

METHODISM IN DENMARK AFTER WORLD WAR II

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After World War II, the people of the Nordic countries had to orientate themselves into a new Europe. Borders were moved. Old political alliances were broken, and new were under construction. The changed political situation stated a new agenda for Methodism in all the Nordic countries.

In Finland, the Karelian foreland and some smaller areas in the north were incorporated into the Soviet Union. For Finnish-speaking Methodism this was a catastrophe because 60% of the membership lived in this area. Some contacts over the border were allowed during a few years but during the period of the Cold War when the Soviet border was totally closed the connexion with the major part of Finnish Methodism was drawn to a close, and only the amputated Finnish Methodism in Finland survived the Soviet period.

Before World War II, Methodism in the Baltic countries was part of the Northern Europe Central Conference. Following the European Union Conference in Copenhagen in August, 1939, where a solid delegation from the Baltic countries had participated, communication became increasingly difficult between the various nations and the destiny of the Baltic Methodism was unknown to the Methodists in the Nordic countries. During the years of the war some Baltic Methodist pastors, who were forced into the German army and were sent to Denmark, showed up in Methodist Churches and joined the worship services. Because Methodists from Denmark, Lithuania, and Latvia had studied together at the Methodist Theological Seminary in Frankfurt before the war, personal and positive relationships had been built. But when Baltic Methodists in military uniforms showed up in Danish Methodist churches and parsonages, the reaction from other Danish people were accusations of being Nazi sympathizers, and some of the churches were vandalized.

In 1939, the membership of the Baltic Methodist churches was over 3,000 and the number of worshippers was even greater. In Estonia, thirteen pastors were appointed to fifteen circuits and congregations, in Latvia seventeen pastors were appointed to nineteen congregations and the Evangelical Association had three pastors serving three congregations with 223 members and 570 regular worshippers, and in Lithuania seven pastors were appointed to seven circuits and congregations. In Tallinn, the Methodists had a Deaconess work, the Bethesda.

The Molotow-Ribbentrop agreement in 1939 allowed the Soviet army to occupy and absorb the three Baltic states into the Soviet empire in August, 1940. The Communist power apparatus was very effective: 10,000

Estonians, 34,000 Latvians, and 38,000 Lithuanians were immediately arrested and deported to Siberia. Politicians, pastors, leaders of all kinds of organizations disappeared. The Germans attacked the Soviets and when the Nazi army came to the Baltics in June, 1941, they were welcomed and received as liberators. But the joy was short-lived. The Nazi strategy was to absorb the Baltics into a new Germany; Baltic independence was cancelled, and 280,000 men from the Baltics were forced into the German army and then sent to the eastern front. In addition, 240,000 Baltic Jews were killed.

When the tide of the war changed, many people fled because they feared there would be renewed and enhanced Soviet cruelties. The Soviet army occupied the Baltics in 1944 and started a new wave of terrorism. Thousands of Baltic people were forced to accompany the retreating German army. By 1949, there were 64,000 Baltic citizens in Displaced Persons Camps in Germany, among these were many Methodists including twenty-three preachers. Industrial companies, the land, and the economy were all nationalized. People with German names and people with relations to the West were persecuted. Churches were closed down and used as factories, storerooms, stables for military horses, sports and swim centers, as well as for basic housing. In particular the new Anglo-American inspired congregations were persecuted and denied the freedom to worship.

A curriculum of atheistic propaganda commenced in the schools, and while the elderly were eventually granted the privilege to practice their faith in private, all efforts to evangelize young people and to recruit new members to the churches were forbidden. Many Russians were forced to move into the Baltics and became the new leading class, the new aristocracy. Russian became the official language and primary language in the schools. Baltic men were forced into the Soviet army. The economical, technological, and the social standards were frozen at the 1940 level.

World War II and the incorporation of the Baltic states into the new Soviet Union was a catastrophe for Methodism and other Western-inspired Christian movements in the region. In Estonia, superintendent Martin Prikask was executed by the communists and was the first Estonian Methodist martyr. The largest Methodist church building in Tallinn along with the denominational headquarters were destroyed by aerial bombing and eventually many church buildings were taken over by the new regime for other uses. The first and oldest church in Estonia, the church in Kuressaare, was twice occupied by the Soviet military and used as a horse stable, though each time the persistent church members were able to retake their building and restore it as a place of worship. Alexander Kuum assumed Methodist leadership, and through his personal courage, strength and dignity managed to lead Estonian Methodism through the war years and the persecutions during the atheistic period of Stalinism. Several times Kuum was arrested and even sent away to prison-camp in Siberia, but nothing could break his faith and trust in God. The Estonian Methodist church continued its evangelical work during all the years of Soviet occupation. Initially the regime tried to break down the Christian churches in the country, especially churches with a Western tradi-

tion such as the Methodists, and the persecutions reduced the size of the church but Methodism survived. Estonian Methodism even grew a little during the post-war period. The aggressive persecution of Western style denominations greatly diminished following the Stalinist regime to the extent that the bishop of the Northern European Conference was allowed to visit the Methodists in Tallinn and representatives from the Estonian Methodist church were permitted to join international conferences outside the Soviet Union's borders.

In Latvia and Lithuania, the situation was quite different. The war and the Soviet purging of all German-related people, even people with German names, nearly destroyed the church. There were many martyrs. One of the first was Reverend Rudolfs Goldsmith who was found on a street in Riga with a broken skull. Small groups of Methodists were forced into non-Methodist churches where they soon lost their Methodist identity. Buildings were taken over by the authorities and used as sports centers, factories and warehouses. Some of the buildings were given away to larger denominations whose buildings had been destroyed during the war. In Latvia, Methodist congregations were united with Lutheran congregations, and Methodist pastors ministered in the Lutheran church. In the United States, Latvian and Lithuanian Methodist refugees established a fellowship. Raymond Wade, bishop in the Northern Europe Central conference until World War II, even initiated a conference in Michigan in 1962 for people who were related to the Methodists in Latvia and Lithuania. Pastors, pastors' families and laity participated in the conference.

In Norway, the Methodist Congregation in Trondheim had over the years totally changed its relation to the mosaic community. When the Jewish synagogue was closed in 1941, the Methodist congregation established an undercover synagogue in the attic of the sanctuary of the church where the Jewish Sabbath celebration could be held. In 1942, all the Torah scrolls and the holy articles were entrusted to the care of the Methodists. And when the rabbis and most Jews were gone in 1943, the Methodist pastor ministered to the remaining Jews using the Jewish liturgy and ceremonies. When a new synagogue was consecrated in 1947 by a returning Jewish community, the Methodists returned the scrolls and the sacred items and assisted in making the synagogue fully functional. Since that time the connection between the Methodist and the Jewish congregation in Trondheim has been quite extraordinary. A plate in remembrance was installed on the Methodist Church building in Trondheim by the Jewish community at its fiftieth anniversary.

In Denmark, too, some Methodist pastors were active during the war in bringing Jewish people out of the country and into Sweden. In Strandby, the Methodist pastor organized a system to hide Jews fleeing from other parts of the country. Smuggled aboard Methodist fishing boats they were clandestinely transferred to Swedish boats in the midst of the North Sea or the Kattegat. The price of these actions was that 10% of the fishing boats of Strandby were blown up by mines. In the cold winter of 1941-1942, when all fishing was impossible, the congregation experienced a revival. A new

generation of Methodists were raised during that period and secured a constant growth rate for many years. In 1960, the congregation erected a new and larger church building to accommodate the expanding work.

The border between Germany and Denmark had been moved several times north and south since 1864, and the population in southern Jutland and Schleswig-Holstein was mixed Danish-German. The Methodist Church in Vejle had since the 1860s been the main Methodist center of western Denmark. Many preaching points were served by travelling preachers from Vejle to Frederikshavn in the north and to Schleswig in the south. In fact most of the Methodist congregations in Jutland had been started by preachers from Vejle. When the border was moved north in 1864 the established Danish Methodist congregations south of the border were connected with the North German Annual Conference and became an integrated part of German Methodism until the border was moved north again in 1920 and southern Jutland was united to Denmark. Even though the Methodist Church in Denmark tried to incorporate the congregations in southern Jutland into the fellowship of Danish Methodism the understanding among people in southern Jutland was that Methodism was a church linked to the German population and the German Methodist Church, consequently the conditions for Methodism in southern Jutland were very difficult. By the end of World War II, the small Methodist groups and congregations had disappeared. Between Kiel in the south and Esbjerg in the north only the Methodist congregation in Flensburg survived. World War II ended in Denmark on May 5, 1945. The Soviet air force bombed the isle of Bornholm and two of the Methodist church buildings were damaged. Bornholm was in the Soviet-governed zone of Europe for a year before it was united with Denmark.

When the Northern Europe Central Conference met in 1946, the Methodist churches in Scandinavia and the Baltic were quite reduced. Throughout the war the American Bishop, Raymond Wade, had been unable to visit the churches or lead the Annual Conferences. Several times during the war the suggestion had been made that the leadership of the Scandinavian Methodist Churches and at the least the leadership of the Danish Methodist Church should be taken over by the leadership of German Methodism. Danish candidates for ordination were asked to either go to Germany for ordination in one of the German conferences, or to accept that a German leader would preside at the ordination in the Danish Conference. All Danish candidates refused to be ordained during the war. Following the war it imperative that the Episcopal leadership and the Central Conference leadership be re-established. Reverend Theodor Arvidson, of Sweden, was elected the new Bishop. The reconstruction of the Northern Central Conference took place around a core of the larger Swedish and Norwegian Methodist Churches, along with the smaller Danish Methodist Church and the greatly diminished Finnish Methodism. The former identity of being part of a European or more precisely of a Northern European and Baltic Methodism was replaced with a new Scandinavian and Nordic Methodist identity.

The Scandinavian Theological Seminary, Överås, in Gothenburg was

established in 1924 as a training center for pastors and missionaries to the Methodist Churches in the Nordic countries. After World War II there was a new willingness in the Annual Conferences to build up a common Nordic Methodism and Överås became the most important center for pastoral training. In all the countries from the late 1940s through the early 1960s, many young people announced their intention to go into some kind of ministry. Traditional educational classes for pastors and missionaries were consistently full, and a variety of summer courses prepared many laypersons to serve in leadership of Sunday Schools, scout and youth groups and as lay preachers. It has been of great importance for developing of a common Nordic Methodist identity that the major portion of the leadership of the church was formed in the same educational program and knew each other. One of the additional fruits of this development was massive interaction across borders and between local congregations, including cooperation among choirs and music groups, scout camps, and the exchange of books and supplements for programs. Pastors were appointed to serve in neighboring countries, and it became common to have preachers from neighbor countries when local churches had an outreach campaign. For the Methodist Churches a new generation of leaders sprouted up, and they were needed. But after some years the churches could not employ the great number of leaders it had produced, and very many with educations from the Methodist Church looked at other occupations such as teachers in public schools, scientists at the universities, and pastoral ministries in other churches or Methodist Churches in foreign countries. Some of the influential personalities were Harald Lindström, Arne Hassing, Emil Larsen, Niels Mann, Thor Hall, Ingvar Haddal, Thorvald Källstad, Ole and Peder Borgen.

The General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church decided in 1956 to let women be ordained Elders and become full members of the annual conference. Immediately young women from Sweden, and soon also from Denmark and a little later from Norway and Finland started theological training at Överås. The Nordic state churches opened for female pastors first in Denmark in 1947, followed by Norway and Sweden. Since 1962, when Maiken Hellgren was ordained an Elder in Sweden, female pastors have served in the Nordic Methodist churches.

In 1951, Reverend Göte Bergsten in Gothenburg started the St. Lukas Institution which was a pastoral and therapeutic counseling organization. Bergsten combined the tradition of pastoral counseling with the new American client centered therapy. The St. Lukas Institution became a major work not only in the Swedish Methodist Church but in the broader Swedish society, as well as in the neighboring countries. Sven Ljungdahl and Anker Nielsen followed up and developed the work of Göte Bergsten.

At the Central Conference in 1953, the Dean of Överås, Odd Hagen, was elected the new Bishop. Odd Hagen was the first Nordic Methodist who wrote a course book in systematic theology. Bishop Hagen focused his leadership on the international dimension of the Methodist Church and he introduced a number of young pastors to what was going on in Methodism

outside Northern Europe. Under his leadership the two first editions of the Scandinavian *Book of Discipline* were produced with adoptions and changes ratified by the Central Conference.

The ecumenical movement in the Nordic regions progressed rapidly in the decades following the war. This process was stimulated by the international Ecumenical movement and the establishment of the World Council of Churches in 1948. But the situation in the Nordic countries was unique. Ecumenism was an exclusively Protestant endeavor, with the exception of Finland where the Orthodox Church is one of two national churches. The recent history of the Roman Catholic Church in Nordic countries is very similar to the history of Methodism, which means that the first congregations were founded by immigrants after the establishment of religious liberty in the mid-nineteenth century, and until the Second Vatican Council, the Roman Catholic Church had no active engagement with other Nordic churches. For the Methodist Church, Ecumenism developed in two directions. One direction was the relation to the Lutheran Church, which on the theological level is the church closest to Methodism. Even before any formal ecumenical agreements, the close relationship between Methodists and Lutherans made it possible that a pastor from one of the denominations was accepted as pastor of the other. Several Methodist pastors ended up as pastors in the Lutheran Church. But the Lutheran Church was the state church, governed by the parliament and administered like another civil department; so on the ecclesiological and practical level the distance between Methodists and Lutherans was extreme. Another direction of ecumenism was the relationship to other Protestant churches such as the Baptists, Covenant Mission, Salvation Army and Pentecostal churches. From a theological perspective these churches differed greatly from Methodism, though they all defined themselves in the evangelical revival tradition; in the Nordic countries they represented an Anglo-American Christianity in opposition to traditional European Christianity. From the Methodist perspective both directions of ecumenism developed successfully if the target was to unite the Churches and reconcile old schisms, but the development caused a decline in the membership of the Methodist Churches.

The Pentecostal movement was brought to the Nordic countries by Reverend Thomas Barratt (1862-1940) who was employed by the Norwegian Methodist Church as a traveling evangelist. Barratt's first platform in Norway and Denmark was for several years the Methodist church. In Sweden, Barratt soon connected with the Baptist network. Even though the first Pentecostal congregations were established in the 1920s, the question of whether the Pentecostal movement should be recognized as a branch of Methodism or as a new and autonomous denomination remained an open discussion within the post-war Methodist conferences. Most Pentecostal congregations established in the 1920s and 1930s aligned with the geographic distribution of the Methodist and the Baptist churches. After the war it was obvious that the Pentecostal movement had caused schisms in many Methodist congregations and losses of members and pastors.

In Norway, the Methodist Church's connection to the Lutherans was the most successful. The roots of Norwegian Methodism were the same as the Lutherans, pietistic Haugeans. This helped prepare the way for the formal establishment of closer relations both in the 1994 agreement, The Fellowship of Grace, and in the 2005 decision that the Methodists should join the Lutheran Theological Seminary.

In Denmark, the four old Free Churches—Baptist, Covenant Mission, Salvation Army, and Methodist—initially cooperated in outreach campaigns. Each of the denominations was so small that it would have been difficult for them to maintain exclusive evangelical campaigns to reach the local population with the gospel in a version different from that of the established church. Together the Free Churches organized huge national campaigns: first in 1947 and again in 1952 with the Scandinavian evangelist Frank Mangs; in 1965 with Billy Graham; and in 1967 with E. Stanley Jones, who proved particularly effective drawing thousands of people to hear the gospel all over the country.

Dr. Jones had been introduced all over Scandinavia before and after the war by several of his books, which were translated and published mostly by non-Methodist publishers. Jones was the most influential and widely read Christian writer in several decades both in the volume of books sold and in number of editions and printings. In Bishop Jones' spirit, the Ashram retreat and meditation movement started as a forerunner to postmodern spiritual awakening. In 1953, the Methodist pastor Emil Larsen initiated a Free Church theological periodical, *Faith and Life*, which became an important instrument for theological reflection on themes focused on Free Church theology and praxis. In Sweden a similar periodical had previously been established.

The Free Church experiences of successful cooperation in evangelism along with the increased visibility and growing audience for their message inclined the denominations to explore the possibility of uniting the four Free Churches into one. In 1959, a proposal calling for the unification of the major denominations into a united Free Church of Denmark was circulated along with ideas for the outline of a constitution. The proposal was debated by the various boards of the Free Churches as well as by the broader constituencies at their annual meetings. The consequent negotiations were not successful and the entire process was so frustrating to some of the most active Methodist leaders that they left the Methodist church. The periodical *Faith and Life* ceased publication in 1967.

Sweden was the country where the state church system was first seriously challenged. Between the two World Wars many people expected that the socialist political wing would separate the Lutheran church from the state. Many Methodists were sure that a deconstruction of the state church system would create new opportunities for the Methodist Church. Some preparations for that scenario could be seen in how Methodism placed itself even closer to the established church. After World War II the political opinion changed and the idea of separating the state and the church was cancelled

leaving the Methodists in a new situation in which the Lutheran state church was strongly supported. Simultaneously with this development, the Free Churches in Sweden started a long journey together.

By 1963, the Free Churches had drafted *Common Ground* in which a basic theological agreement for the churches was formulated. In 1968, the next major ecumenical results were presented in the report, *Common Way*, where the practical questions of how the Free Churches could work together were dealt with. These two documents mark important steps in the process of the creation of a common Free Church tradition in Sweden. The consequent development to these efforts is that many local congregations have united into ecumenical congregations with connections to more than one national church, several Methodist congregations have been part of this process. The Methodist Church, together with the Covenant Mission Church and the Baptist Church, has continued the ecumenical dialogue with the intention to unite. This effort came close to the creation of a new church in 1969, though it ultimately failed. During the successive years new rounds of dialogue were started. By 1995, these conversations led to the creation of a third important document, *Common Faith*.

In 1987, all Christian churches in Sweden adopted an ecumenical hymnbook, which has since been updated with a revised edition and a common lectionary for the Christian year. The three churches have agreed to form a new church by merging in 2012. On this long road of successful ecumenical development some church members and pastors have moved from one denomination to another and while a larger number have switched from the constituent churches to ecumenical local churches with the results that all three churches have dramatically declined. Three theological seminaries in Sweden were united in 1992; the Methodists joined the fellowship of pastoral training in 2008, when the training center at Överås in Gothenburg was closed.

The ecumenical development in each of the Nordic countries has in a way been in competition to the inter-Nordic growth of fellowship among the Methodist churches. Prior to 1965, the inter-Nordic Methodist connection was primary. Since then ecumenical relations have been the most dominant.

The post-War generation of youth is an important theme in the history of Methodism. During the 1920s, Sunday school attendance lagged behind church membership. From the 1930s through the 1960s, Sunday school attendance and church membership were nearly equal. Prior to the late 1960s, almost every Methodist congregation had a scouting program and participated in summer scout camps, all of which brought young Methodists together on both a national level and on an international level, particularly of a broad Scandinavian nature. It became a tradition for scout groups to visit neighbor countries or to have regular contact with a permanent partner scout group. Similar activities were developed involving vocal choirs and string music ensembles. In the post-war years string music was part of traditional evangelistic songs, as well as popular or contemporary music. Before the 1960s,

string music and awakening songs had been common in the context of evangelical evening meetings and activities for the young adults. All congregations had a least one singing and one instrumental group. This practice lasted until the late 1960s when television became common, which made it more difficult to draw people to church in the evenings. The Sunday morning services followed the Methodist liturgy in the tradition developed in each of the conferences. The organ was the main instrument and the singing followed the tradition of classical hymns, no revival songs or melodies in 3/4 time were welcomed. The *Danish Methodist Hymnal* of 1953 is a good example of this preference. The older tradition of revival songs using popular or contemporary music disappeared, and it was not until the advent of the Gospel music phenomenon in the 1970s that a new connection to the Methodist tradition of popular or revival songs was renewed in local churches.

In 1958, the Scandinavia–North Carolina Caravan was started. The Caravan is a youth exchange program between the Methodist churches in the Scandinavian countries and the Methodist churches in the state of North Carolina in USA. Every second year a group of young Scandinavian Methodists visits North Carolina and meets with people. And every second year the caravan goes the other way. It has been a very popular and successful program and it has been running every year since 1958. The ties between Methodism in Scandinavia and North Carolina have been strengthened through this program. People have moved in both directions and today we find mixed couples, pastors and lay leaders, on both side of the Atlantic.

In the 1940s and 1950s, the average level of education greatly increased, prior to that time the typical Scandinavian spent seven years in school. A new group of young adults grew up, students who had completed high school and sometimes university. This group was a minority in the church and they needed a forum to meet with other Christian young people who were struggling with the questions regarding a scientific understanding of the world, the various popular political ideologies and the psychological and sociological explanations of religious phenomena. It was difficult for the anti-authoritarian, politically left-wing and scientific critical group of pre-college students to fit into the often anti-intellectual and conservative evangelical youth groups of the time, conflict was not unusual. In 1951, some of the young pastors of the Denmark Methodist church started annual camps for Methodist students. Over the years these grew rapidly and became an important forum for all kinds of discussions about faith, science, politics and ethical questions. Revivalist piety disappeared, and a generation of young leaders who were focused on social ethics was formed out of this new climate. For some of the most progressive young people the change of the understanding from a pietistic, hostile-to-the-world focused church, to a socially, ethically and culturally relevant church went too slowly. They found in E. Stanley Jones' appeal to live out a radical Christianity and in the message of the World Council of Churches to find the agenda for the church in the world a clear direction for the church. They were progressive, socially minded, anti-military, and feminists, and they did not understand why so many Methodists

of the generation before supported the Vietnam War, a capitalistic political orientation, and insisted that the church had nothing to do with the kinds of questions they were asking. Some left the church and joined a variety of alternatives: the Tvind schools; to live in collectives; careers as counselors, teachers, social workers or politicians. Other young people, thinking in the same way and holding similar ideas, kept their engagement and struggles within the church and became a very strong generation of leaders who gave the church new direction. The Jesus-movement and books such as David Wilkerson's *The Cross and the Switchblade* in 1963 and Colin Morris' *Include Me Out* in 1968 gave inspiration to develop a faith that combined the understanding of the secular world and a genuine and moving Christian faith. The Methodist Church, too, had a young people's revolt.

In 1964, a new congregation, the Calvary Church, was founded in Copenhagen. In 1965, the new Bethany nursing home for elderly people was built next to the Calvary Church.

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