

6-2019

## Lennart's Innan Murarna Föll: Svenska kyrkan under kalla kriget [Before the Fall of the Walls: the Church of Sweden during the Cold War] - Book Review

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### Recommended Citation

Hjlem, Norman A. (2019) "Lennart's Innan Murarna Föll: Svenska kyrkan under kalla kriget [Before the Fall of the Walls: the Church of Sweden during the Cold War] - Book Review," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 39 : Iss. 4 , Article 7.

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## BOOK REVIEW

Lennart, Sjöström, ed., *Innan Murarna Föll: Svenska kyrkan under kalla kriget* [Before the Fall of the Walls: the Church of Sweden during the Cold War] (Skellefteå, Sweden: Artos Bokförlag, 2019) 640 pp.

Reviewer: Norman A. Hjlem, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

This volume, like several others,<sup>1</sup> is the product of historians, theologians, and churchpersons who, largely stimulated by the Finnish churchman Risto Lehtonen, have in recent years been exploring the role of and impact on churches of the Cold War, 1945-1989/90. The present work by Swedish scholars is unique in that Sweden was “non-aligned” during that time, and the Church of Sweden was (until 2000) a state church which did not enjoy the independence—political and otherwise—characteristic of churches in many other lands. This created a singular context for Sweden’s relation to the tensions and upheavals of the Cold War.

The first essay in the book, by Kristian Gerner, professor of history emeritus at the University of Lund, is a general survey of the developments in Sweden. He succinctly states what was facing Sweden:

During the Cold War Sweden pursued a policy of non-alignment which entailed neutrality in war. This policy managed to keep Sweden outside World War II. After the war, Sweden’s main agendas were a) to sustain a strong military defense against the perceived threat from the Soviet Union; b) continue the policy of non-alignment; and c) to support de-colonization of the Western empires and to bring aid to the so-called developing countries. The Swedish church and her individuals acted in the international arena within this ideological and political context.<sup>2</sup>

The volume’s second chapter by Katarina Kunter, translated and included in this issue of *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*, reviews how the ecumenical movement embodied in the World Council of Churches (WCC) understood and dealt with the Cold War.

<sup>1</sup> Including Mojzes, Paul, ed., *North American Churches and the Cold War* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Quotations from *Innan Murarna Föll* are from the English-language summaries which accompany each chapter.

Notably, the WCC during this period came increasingly to understand itself less and less as a Western organization and increasingly as a global movement. This greatly influenced the WCC and its member churches in their encounter(s) with the Cold War.

The second section of *Innan Murarna Föll*, five chapters, deals with relations between the Church of Sweden and selected churches of Eastern Europe during the Cold War. A serious issue concerning these relationships was raised in Sweden both by the Lutheran theological tradition and by the church-state relation at the time. (The Church of Sweden was disestablished in 2000.) In her chapter on “The Reaction of the Church of Sweden to the Crisis in Hungary” Birgitta Brodd states:

There was absolutely no expectation from society that The Church of Sweden should articulate any view on events in Hungary. The Swedish government, as well as parliament as a whole, were very clear in their repudiation of the political situation in Hungary. The Church of Sweden, being an established church, was hardly required to say anything officially...The Church of Sweden could, during the crisis in Hungary, without criticism, uphold the Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms. What happened on a political level in Hungary was not to be discussed or protested against publicly by the established Church of Sweden. Instead the Worldly Kingdom, i.e., the Swedish government, did precisely that. The role of the Church was performed in the Spiritual Kingdom.

The Swedish church, during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was marked by sharp disagreements concerning the proper role of the church within public life and during that same period the decision was made in favor of disestablishment. The “crisis” of the Lutheran Church in Hungary centered largely around the arrest(s) of Bishop Lajos Ordass by the communist government. Given the situation described by Dr. Brodd, contacts between Swedish church persons and the Lutheran Church in Hungary were carried out individually, through the WCC and LWF (Lutheran World Federation), or through aid organizations.

In addition to the chapter on Hungary, the second section of *Innan Murarna Föll* includes informative chapters dealing with Swedish Cold War relationships with the church in

East Germany (DDR) described as “a special brotherly relation” (Almut Bretschneider-Felzmann); with the independent Swedish congregation of St. Katherine in St. Petersburg (Gunilla Gunner and Carola Nordbäck); with the Russian Orthodox Church throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Jan Henningsson); and with the Estonian Lutheran Church (Tiit Pädam).

The third section of the volume deals with the “transoceanic perspectives” found in relations between the Church of Sweden and three of its former mission fields: India (Björn Fjärstedt), China (Jonas Jonson), and Ethiopia (Leif Nordenstorm). A fourth chapter in this section is of remarkable interest: “The Nicaraguan Peasant Mass: An element of the Cold War in the Church of Sweden” by Sven-Erik Brodd, professor of ecclesiology emeritus at Uppsala University. The socio-political struggle in Nicaragua associated with the Sandinistas was of great interest throughout the Swedish society, including the church. In this connection Latin American “liberation theology” had some influence within the Church of Sweden, and masses from that perspective were frequently translated and celebrated in Sweden. Brodd analyzes the use and appropriation of these masses from the perspective of ecclesiology and sacramental theology. *Campesina Nicaragüense* by Carlos Mejia Godoy was perhaps the most popular. Sven-Erik Brodd writes:

To put it in context, when the Nicaraguan Peasant Mass was performed or celebrated in the Church of Sweden, it was explicitly or implicitly associated with “the last battlefield of the Cold War,” i.e., Central America and consequently Nicaragua.

Finally, *Innan Murarna Föll* concludes with a section reviewing inner-churchly discussions—on occasion, conflicts—regarding the imperatives presented by the Cold War and the ideological debates concerning the best way to apprehend it. There is a chapter concerning “Milieu, Justice and Peace: Social ethical challenges to the Church of Sweden during the Cold War” (Gert Nilsson); a chapter on “Swedish inter-national priests and diplomats and the

challenges of the Cold War” (Lennart Sjöström); and a chapter on “The Cold War and ideological strife” (Johann Sundeen). There is also a concluding summary essay by Sven-Erik Brodd that gathers together the many strands of the volume. Brodd’s “postscript” concludes that “[o]ne of the outcomes of the book ‘Before the Fall of the Walls’ is that even if a variety of issues regarding the Church of Sweden during the Cold War are detected and discussed, there is an urgent need for further research.” Indeed.