Holiness theology among the early Methodists in Sweden may be traced back to several sources and mutual influences. The remarkably inter-twined careers of a handful of devout people shaped the spiritual life of generations. Conference journals and church histories tend to present membership statistics and ministerial records as evidence of a movement’s vitality. In this paper, however, the focus is on the theological content and method first heard and then proclaimed by preachers in the early years of Swedish Methodism. These include (in chronological order): C. G. Wrangel and the early läsare, George Scott, the Hedström brothers, Eric Jansson and his followers, and the Swedish Methodists in America responsible for sending missionaries to Sweden.

C. G. Wrangel and the Early Läsare

A common root shared by many early Swedish Methodists was a background in the läsare or lay-reader movement. These läsare shared with their Continental and English neighbors the main emphases of pietism: a return to the biblical portrayal of humans as sinners, Christ as redeemer, justification by faith, experiential rather than doctrinal theology, and holiness of life.¹ The movement took hold in the 1720s, and was strongest in Småland, Norrland, and Hälsingland, where an estimated two-thirds of the adult population, both clergy and laity, participated in conventicles. They held their meetings in homes despite the Conventicle Edict, which since 1726 had prescribed fines, imprisonment, and/or exile for those who met secretly or without the leadership of the Swedish Church.²

Dr. C. G. Wrangel, an eighteenth-century clergyman in the Swedish church, began reading Wesley’s works while serving a congregation in Philadelphia. In 1768 Wrangel met Wesley and preached in the chapel at Bristol. Once back in Sweden, he drew upon his läsare constituency and founded “Pro fide et christianismo,” a society that was roughly like a


Methodist class-meeting. Wrangel also did open-air preaching, but there is no indication that a particularly Wesleyan understanding of sanctification had a focal place in his sermons.  

George Scott  

George Scott (1804–1874) was a Methodist Scotsman ordained in Edinburgh. He came to Sweden in 1830, invited to be the spiritual leader for workers in factories owned by Samuel Owen, a British industrialist. Scott's two main accomplishments while working in Sweden were the foundation of the Swedish Bible Society and the organization of a temperance movement. He published many tracts and sermons on the latter, as well as traveling around the country giving temperance lectures and encouraging the läsare movement. His preaching was described as “marked by evangelical simplicity, fervour, and power.”\(^4\) Scott did \textit{not} speak much about the Wesleyan concept of sanctification; the doctrine did not appear to be his main interest. His notes on an exposition of Matthew 5:48 are preserved in the library Carolina Rediviva: “God is Love—to be filled with pure Love—is to be perfect as our Father in Heaven is perfect—a Command—a Promise—What do ye more than others?”\(^5\)  

During his travels, Scott was received enthusiastically, especially in Halsingland. This was later the birthplace of Janssonism. Admirers of Scott who heard him preach in Stockholm, and who later became Janssonists included the influential minister from Norrbo, Anders Gustaf Sefström, and Jonas and Olof Olsson, who subsequently became Jansson's deputies at Bishop Hill. There is no record of Scott and Jansson meeting, nor of one mentioning the other. Scott was so well-known and respected in the area of Jansson's activities, however, that it seems likely Janssonism, consciously or unconsciously, adopted some of the vocabulary and ideas of the Methodist preacher.  

Scott's ministry during the 1830s flourished, but eventually he ran afoul of the Swedish Church and government for his criticism of the church and for giving an unflattering description of the mission situation in Sweden while on a fundraising trip to America in 1841. He was forced to relinquish his work in Stockholm in 1842 and was replaced by Carl Olof Rosenius.  

The Hedström Brothers  

Olof G. and Jonas Hedström had little dealing with the läsare movement in Sweden; their influence was upon emigrants to the United States,  

\(^5\)Elmen, 47.
and those who later returned as Methodist missionaries to their homeland. Olof G. Hedström, born 1803, left Sweden in 1825, five years before George Scott arrived. He became a Methodist after his conversion in 1829. He was received on probation in the New York Conference in 1835. In 1841 Hedström met with George Scott, who wanted him to return to Sweden with him as an assistant, but Hedström refused. In 1845 the Bethel Ship John Wesley ministry was inaugurated through the efforts of the Methodist Missionary Society, Hedström, and Peter Bergner (a fellow-Swede and lay evangelist who had also been converted in America). The first service was held on Pentecost in 1845, on the ship then docked in the North River. Fifty persons attended. In the beginning it was a ministry mostly to sailors, but in 1846 this began to change with the first mass immigration of families, younger sons, and the very poor. Hedström served as “captain” of the Bethel Ship for 25 years, and died in 1877.

Jonas Hedström, born 1813, came to the U.S. with his brother, but settled in Pennsylvania and eventually fell in love with a young German woman. When she and her family moved west to Victoria, Illinois, he followed and later married her. He was a blacksmith and local preacher, and in 1846 founded the first Swedish Methodist congregation in the Midwest, at Victoria.

Neither Hedström left any sermon manuscripts, though Olof left notes on his ministry with the Bethel Ship. Even so, Henry C. Whyman claims that through the reports of others, one can discern a difference in the style and content of preaching by the brothers. Olof was much less strident in his relationship to those with a different theological bias. His main goal was to win the immigrant for Christ.6

The Hedström brothers ultimately influenced the development of the holiness theology among Swedes in America and in Sweden. This happened in at least two ways; first, O. G. Hedström’s multifaceted ministry to immigrants resulted in winning both converts and former Lutherans to Methodism in America. Swedish-speaking Methodist missionaries, such as Adolf Cederholm, who were sent to establish and strengthen Methodism in their native land came from the ranks of those who passed through the Bethelship. Second, when Olof Olsson emigrated to the U.S. to look for a refuge for Erik Jansson and his followers, O. G. Hedström met him and suggested the good, cheap land in Illinois where his brother had settled. Jonas Hedström and Olof Olsson met Jansson and his party in New York and escorted them to Illinois, a few miles from the Methodist church Hedström had founded. Jansson and Hedström argued sanctification theology during the whole journey, which, naturally, required Hedström to hammer out the Wesleyan understanding of perfection as opposed to the Janssonist. This was important for the Methodist credibility among

---

immigrant communities in Illinois, for Hedström was accused by both Lutherans and Baptists of playing “the same string” as Jansson on the doctrine of sanctification.  

Jonas Hedström’s commitment to Wesleyan theology is further evidenced in the fact that the pioneer Methodist preachers he trained from 1849 to shortly before his death in 1859 read Wesley’s sermons and his “Plain Account of Christian Perfection.”

**Eric Jansson and His Followers**

There was mutual influence between Eric Janssonism and orthodox Wesleyanism in the evolution of nineteenth century holiness theology in Sweden and Swedish-speaking America. Jansson’s unpublished manuscript autobiography, written in 1844, suggests that his parents did not raise him as part of the läsare movement that flourished in Hälshingland; he described them as “people whose religious feelings were those of the indifferent mob, whose fear of God was in respect for the church with all its decorations and priests.” In 1830, when Jansson was 22 years old, a painful attack of rheumatism precipitated a religious awakening that is described in terms not unlike Wesley’s Aldersgate experience:

I remembered what Christ did when he was on earth among people. So I prayed to Him to be made whole, and at once I was freed from my pains. At the same time I became conscious, believing firmly that God had taken away my sins and made me free from all sin.

Following this experience, Jansson became active in local conventicles, and studied the works of Martin Luther and Johan Arndt. He was convinced of his own call to preach, however, and within a few years repudiated both Luther and Arndt, who warned against allowing the laity to preach. A gifted, even hypnotic speaker, he began to teach the necessity and attainability of entire sanctification, the experience of it with justification as a single event, and the superiority of his own experiences and insights. Furthermore, he spoke freely about the corruption of the Swedish church and its leaders, encouraged celebration of the eucharist outside the church without ordained clergy, and incited acts of civil disobedience. During the same period (the early 1840s), Jansson became close friends with läsare-priest Jonas Olsson and his brother Olof, Olof Stenberg, and others who had recently heard George Scott’s Methodist preaching in Stockholm.

By the time Jansson emigrated to America in 1846, he had written a catechism and songbook for his hundreds of followers. These were not

---

7 Letter from Wesley M. Westerberg to the author, November, 1981.
8 Letter from Wesley M. Westerberg to the author, November, 1981.
published, however, until he had established a utopian colony (with himself as head) at Bishop Hill, Illinois. Sanctification was presented in these writings as attaining sinless perfection and, consequently, equality with Christ. For example:

Q: Do you believe that just as Christ came, now Eric Jansson has come with the light of truth, like God at the hour of creation, calling forth light out of darkness?
A: ... As the splendor of the second temple at Jerusalem far exceeded the splendor of the first, so also the glory of the work which is to be accomplished by Eric Jansson, standing in Christ's stead, will surpass that which Jesus and his apostles carried out. ...¹¹

Unlike Wesley, Jansson first claimed perfection and then gradually defined it, drawing heavily on the Johannine epistles. The claim to spiritual superiority gave self-confidence and a sense of solidarity to his poor and working-class followers, as well as the courage to leave home and family behind for an unknown world. Once at Bishop Hill, however, very few Janssonists claimed personal perfection; it became the exclusive quality of their prophet. For about ten years after Jansson's murder in 1850, colony members maintained an economic corporation and continued worshipping in the Bishop Hill Colony Church. By 1865, however, virtually all the Janssonists affiliated with the Methodist Church, finding, perhaps, more of a "common language" there than they could share with Lutheranism. Their first pastor was Nels Westergreen, who later trained Methodist ministers who returned to Sweden in the 1870s and 1880s. The second pastor, Peter Challman, had been a Janssonist before coming under the influence of Jonas Hedström in Victoria.

Other Swedish Methodists in America

The preaching of Wrangel, Scott, O. G. Hedström had called for a spiritual awakening with ethical consequences, while Jansson's message, though prima facie about sanctification but was actually megalomaniac and antinomian. However, it was in the first generation of the Swedish Methodist Conference in America that holiness theology was a topic of sustained interest for preaching, the extension of Methodism, and personal spirituality. The four men most responsible for this were Victor Witting, S. B. Newman, Nels Westergreen, and William Henschen.

Victor Witting, born in Malmö in 1825, was apprenticed to an apothecary as a young man, but later decided to go to sea. In 1845 he went as a crew member on the ship "Cere" bound for America. There were several Janssonists on board. In a scene reminiscent of Wesley among the Moravians

¹¹Eric Jansson, Cateches (Söderhamn: C. G. Blombergsson, 1846), 80.
on the voyage to Georgia, Witting was terrified when the ship was caught in a fierce storm. The Janssonists were calm and confident, praising God in the mist of the tempest.\textsuperscript{12} The ship was wrecked off the coast of Sweden, but caught between two large rocks and did not sink. Witting regarded it as a sign of God’s mercy to the Janssonists, and promised God he would visit these Christians in America.\textsuperscript{13} He fulfilled his vow in 1848 after encountering another group of Janssonists on their way to Bishop Hill.

Witting’s autobiography describes his sojourn in the utopian colony chiefly in terms of building programs, number of members, and his work as a doctor’s assistant; he never gave a theological critique of Eric Jansson’s holiness theology \textit{per se}. Wallenius’s biography indicates Witting left Bishop Hill in 1849 because he took issue with Jansson’s despotic rule and with the lack of harmony in the colony; however, Witting merely wrote that he “became tired of the Prophet.”\textsuperscript{14} Witting and his wife moved to Galesburg, a few miles away, and met up with a group of Swedish Methodists led by Jonas Hedström and Peter Challman. There were about a hundred ex-Janssonists living in Galesburg, and, like those who stayed at Bishop Hill after Jansson’s death in 1850, most became Methodists. Witting later made a trip to New York, and was encouraged by Olof Hedström to become a Methodist preacher. He was admitted to the Rock River Conference in Illinois in 1855, and served churches in Andover, Victoria, and Rockford before becoming the first editor of \textit{Sändebudet} (the Swedish Methodist newspaper) in 1862. In 1867 an anonymous donor underwrote the cost for Witting to make a “missionary trip” to Sweden, where he began preaching and attracting large audiences. Bishop Kingsley of the Methodist Episcopal Church made him superintendent of the Methodist work in Sweden. After Methodism in Sweden was officially organized into a separate denomination, Witting returned to the United States.

Christian perfection/holiness was a favorite theme of Witting’s while he was editor of \textit{Sändebudet}. During the 1860s and 1880s, he printed a staggering number of articles and sermons on the subject, usually putting them on the front page. It is reasonable to assume his commitment to holiness theology continued uninterrupted during his time in Sweden. However, the variety of authors quoted in \textit{Sändebudet} suggests Witting did not discriminate between Wesleyan and non-Wesleyan discussions and interpretations of the doctrine. Furthermore, a few of the articles were written by Witting himself. He did publish a sermon entitled “Hälsa—Helgelse” (Health-Holiness) in July, 1889. The sermon conveys a warning

\textsuperscript{12}Victor Witting, \textit{Minnen från mitt Lif som Sjöman, Immigrant och Predikant} (Memories of my life as a sailor, immigrant and preacher) (Worcester, MA: Burbank & Co 1902), 60.

\textsuperscript{13}C. G. Wallenius and E. D. Olson, \textit{A Short Story of the Swedish Methodism in America}, 30.

\textsuperscript{14}Witting, 107.
to those who neglect their spiritual health and God’s promise to those who seek it. On one hand, the concept of sanctification is sufficiently familiar to the reading audience that it need not be defined other than saying, “Sanctification is health in truth.” A conceptual shorthand is used. On the other hand, the message warns of the perils of neglecting this health, as though the idea of spiritual health may be new to many.

He published a second sermon, “Vill Du Blifva Fullkomlig?” (“Do You Want to Become Perfect?”) later in July of the same year. It appeared on the first page, between articles on the meaning of the “full armor of God” and a favorable review of “new experiences” taking place in the Holiness Movement. Quotations from The Guide to Holiness form the foundation of the latter article. The second sermon defines perfection as “being so filled with God’s love that selfishness and sin are driven out of the heart’s sanctuary.”¹⁵ Witting’s lengthy explanation of biblical foundations for the doctrine and explanation of terminology suggest he does not assume as much common theological ground with readers. The message is more argumentative in style, making heavy use of imperative verbs throughout the work, and offering few words of comfort or assurance. The means by which one is perfected is not explained clearly, nor is there a delineation of human activity versus divine activity in sanctification.

In addition to his work as a pastor and newspaper editor, Witting wrote and translated hymns, including what were generally conceded as the best Swedish translations of Charles Wesley’s hymns.¹⁶ None of his Wesley translations, however, appears in the current Psalmer och Songer. Witting also wrote original hymns, such as “Tack och lov ske dig, o Jesus, Ty du frälsat har min själ,” (“Thanks and praise to you, O Jesus, for you have saved my soul”) but sanctification was not a prevalent theme in his verse.

In summary, it is somewhat difficult to “pin down” Witting’s sanctification theology, both because of his eclectic taste in publishing and his silence about the sanctification theology which he learned and preached at two crucial periods in his life. The first period was 1848–49, when he lived among the Janssonists at Bishop Hill. Their theology of Christian perfection was considerably different from the Wesleyan interpretation, yet Witting’s comments about the Janssonist movement contain no reaction to their theology. The second period when one might have anticipated sermons explicating holiness theology was during his period as superintendent of Methodist work in Sweden, where this point of doctrine had been misunderstood—yet the only reference to sanctification in Witting’s autobiography was in the course of a conversation with the King of Sweden in 1875. The explication of sanctification here was brief, and could have

¹⁶ Wallenius and Olson, 33.
been extracted from doctrinal essays by his better-educated colleague, Nels Westergreen. In Witting’s scant writings on the subject, holiness is sought for spiritual self-preservation and the promise of religious bliss; nothing is said about ethical implications, evidence of sanctification, or its impact on the Church and world.

S. B. Newman, born in Höganäs in 1812, emigrated to America at age thirty and settled in Mobile, Alabama. At a Methodist campmeeting in 1844 he experienced a religious awakening and call to ministry. He was ordained deacon in the Alabama Conference in 1847 and in 1851 was called to be O. G. Hedström’s co-worker at the Bethel Ship, a position he held for three years. From there he went to be pastor of the struggling Swedish Methodist congregation in Chicago, where, in December, 1853, the young Nels Westergreen was converted under his preaching. The importance of sanctification theology to Newman is manifested in his ministry and devotional life; the tract he gave Westergreen and other converts in Chicago was Wesley’s “Christian Perfection.” This autobiography notes these excerpts from his journal:

To become holy, useful and of service is my deepest desire. In this mood I gave my first sermon of 1872 in Victoria, on Deuteronomy 30:6. . . . The old is perished— Might new grace, new peace, and new blessing be poured out over my soul. I am longing for the fullness in Christ which the Word promises. 17

Because Newman’s ministries in northern Illinois and New York took place during the first major waves of immigration from Sweden, his commitment to pursuing holiness had more far-reaching consequences than it would had preaching on this topic begun fifteen or twenty years later.

Nels Olofson Westergreen (1834–1919) was connected with nearly all the people and permutations of holiness theology mentioned earlier. The eldest of seven children born to very strict lāsare parents in Blekinge, Westergreen and his family emigrated to the United States in 1852. Then age nineteen, he worked in Boston for several months before joining family members in Chicago, where, as previously noted, he was converted after hearing Sven B. Newman. Newman became his mentor, and encouraged him to seek both sanctification and ordination. Westergreen studied at Knox College and Garrett Biblical Institute, and was ordained a deacon in 1859. He was appointed to Victoria, the first Swedish Methodist Church in the country, organized by dissident Janssonists and Jonas Hedström in 1846. A few years later he was the founding pastor of the Methodist Church in Bishop Hill. All these factors helped make the pursuit of holiness the focus of Westergreen’s preaching, teaching, and personal spiritual life. Furthermore, the popularity of the holiness revival in English-speaking Methodism provided a supportive environment for his interests.

Because he was one of the best-educated Swedish Methodists at the time, Westergreen was chosen to be the organizer and first professor of the Swedish Methodist Theology Seminary, which began in Galesburg in 1870. The school moved to Evanston in 1874, and Westergreen was appointed editor of Sändebudet. He and William Henschen ran the newspaper and the seminary between them, thus exerting a powerful and far-reaching influence.

Westergreen’s zeal for sanctification was unvarying, though its expression changed during the course of his ministry. In an 1879 sermon, for example, he wrote:

Cleansed in the present, we still stand in constant need. The saints have no independent holiness apart from him . . . we are not only acquitted as in justification, but truly cleansed, for the removal of all sin. 19

In 1885, Westergreen attended a meeting of the National Holiness Convention for the first time and also published a book called Skillnaden På Sann Helighet och Religiös Svärmeri (The Difference Between True Holiness and Religious Fanaticism/Enthusiasm). The force of his argument lay in logic as well as the authority of Scripture. He reasoned that one might speak of “true holiness” just as Johan Arndt wrote about “true Christianity.” The adjective was necessary because of the presence of possibility of a counterfeit. Within this book, “sanctification” is used primarily as a verb or adjective describing an event or process in the individual, and “holiness” is used to describe the state or quality of the person who has been sanctified. Westergreen emphasized the necessity of wholehearted consecration and a life conformed to Christ as both the means to and evidence of sanctification.

In Svenska Metodismen i Amerika (Swedish Methodism in America), published in 1895, Westergreen’s outline of Methodist theology (first printed Sändebudet in 1876) is presented in contrast to Lutheran teaching rather than “counterfeit holiness.” He distinguished between sanctification and Christian perfection here; the former was defined as a particular work of the Holy Spirit in human lives, received through faith in Christ, purifying one from the remnants of indwelling sin and its contamination, and filling the heart with God’s love. 20 Christian perfection, on the other hand,

---

18 Albert Ericson, one of Westergreen’s contemporaries who was educated in Sweden, was initially named to organize a Scandinavian seminary in 1866, but plans were later abandoned. Ericson returned to Sweden for a brief period of study, and his preaching there was likened to George Scott’s. After his return to America, he served several local church appointments, was editor of Sändebudet for awhile, and became Henschen’s successor at the Swedish Methodist seminary.

19 Nels Westergreen, “Men Wandrom Wi Ljuset,” [sic] (If We Walk in the Light) sermon manuscript, 1879, Northern Illinois Conference Archives.

20 N. M. Liljegren, C. G. Wallenius, and Nels Westergreen, Svenska Metodismen i Amerika (Chicago: Swedish Methodist Book Concern, 1895), 120.
was described as a condition of spiritual grace and maturity, which is possible to attain during the Christian economy of grace on earth, and which corresponds to the idea of being a "father in Christ." was described as a condition of spiritual grace and maturity, which is possible to attain during the Christian economy of grace on earth, and which corresponds to the idea of being a "father in Christ."  

Westergreen's commitment to a Wesleyan sanctification theology found expression in sermons, lectures, and other writings right up to his death in 1919. In this way he differed from William Henschen, whose interest in it diminished as he aged. Westergreen also differed somewhat from Witting. Though he admired the latter's gifts as a preacher and lecturer, he criticized Witting's occasionally breezy style and inaccurate scholarship. Witting, as had been pointed out, lacked the sophistication (or perhaps the desire) to reflect critically on the different holiness theologies propagated during his lifetime.

William Henschen's life (1842-1925) and ministry were uniquely linked with the origins of Methodism and holiness theology in Sweden and can also be traced back to the läsare movement. Henschen's father, Lars William Henschen, was a lawyer who had close personal contact with both George Scott and Erik Jansson. He underwent a religious awakening that led to a friendship with Scott, and in the 1840s was the legal counsel for persecuted followers of Jansson in Hälsingland and Uppland. Henschen studied medicine at Uppsala and Berlin, but taught school and occasionally preached at what later became Missionsförbundet before emigrating to the United States in 1870. He began attending a Swedish Methodist church in Brooklyn and was encouraged to enter the ministry. After ordination he was sent to Chicago, where he became Westergreen's assistant and then successor. The Swedish Methodist Book Concern in Chicago published several small books of his sermons. He returned to Sweden in 1885 and joined the Methodist Conference there, first editing the Swedish Sändebudet, then teaching in the theological school at Uppsala. In 1889 he went back to the United States and resumed his former work until retirement in 1910. A manuscript autobiography, probably written in 1919, is housed in the Northern Illinois Conference archives.

Svenska Metodismen i Amerika quoted Henschen as saying about himself, "In outlook I am a confirmed liberal on religious and political questions, not willing to be bound to any party, but always striving for extensive reform in a group." His zeal for reform is evidenced in this sermon/polemic to readers of Sändebudet:

Reader! If you are not becoming a saint in this life, and weighted as such by God in the hour of death, you are by no means fit for the kingdom of heaven. What is

---

21 N. M. Liljegren, C. G. Wallenius, and Nels Westergreen, Svenska Metodismen i Amerika (Chicago: Swedish Methodist Book Concern, 1895), 122.
22 Nels Westergreen, Diary, July 6 and August 14, 1914. N.I.C. Archives.
24 N. M. Liljegren, C. G. Wallenius, and Nels Westergreen, Svenska Metodismen i Amerika (Chicago: Svenska M.E. Bokhandels-Föreningens Förlag, 1895), 324.
The mood of the sermon is one of urgency and optimism, with a note of warning to lukewarm Christians who do not seek the blessing of sanctification.

As Henschen grew older, his writings suggest holiness theology diminished in importance for him. A 1914 sermon in which perfection is mentioned but not featured seems to blur the distinction between perfection and assurance, as witnessed by his explanation of the term perfect:

This cannot really mean anything but this, that we are entirely on the Lord’s side, and don’t waver between God and the world, or are tossed between faith and lack of faith, but rather have our relationship with God so clear that we can say, ‘I know whom I believed,’ along with ‘nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord.’ To become perfect in this sense is every Christian’s privilege, and we are definitely called to be satisfied with nothing less than this.

The diminished interest in sanctification is also manifested in Henschen’s manuscript autobiography, which lacks the theological and self-critical reflection one might expect. Sanctification is never mentioned, even in connection with his work with Nels Westergreen. Without examining further evidence, such as issues of the Swedish Sändebudet during the period he was editor, it is difficult to determine the degree and manner in which he taught the doctrine in Sweden from 1885–1889.

In summary, Swedish Methodists in the United States, with roots in the läsare movement, the writings of Wesley, and the American holiness revival at the time, helped chart the course for the holiness revival in Sweden. This was done through translating Wesley hymns and other writings, publishing their interpretation of the doctrine of Christian perfection, and appointing missionaries to organize the nascent Methodist movement in their native land.

26William Henschen, “Jagande Mot Målet” (Striving forwards the goal), Ljus På Vägen (Light Along the Way) (Chicago: Swedish Methodist Book Concern, 1914), 78.