiatives too. The main reasons for opposing the free churches were the urge to guarantee the Lutheran and confessional nature of the literature it distributed (from its own publishing house, established in 1857) and that their distributors, the *colporteurs*, were confessional.

Every year the EFS published and distributed (by selling or giving away) hundreds of thousands of cards, tracts, books, and other publications in a country with approximately 3.5 to four million inhabitants.³ Its publishing house therefore became the largest publisher in the Nordic countries in the early twentieth century (Rinman 1951). The EFS maintained that people should be able to trust the confessional content and identity of its publications and *colporteurs*, in contrast with those influenced by contemporary free church tendencies – that is, the Baptists. The tracts were a means to communicate the Christian message in a popular way. The intention was, according to the EFS's 1863 annual report (p. 22), that the publications should rain down on the country, and that God would then give spiritual growth to it. In the late nineteenth century the competition with other forms of literature increased, and the EFS's 1899 annual report acknowledged a common disinterest in reading tracts (p. 170).

The popular and often moralizing (fictional) tracts presented an idealized picture of Christian life (Lindmark 1995). They contained stories about the lives of true Christian believers, their conversions, and how to spread the Word of God, but also stories about the horrors and consequences of denying Jesus in one's life.

For this article a representative selection of tracts was chosen with the intention of encompassing a timespan (from the 1860s, when the EFS first published this form of literature, to the late nineteenth century, when from the EFS's perspective belief in tracts began to decline): tracts written by both anonymous and well-known authors; and tracts aimed at both children and

³ The publication numbers were published annually in the EFS's printed annual report.

adults. Sixty-two tracts were read, and a selection is cited in this article. I also draw on a book with a similar premise to that of Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, called *Brukspatron Adamsson eller Hvar bor du?* (Squire Adamson, or Where Do You Live?⁴, Waldenström 1863). The first edition was published in 1863 by Paul Petter Waldenström (theologian, lecturer, clergyman, and member of parliament) as an easy and accessible way of summarizing the basics of Christian faith. Waldenström was then part of the EFS but later left it to found the Mission Covenant Church (Svenska missionsförbundet – SMF) of Sweden in 1878. *Brukspatron Adamsson* (Squire Adamson) became one of the most-read books in Sweden in the late nineteenth century (Schück and Helms 1904) and is therefore relevant for this study.

The Evangelical Revival worldview regarding the changing role of religion

The genre of so-called true fiction presented in tracts and books was supposed to translate the faith and teaching of the revival movement to common language and to appeal to the ordinary man, complementing more conventional literature in the Christian tradition such as the Bible, catechisms, printed sermons, and Bible explorations (Lindmark 1995). Among members of the board of the EFS these fictional stories were initially regarded as a threat to the intellect of common people (linking this genre with contemporary fiction), but when the EFS began to publish true fiction in the late 1860s, the intention was to (indirectly) teach the Word of God, while people (in the worst case) only wanted to read interesting stories (Gelfgren 2003).

The stories had a strong focus on several themes, and here David W Bebbington's characteristics of the Evangelical movement are used to highlight some. He mentions 'Conversionism', 'Activism', 'Biblicism', and 'Crucicentrism' as essential to the Evangelical movement's worldview (Bebbington 1989). Hence, the tracts encouraged individual *conversion*, or revival, which led to an urge for the newly converted *actively* to seek to convert other people. The path to conversion was mediated through the message of *the Bible*, in which the atoning death of Christ on the *cross* was at the centre of the Bible and the convert's life. We therefore find people in the various stories who are confronted by the gospel, who choose to live accordingly, and who choose not to. For those who have chosen the way of Jesus, life is presented as pleasant and content despite their struggle to follow a narrow path through life. However, those people doing the opposite, that is, not saying yes to Jesus,

⁴ In this article the author has translated the Swedish titles to English.

choose damnation, self-righteousness, and misery – in both their mental and material wealth. This is also the essence of *Squire Adamsson*, which describes Adamsson's path through life, walking from city to city (cities with names like Holiness, the World, and the City of Darkness), meeting people of various characters (people with names like Freethinker, Gospel, and Mother Innocent), and seeking a life in the presence of God.

In this article four themes from true fiction literature are chosen to illustrate the worldview of the nineteenth-century revival and to highlight and illustrate the role of the revival movement in relation to the changing role of religion – 'conversion', 'activism', 'the dualistic worldview', and 'self-reflection'. Conversionism and activism are directly related to Bebbington's terminology. Two further themes are added for the sake of the argumentation – the dualist worldview and self-reflection. These two themes emerge from the reading of the empirical material, and a consequence of the conversionism aspect (one had to be converted or saved from the old sinful life to a new life). At the core of revivalist thinking was the reinforcement of a dualistic view of the world, a worldview that divided the world into Christian or non-Christian, and faith by heart or faith by reason. A true believer was supposed to be 'hot', not 'cold', and not even lukewarm (see Rev. 3:16), indicating a worldview that induced a stern duality and hence different alternatives. Conversion also resulted in self-reflection, which arose from the need to approach and deal with the dualistic worldview, with its different possibilities of choosing different ways of life.

The dualistic worldview

In the revivalist worldview there was a sharp contrast between believers and nonbelievers, and what was considered Godly and worldly, and this was repeatedly enforced through the tracts and *Squire Adamsson*. The foundation of this dualistic worldview is the need for conversion, without which man is fallen, ever since Adam was tempted by Eve to eat the apple in the Garden of Eden. Mankind is fallen, and only God can save it, and the world without God is dark, chaotic, and lost. The tracts polarized the world and man alike and popularized this view.

The tract *Två hem* (Two homes, 1890), for example, depicts two different men and their lives. They are both British working-class individuals, and both have just been paid and are on their way home from work. However, before arriving home they go to the pub for a few drinks, and when they leave, they are both intoxicated and have forgotten to buy necessities for

their families. The home of one of the workers is described as ‘barely a home’, as it is messy and generally an unpleasant place to be. The wife is depicted as angry and yelling at him, and the son is a ‘shaggy child’. In the other case the man comes home to a tidy but simple home; it is clean, and the meal is described as simple but well prepared by his pious wife. In this case the wife and his son forgive him for his negligence, which then gives him a guilty conscience, and in the end he converts to Christ. The story ends with a picture of ‘a drunkard’s’ (the first worker’s) grave (*Två hem/Two Homes* 1890). In another tract a Christian man seeks the home of a non-Christian alcoholic, who is sitting in a shed, dressed in rags, with his dead wife by a wall, blaming himself for her death. The Christian character tells the drunken man and his pale daughter with her starving baby in her arms about salvation through Jesus Christ (*Endast två ord/Only Two Words* 1897; *Det värnlösa barnets brev/The Letter of an Innocent Child*, undated).

In *Den lycklige bibelläsaren* (The Merry Bible Reader 1892), a gentleman named Thomson visits the more dilapidated areas of London, and behind a half-rotted door he hears someone reading the Bible and a ‘simple prayer’ and is moved to the bottom of his heart. When he looks in, he finds a tidy home, with the mother doing her housework surrounded by her three children doing their Sunday school homework. A true Christian is thus depicted as tranquil, sober, and hardworking, with a joyful and positive mind (*Gamle Anders/Old Anders* 1876), as someone who goes to church, trusts the Bible, and is content with life (*Duglig till intet/Good for nothing*, undated). Meanwhile, a non-Christian way of life includes wasting time, drunkenness, reckless talking, being absent-minded, and so on. Worldly success and happiness originating in career, money, or other ungodly measures of prosperity results in a life without true meaning, which is only to be discovered when hardship and ordeals set in.

Only conversion and salvation through Christ can save man from a sinful and meaningless life. The two sharply polarized alternatives are repeated and accentuated over and over again in the tracts, and there are no different shades of grey – the alternatives are either/or.

Conversion

If the dualistic worldview is the basis for the Evangelical Revival, conversion, awakening, or revival is the means to salvation – a notion going back to the Lutheran and pietist view of individual faith. The individual themselves is responsible for deciding their fate. Conversion is the pivotal point in life

when they decide to follow the way of God and abandon mankind's sinful nature. Within the revival movement a definable moment of conversion is inevitable for a true Christian, and one has to be a Christian 'by heart', not simply 'by mouth' or 'by reason' (*Hon talar som en kristen/She Speaks Like a Christian* 1890). Through free will and deliberate choice the individual can be raised and become the image of God they were intended to become before the Fall. The importance of conversion and the moment of and path to it are repeatedly narrated throughout the tracts. In the Swedish case, for example, this must be contrasted with the more collective form of religious practices traditionally found in the contemporary Lutheran Swedish state church.

The path to God is narrow, but through his love God keeps the gates open for anyone who wants it. Anyone can pass through, even though it may be difficult to do so (*Den trånga porten/The Narrow Gate*, Waldenström 1873; *En för alla/One for All* 1896). Conversion usually begins with the individual realizing their sinful nature and estrangement from God, and the tracts describe this process in many ways. The conversion is described as a wedding party (analogous with Jesus's Parable of the Great Banquet in Matt. 22 or Luke 14) to which everyone is invited, and all that is required is to respond positively to the invitation and to act and live as a worthy guest (*Allting är redo/Everything Is Prepared*, Fr. Sandberg 1896). According to one tract God calls on you to marry His Son Jesus, though you be the most wicked and a slave to sin and death (*Ett råd till de nödställde/Some Advice to Those in Need* 1896). The first step towards conversion is to become aware of your sins and shortcomings, which is done by reflecting on your life in the light of the Word of God.

When the individual is confronted by their depravity, they must act quickly because they cannot know if they will be interrupted by death or overcome by other obstacles. Sickbeds and deathbeds are therefore a common setting for reflection and conversion – because their fragile and sinful nature confronts them at their death, and they are thus prone to realizing the need for conversion (cf. *Världen förgås/The World Perishes* 1907). Even the hardest mind is softened when fearfully facing death. The tract *Hwarthän? Hwarthän?* (Where to Go? Where to Go?, Bonar 1891) describes a truly horrifying death scene where the non-Christian dying person is frightened by their destiny. The author concludes that darkness is persistent, and there is no light of hope, but the one who is saved is lifted above despair and hopelessness. Another tract tells the story of a woman 'who speaks like a Christian', but who is lying on her deathbed, terrified and not in her ordinary joyous mood (*Hon talar som en Kristen/She Speaks Like a Christian* 1890).

Conversion is ever present in the tracts, and they emphasize the need for conversion as the only way to salvation and a truly joyous life. It is and must be a deliberate and individual choice between life and death with eternal consequences, and one should not wait until it is too late.

Activism

The dualistic worldview is the foundation for revivalist thinking. Conversion, encouraged by reflecting on and being exposed to the Word of God, is a leap of faith – from being sinful and damned to being eternally saved and restored to the image of God that was God’s original intention for the individual. A true Christian takes responsibility for their life and lives life accordingly, a life of sanctification. A consequence of conversion, however, is the need and desire to spread the gospel to others to save their lives (cf. *Lef för Jesus/Live for Jesus*, Moody 1876). The tracts, as well as youth associations, Sunday schools, Bible study groups, journals, and so on, were all part of this activist endeavour. G. M. Ditchfield claims that every hour must be accounted for before God (Ditchfield 1998), and Callum. G. Brown even describes revival as a ‘salvation industry’ and as aggressive and exclusive (Brown 2001, 43–57). It accentuates and contributes to a division of people into us and them – those who are saved, and those who are not; those who spread the gospel, and those in need of receiving it.

A tract by the American revivalist preacher and publisher D. L. Moody illustrates this. He describes how every Christian must seek to convert others, and how not a single day should be left without an attempt to spread the Word – through prayer, talking to people, writing to them, knocking on doors, and sending them tracts and other publications. Many mistakes will be made, but the worst is not to try (*Lef för Jesus/Live for Jesus*, Moody 1876). *Besök hos the fattiga* (Visiting the Poor 1899) advises the reader about how to approach poor people to save their souls: do not act in a superior way; rather, offer jobs, learn about their psyche, discuss mutual interests (for example, healthcare or knitting with women, or farming or gardening with men), offer help or loans, and so on. Use anecdotes when speaking about spiritual needs, as they are easier to understand and remember.

In most tracts, however, it is by setting an example that a true Christian can demonstrate the Word of God in practice. In several tracts the leading Christian character speaks to people and reads the Bible or lives a righteous, just, and clean life that convinces others to convert, or when this does not happen, misfortune or disaster befalls the stubbornly unconverted. It

may be more accurate to speak of passive activism, as Christians, through their honest and dignified lives, show that Christ 'shines' through them. In *En troende familjs strid och seger* (The Fight and Victory of a Believing Family 1888) a man and his family are sentenced to death by a Japanese king because of their Christian faith. One after another the members of the family choose martyrdom and are taken away to be brutally executed. At the end of the story it is the husband's turn, and he is then presented with a test of his faith. All the members of his family are alive, for everything has been staged. The king is impressed by the family, and he converts to Christ.

A truly converted Christian therefore takes responsibility for their life and aims to stand trial at the feet of the Lord on Judgment Day. Every moment must be accounted for, and one of the responsibilities is the aim of converting others – showing them an alternative way, the way of God. This approach to life must be differentiated from life as a Christian within the framework of the state church, which sets no such ideals for being a Christian believer.

Self-reflection

The mere fact that the various revival movements create alternatives in an otherwise rather religiously homogenous society raises questions about personal faith and convictions. At the very core of the revivalist notion of faith is individual choice. The dualistic worldview, with a focus on conversion, emphasizes and polarizes various alternatives. Simultaneously, there is a push towards, and an activist approach to, missionizing to the unreached, supported by the revival movements' infrastructure (for example, voluntary associations, publishing houses, Sunday schools, foreign missionary endeavours, etc.). It is argued here that a situation is generally created in which self-reflection is introduced at a popular level.

In *Brukspatron Adamsson* (Squire Adamsson) Waldenström wishes to introduce and teach the basics of Evangelical doctrine. The grace of God is emphasized as the only way to eternal life throughout the book. Only faith in Jesus can save man, and the quest for salvation by works is never sufficient but is instead enthusiastically rejected in the book. In reading the novel, we follow Adamsson throughout his life, from his position as squire of Diligence manor (Arbetsamhet) in the city of Gospel (Evangelium) and finally, after many hardships and temptations, in the city of Holiness (Helighet), governed by Justus Omnipotent (Justus Allsvådlig).

The book's universe consists of seven cities. The book's other places include the Realm of Darkness (Mörkrets rike), ruled by Beelzebub; Paradise (Paradis), created by Justus after the schism after which the Realm of Darkness is created, and where the common people live; the World (Världen), which men created but is under the rule of Beelzebub and governed by the men I (Jag), Want (Vill), and Shall (Skall). The mere creation of the World angers Justus, and he therefore sends his son Immanuel to the people in the World, who execute him at Golgotha, even though he has been resurrected. The city of Gospel is created around Golgotha, with Immanuel as its ruler. Gospel is the city that harbours people who want to be set free from Beelzebub, and from which preachers are sent out to preach grace, the law, and the consequences of not receiving grace or following the law. Meanwhile, the World sends out freethinkers to preach spiritual freedom. There is also a seventh city, Indecency (Lösaktighet), from which preachers are sent out to preach, as is also the case for the city of Self-righteousness (Egenrättfärdighet). All these preachers proclaim their view on life, which in and of itself can be seen as an illustration of the changing spiritual and ideological landscape of the nineteenth century, a landscape contemporary man had to navigate.

Adamsson lives a good and righteous life in his manor. He is decent and educated, serves as chairman of the local mission society, is a monthly donor to missionary associations, and is engaged in the local church. The first to point out his self-righteousness is the old widow Mother Simple, who throughout the story accompanies Adamsson as his associate and corrective other. Adamsson is for some reason in debt to Justus Omnipotent, who seeks to reclaim his money. Mother Simple suggests that Adamsson leave his manor and move to Gospel. He is then torn between the works suggested by the law of the church and its clergy and the free offer of grace Mother Simple proposes. For a while he enjoys the easy-going company in the city of Indecency that contrasts with the anxieties he moans about experiencing in the city of Gospel.

The book's main theme is that Adamsson cannot believe that grace can be free, that he only has to believe, without doing anything, and that the faith he has learned from books and the church is in vain. He is constantly reflecting on his state of mind and his nature in relation to the various available choices. 'After a while I started to like myself and sought my personal glory. I abandoned Gospel and moved to Self-righteousness. There I lost my first love and became more and more blind,' Adamsson muses (p. 213). At one point, in Gospel, he thinks: 'maybe they are right over there [in Indecency].'

Here I suffer from doubts, fear, and uncertainties. ... If I only knew what to do! Maybe it is us [the people of Gospel] Paul the Apostle means when he talks about being a slave to the law' (p. 124). Even Mother Incipient occasionally suffers from doubt. In both cases – and this is the ultimate message of the whole story – they grow spiritually through doubt and agony.

There is the offer of free grace, but it is up to the individual to choose to receive grace. For Adamsson this offer is followed by self-reflective questions about whether he has been saved, how to live, what is true, how to know what the right thing to do is, and which is the path to follow through life – all questions of which someone never can be sure.

Discussion: Revivalism, modernity, and secularization – a paradoxical relationship

The role of the church was indeed transformed when modernity – including social differentiation, industrialization, and the resulting urbanization – scattered locally based (religious) communities and established new ones, as mentioned in the introduction. The church and Christendom were also contested by rationalist thinking based on the promises of science and new ideologies such as liberalism and communism, for example. This article, however, focuses with a complementary perspective on the relationship between the worldview of the Evangelical Revival itself and the transformation of the role of Christianity and religious faith. The Swedish case is used to operationalize and empirically study this relationship.

At the core of Evangelical thinking is the individual's relationship with God and the choice and responsibility to receive the grace God offers – to be revived and to be converted (or to choose not to be). Here is the link to the paradoxical relationship between revivalism, modernity, and secularization – in terms of pluralization, individual choice, polarization, and the possibility of abstaining from any religious affiliation.

In opposition to (what was seen as) an overly rigid and institutionalized Lutheran orthodoxy, the Swedish Evangelical movement followed Luther's example and acted to individualize the relationship with God. This involved personal conversion, which was at the centre of Evangelical thinking. Conversion includes a leap of faith, the leaving of one's old life and the entering of a new one, an action founded on a dualistic worldview – a duality expressed, for example, in the tracts through images of misery, drunkenness, and depravation versus contentedness and well-orderedness. If converted, one has the obligation of setting an example by implicitly

converting others through deeds such as honesty and dignity and explicitly spreading the Word through conversations and handing out tracts. However, people cannot be really sure if they have been saved by the grace of God, and self-reflection is therefore an integral part of Evangelical life. These doubts are illustrated by the wandering life of Squire Adamsson, for example. If someone is saved, this will have consequences in their life, and they should aim to live as if they are saved. If they try too hard, however, they are probably unsaved. Charles Taylor expresses this in the case of the puritan spiritual life as:

... [it] moved between a Scylla and a Charybdis. On one hand, one had to have confidence in one's salvation. Too much anxious doubt amounted to a turning away from God's gift, and could even be a sign that one was not saved after all. But at the same time, an utterly unruffled confidence showed that you were altogether forgetting the theological stakes involved, forgetting that one was a sinner who richly deserved eternal damnation, and was only saved from this by God's gratuitous grace; that one was in fact hanging over a cliff, and was only held back by God's outstretched hand (Taylor 2007, 82).

One can therefore never know if one is saved; rather, one has to live in doubt – but not too much if we are to believe Taylor. Squire Adamsson (as well as Pilgrim in Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*) represents here the revivalist way of life. Throughout the book Adamsson wanders around, asking himself about the meaning of life and how to live it, and whether he is saved or not. It illustrates how the revivalist worldview created a situation in which individual self-reflection was introduced, and then repeated throughout the tracts. Although previous revival movements had been quite limited in their distribution, the nineteenth-century revival movement reached far more individuals in a society that was becoming increasingly modern.

The legal possibilities of formulating new religious ideas, attracting new proponents, and establishing new religious voluntary organizations were in line with contemporary demands for religious freedom. In the wake of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, demands for religious freedom arose (often in opposition to the Ancien Régime and the established church), demands shared by proponents of various revival movements and other religious minorities throughout Europe. During the latter half of the nineteenth century the legal framework that upheld the monopolistic role of the Swedish state church was undermined, starting with the abolition of the Conventicle Act

in 1858. This development can also be illustrated by the mushrooming of contemporary religious associations with different affiliations. In Sweden, for example, the confessional inner mission explicitly contested with the free churches (i.e. the Baptist movement) of the early nineteenth century. Their associations (originally one for inner mission, one for baptism) split and re-established themselves several times in the late nineteenth century, pluralizing and thus diversifying the religious landscape itself, a development that was also part of the process of negotiating the role of a hegemonic church. The distribution and establishment of various revival associations were related to the worldview of the revival movements, which had opened different interpretations of the Word of God, each interpretation of which 'needed' its institutional framework (compare with Gregory 2012).

Through voluntary organizations, their way of working, and their rationale the revival movements were clearly part of the process of modernity. As Peter L. Berger writes, without any specific investigation of the nineteenth-century revival movement,

Evangelical Protestantism is one of the major religious traditions in which a personal act of individual decision is at the heart of the faith. One cannot be born as a Christian, one must be born again, having decided (in Evangelical parlance) 'to accept Jesus as personal lord and saviour.' Nothing could be more modern than this principle of individual agency (Berger 2014, 27).

To support such a claim, Squire Adamsson and his walk of life serve as an illustration. He spent a major part of his life reflecting on his choices, fate, and eternal life. He was torn between doubt and assurance – was he saved or just self-righteous, should or could he work on his redemption, or what should he do? In the different tracts the characters in one way or another must choose between being saved by grace or being lost for eternity – and there are no shades of grey in between.

In his discussion of modernity Giddens claims that it entails a self-reflexive attitude originating in the loss of the premodern homogenous society, which was replaced by a heterogenous and fragmented society (Giddens 1991 – compare with Beck's (2010) 'reflexive modernization'). Heterogeneity inevitably leads to relativization and choice. Moreover, modern science introduces doubts, according to Giddens, and truth remains true only as long as new discoveries do not overrule it. Hence, truth is relativized. To doubt and to seek new knowledge are part of the modern project, and for individuals this means being confronted with making decisions on a daily

basis. Giddens claims that ‘Modernity is a post-traditional order, in which the question, “How shall I live?” has to be answered in day-to-day decisions’ (Giddens 1991, 14), an attitude resembling Adamsson’s struggle, and well known in the protestant Evangelical Revival.

The revival movement(s) claimed that the Word of God and the atoning death of Jesus Christ were an absolute truth – mainly in relation to the established majority church and in opposition to contemporary secular tendencies. The aim was to strengthen Christian faith, but in doing so – as the tracts illustrate – dichotomies, alternatives, and doubts were introduced. The hegemonic role of the (protestant/Lutheran) church was questioned and hence undermined, calling for alternative interpretations of the Word of God. While doing so, however, a sharp distinction/dualism between the saved and ‘the others’ was introduced to Christian faith and practice (a dichotomy further emphasized from the other side by contemporaries such as the socialists and freethinkers) (compare with Beck 2010; Berger 2014).

This division was further induced because of the ‘activist component’ of the revival movements. As a token of being saved, the saved individual would seek to proclaim the gospel to the unsaved, encouraging conversion. Being lukewarm was not a desired alternative, and one can only imagine how dualism and individual doubt could result in different outcomes, ranging from the ‘faith of the heart’, nonfaith, or even religious apathy or simply ignorance. Individualism, choice, and pluralism made alternative outcomes possible: ‘Pluralism enables, indeed compels the individual to make choices between different religious and non-religious possibilities,’ according to Berger (Berger 2014, 37). Here Adamsson and his contemporaries sought to find their way between Scylla and Charybdis.

Even if the Evangelical Revival and the worldview it formulated aimed to strengthen religious faith overall, it reformulated religious faith and commitment – pushing it towards religious enthusiasm and unity but at the same time pluralizing its contemporary mental landscape, thus removing from its contemporaries the option to be religiously lukewarm.

It has thus been observed that the Evangelical Revival was part of and contributed to a pluralist situation by providing new alternatives. New associations were created, new theological interpretations saw daylight, and conflicts with nonreligious actors arose. This article, however, further highlights how the seed of self-reflection, faith, doubt, religious apathy, and deconversion is inherent in the worldview of the revival. The nineteenth-century revival sought the restoration of the Word of God but was ultimately

part of part of and contributed to the complex process of a pluralizing society and thereby of the undermining of both the church and Christianity as the hegemonic paradigm – to the extent where Christianity, according to Charles Taylor, is nowadays only ‘understood to be one opinion among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace’ (Taylor 2007, 3).

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