

Traces of Italian Influences in Sweden during the Reformation Period 1521 to 1632

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In the Late Medieval times the German influences on what today is Sweden were heavy. Throughout the reformation period they became dominant. These influences are, however, not the only ones and it is possible to notice influences also from the Netherlands, England and Scotland, France, etc. The subject of this short essay is the Italian connections that can be noticed in spite of the fact that the realm of Sweden eventually broke up from Rome and incidentally identified it with the Papacy and dismissed it as a political and spiritual enemy.¹ It might therefore be of some interest to see if there are some elements of Italian influences on Sweden from what probably was the most Roman culture at the time. The Netherlands, France, Scotland and England provided a less monolithic picture and were therefore not necessarily that religiously antithetic, as Italy probably would have been conceived.

It is also, of course, somewhat problematic to speak about Italy during this period. Politically it was a number of states, governed by domestic or foreign rulers. One could, however, maintain that the cultural, linguistic and religious unity of the geographical area that is now Italy justifies the idea of an Italy in this paper.

When I am talking about Italian influences, this implies that the Medieval unity of the Church, the Latin or Western Christendom, has been fragmented by the establishment of national churches. For the first time the ecclesial boundaries coincide with the political boundaries in Europe. That is the prerequisite for any interpretation of any sort of ecclesial or theological influences from one country to another. One would never come across the idea to label Franciscan or Benedictine activities or theologies in Sweden during the Medieval »Italian influences«. Thomas Aquinas was never looked upon as the Italian. Not even today, I suppose. So, when I am talking about »Italian influences«, during the Reformation period, this is in itself a result of that period.

The question about the temporal extension of what could be called the Swedish reformation period is not a simple one. It is in this paper understood as having a longer duration than is normally presumed in the Swedish Reformation research. Some scholars maintain that it begins with a diet in Västerås 1521 when the later Reformation King Gustav Eriksson Vasa seized power and ends in 1611 with another diet in Örebro, after the death of his last son on the throne, and the achievement of a sort of ecclesial consolidation.² Other scholars put an end to the reformation era by the Swedish-Finnish national council in 1593 when the Swedish Church Ordinance and the Augsburg Confession were approved.³ But there are also other possibilities, for example to identify important prayer books, which could lead to a time limit put to 1617.⁴

It is thus possible to date the Reformation period differently, probably depending on what perspective or angle used. There are also ideological motives involved, e.g. if the theological presuppositions presented for the first time by the Enlightenment that the Reformation was still ongoing. For the Swedish development I would, however, propose that the Reformation period ends when the dynastic realm is secured and Lutheran orthodoxy is firmly rooted, with the death 1632 of Gustav II Adolf and his cousin Sigismund Vasa, who was king of Poland, Roman Catholic, and had been forced to renounce the Swedish crown.

A Short Introduction of the Swedish Reformation

The ecclesial and political background to the Swedish Reformation period is to be found in Germany. Politically, after all, the Germanic traditions based on the personal power of the leader and the system of clans and families had been suppressed by the Roman institutional legal system, expressed by the canon law. The idea of national kingdoms had one main opponent, the Pope. The ideology behind that is established during the late Middle Ages and had to do with the problem of ultimate power in the monolithic ecclesio-political entity called Christianity. One of the first actions taken by the Reformation king in Sweden, Gustav Vasa, after his election, was to proclaim that he had transferred the power of the Pope to himself.

The reasons for the Reformation in Sweden were pure political. Since 1397 Denmark-Norway on the one hand and Sweden-Finland on the other

had formed a sort of federation under, most of the time, the crown of Denmark. At the turn of the century 1500, uprisings by nationalistic and separatist groups in Sweden and the assaults by the Danish king, ended in war. The archbishop of Uppsala, Gustav Trolle, who took stand in favour of the Danes and the federation, was 1516 uncanonically deposed by the estates of Sweden. Released he crowned the Danish king to king of Sweden. Thereafter the Swedish nationalists looked him upon as a traitor. At the same time his actions were recognised by the Pope. The alternative for the nationalists was to look to Germany for possible ideological fundamentals. Ideas influencing the new conceptions of the royal person and the royal power, decisive for the Reformation, came from Italy.

In the beginning of the 16th century it also became clear that Rome had become the defender and centre of what in some circles was looked upon as modern theology, described as new rites and new teaching. The German reformer Philipp Melanchthon, who is the author of the only confessional corpus which all so-called Lutheran traditions have in common, the Augsburg Confession of 1530, makes this clear. The articles of faith state that the only thing which the reformers claim is the removing of some misuses in church life and teachings. He claims the continuity with the Early church and holds that the reformers have nothing to criticise in the Roman church »as far as it is known among its earlier authors«. Like the humanists in general, *antiquitas* became the norm for true praxis and true teaching. This reference to *antiquitas* is, of course, rooted in the Renaissance and probably the reason for the appreciation of renaissance ideas in Sweden and one of the bridges to Italy.

Still during the 1540's the majority of the diocesan chapters were dominated by theologians who looked upon the demands of the King to be entrusted with the power of the Pope as a sort of irregularity. The transition from Roman supremacy of the Church in Sweden to national governance of it, was rather smooth. Partly it had to do with the fact that some of the leaders had a common experience of studying at universities abroad, some in Italy, and that they stayed on during the Reformation.

The Swedish Reformation was, as mentioned, conservative in character. It was certainly not a popular movement and the first Reformation king, Gustav Vasa, tried to achieve his political goals, the most important one to take power of the Church, as flexible as possible. Each time the king tried

any radical change in the ordering of the Church that caused riots and revolts. Especially during the 1530's and 1540's these changes were initiated by German advisors, to whom the king entrusted ecclesial power. One of the problems Gustav initially had, was that the Pope refused to confirm elections of bishops. The king needed bishops for coronations and weddings. When the Pope acted on this, it was too late because the king had appointed bishops himself.

The complicated situation after the ordination of Archbishop Laurentius Petri (1531), without papal confirmation, is partly due to the fact that Gustav Vasa's envoy to the Holy See in 1524 never returned to Sweden but remained in Rome. Johannes Magnus (1488–1544) was elected archbishop of Uppsala 1523 and ordained in exile in Rome 1533 and thus a counter archbishop to Laurentius Petri.

His brother, Olaus Magnus (1490–1557), lived first in Venice and after 1545 in Rome where he 1555 published the important history of culture »*Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus*«. He was, after the death of his brother, ordained archbishop of Uppsala and as such he also took part in the Council of Trent. To those in Sweden who remained faithful to the pre-reformation ideas, Johannes and Olaus Magnus gave impulses from the developments in Italy.⁵

The sons of Gustav Vasa, Erik XIV (1533–1577) and John III (1537–1592) were both active in Swedish church politics, the former sympathising with Reformed theology, the later trying to re-establish communion with Rome.

The reason for the Provincial council 1593, mentioned above, was that Johan III, who in 1569 succeeded his brother Erik XIV, had introduced a Church polity which from time to time intended a re-union with Rome. When his son Sigismund (1566–1632), who was also the king of Poland, in 1594 had become the king of Sweden, Sweden had got a Roman Catholic king. This was very much opposed by those theologians who, after the death of Johan in 1592, had returned from university studies in Germany but also by some of the nobility and foremost by the uncle of Sigismund, the duke of Södermanland, Karl (1550–1611). The tensions between the duke, who was influenced by reformed, Calvinist theologians, and the Roman Catholic king led to a rather bloody battle in 1598 whereafter Sigismund was disposed. Karl, however, waited for coronation until 1607 and became Karl

IX. The problem, which from that moment affected all Swedish politics, was the fact that Sweden had two anointed kings, one in power and another awaiting his time. And still Sigismund had support from leading circles in Sweden. This history is necessary to have in mind when trying to understand the controversies around the Italian advisers and counterparts to the Swedish court during the last decades of the 16th century.

Karl was succeeded by his eldest son, Gustav II Adolf (1594–1632). He is the mythological defender of Protestant Faith at least in earlier German and Swedish writing of history. He became king of Sweden in 1611 and in fact much of his time as king he spent on the European continent devastating Germany by means of French subsidies given by the Roman Catholic deacon and cardinal, Armand Jean du Plaisis Richelieu. After his death on the battlefield of Lützen in 1632, the king was in turn succeeded by his only child and daughter, Christina (1626–1689), who was crowned 1650, abdicated in 1654, converted to the Roman Catholic Church in 1655 and settled in Rome. From the middle of the 17th century there is a revitalisation of the Swedish interest in Italy and Italian culture through the ages.

Italian-Swedish Connections during the end of Medieval Ages

Now, the question to be raised is what the foreign, in this case »Italian», influences on the Swedish Reformation looked like. The pre-Reformation period is, of course, characterized by international exchanges. Swedish students could be found all over Europe and people made pilgrimages to distant places. The religious orders in Sweden and elsewhere were stamped by the international context of them all.⁶ To Swedes, of course, Italy was important because of its universities. Prominent Swedish churchmen had studied canon law at Bologna, theology in Siena, and so on. Rome attracted for example St Bridget, Sancta Birgitta of Sweden (1303–1373), today one of the Patrons of Europe. She lived in Rome from 1350 until her death 23 years later. The statesman and reformer Laurentius Andreæ (1470–1552) had studied in Rome, at least during three different periods. Among those who had made extensive study travels in Italy was Martin Skytte (1480–1550). He was a dominican and ordained bishop without papal confirmation when Gustav Vasa was crowned in 1528. The learned opponent to the

Reformation ideas, Peder Galle (ca. 1450–1538) had received his doctorate in Siena. He was the director of the training to priesthood in the Archdiocese up to 1538.

After the reformation the travels to Italy seem to have almost ^{ceased!} (seized) even if there is a more and more nuanced view on them. In the beginning of the 17th century it is said that the travels during the reign of Johan III were dangerous for the true religion but that it was generally good for young people to go to Italy to learn language and culture useful for civil servants.⁷

Renaissance and Baroque

There are, in spite of the relative isolation of the national churches, internationally influential clusters of ideas, which transcend the boundaries even of the national churches. One is the Renaissance, which grow out of the Italian context to embrace all Europe. The Renaissance arrived in Sweden together with the Reformation, influenced from Germany, during the 16th century.

The Renaissance was succeeded by the baroque. In Northern Europe, if one refer to architecture, we have a sort of unique style called baroque classicism, which distances itself from what was looked upon as the more fleshly and emotional Italian baroque. The Italian influences in this case were then negatively defined. But they were present. In spite of the rather modern, I believe, idea that the baroque art, paintings and sculptures, are looked upon as propaganda of the triumphant Roman Catholic Church, Swedish churches are definitely influenced by Italian artists.

The main reason for mentioning these movements is that during the 16th and 17th centuries there were no secular spheres in Europe, or anywhere. Culture was in character ecclesial.

Italian Impulses and the Role of the King

King Erik XIV (king 1560–1568) was a highly educated renaissance prince who developed mental illness and was occasionally disposed from the throne. Erik was personally influenced by Baldassare Castiglione's (1478–1529) portrait of the ideal court etiquette presented in his book »Il libro del cortegiano» (1528). Castiglione was an Italian nobleman and diplomat. We

know that the king also received this book in French translation in 1561.⁸ But we also know that both Erik and his brother Johan managed Italian and that parts of the leading persons in the court also corresponded with each other in Italian. The book was in any case used and trendsetting in the court for at least 50 years.

Another very obvious influence comes from the Florentinian statesman and author Nicoló Machiavelli.⁹ It is clearly so that Erik's system for his government is mirroring the ideas in »Il Principe» and other works.¹⁰

In his »Ethica christianae» (6 vol. 1617–1631) the bishop and later archbishop Laurentius Paulinus Gothus (1565–1646) confronts the Macchiavellian idea of the autocratic ruler. The king cannot against the will of the bishops intervene in the governing of the one, holy catholic Church and the power of the monarch depends on a contract or treatise between him and the people, writes the bishop. We also know that Gustav II Adolf was presented with a book around 1620, printed in Sweden, which is a translation of the count of Modena, Fulvio Paciani's »De vero justoque principe» (ca. 1600).¹¹

Italian Impulses on Swedish Church Politics

The curia in Rome, dominated by Italians, could easily be characterised by its failure to understand the Nordic way of thinking, the politics undertaken and the consequences of their decisions.¹² The troubles began with the appointment of the papal legate Archimboldi in 1518 and the political tensions and even wars between Denmark and Sweden.¹³ Giovanni Angelo Arcimboldi (Giannangelo Arcimboldi, 1485–1555) was probably the only Italian who has been elected archbishop of Uppsala.¹⁴ He was sent to Sweden by the Pope to promote indulgences but was drawn into Scandinavian politics and elected by the chapter in 1518. Seeking papal confirmation in Rome the developments took another turn and Arcimboldus career another direction. 1550 he became archbishop of Milan.¹⁵

It was even so that the Pope 1523 had appointed an Italian, Francesco de Pontenza, to the see of Skara. Gustav Vasa refused to accept the appointment because the king did not allow foreigners to be bishops in Sweden.¹⁶

The misunderstandings actually paved way for the separation of the Nordic countries from the See of Rome. The Commission of Cardinals in Rome and the synod of Vicenza had 1538 condemned the decisions in Väs-

terås in 1527. There was no support to be expected from that quarter.¹⁷ The Swedish Kings expelled all foreign clerics from the country and the first one who actually invited them again was Johan III.

For Johan III there were good political reasons for an interest in Italy. The king was married to Catharina Jagelonika, the daughter of king Sigismund I of Poland and Bona Sforza of Milan and Naples. To get the rich inheritance from her, Johan had to approach the Holy See, because the Pope was the protector of Naples.¹⁸ Johan also had embassies to Italy of both political and ecclesial nature from 1574 to 1578.¹⁹ The strivings for the Neapolitan legacy from Bona Sforza of Napoli, demanded good relations with the Holy See, and thus the Italian nobility.²⁰

But Johan was also genuinely favouring the idea of the unity of the Church Catholic. He lived himself in what today would be labelled a mixed marriage, one of his wife's sisters was a Protestant, his son Sigismund was brought up as Roman Catholic. During the reign of Johan III, it seems as the court was overloaded with Italian dignitaries, not least Jesuits.²¹ Vincenzo Portico was actively working for a reunion between the Church of Sweden and Rome. Paulo Ferrari was a jesuit in the service of Queen Catharina Jagellonika. Vincentio Lauréo was a papal diplomat placed in the court of Johan III. Giovanni Francesco Commendone was one of Pius IV most competent diplomats who in 1561 carried the invitation to the Council of Trent to the Swedish King and Church. Germanico Malaspina was another one who in various positions worked for the return of the Swedish Church to Rome. Germanico Malaspina was papal nuntius, Italian nobleman, 1583 bishop of San Severo in Apulia and followed Sigismund 1593–94 to Sweden.²² During the negotiations about the Swedish throne, Malaspina presented the arguments against the decisions by the Provincial council 1593.²³

The most important of them all was Antonio Possevino (1533/34–1611). He was 1577 sent by Gregorius XIII to the Swedish court and stayed until 1580. Antonio Possevino was a learned Jesuit, scholar and diplomat.²⁴ He took active part in the Church politics of Johan III, not least in the negotiations between the king and Rome. Others were, to mention some, Claudio Aquaviva, Dezio Azzolini, Alberto Bolognetti, Giovanni Caligari, Francesco Eraso, Giacomo Savelli, and not least Tolomeo Gallio, the cardinal of Como. The reason for this heavy Italian presence was, of course, the Italian domi-

nance in the curial diplomatic corps. For the unity of the Church this was disastrous. The possibilities for the Italian churchmen to grasp the situation in Sweden was, as hinted at earlier, minimal and the demands of the king for reunion with Rome seems from a post-Vatican II perspective totally acceptable. Tolomeo Gallio (1527–1607), Cardinal of Como 1565, from 1572 head of the secretariat of state and a prominent supporter of the Counter Reformation, played an important role in holding back the ideas of Johan III.²⁵ But also other cardinals, like Giacomo Savelli, opposed Johan.²⁶

It is remarkable to notice that when Johan III looked for union with Rome, in one way or another, in discussions and negotiations almost all his counterparts were Italians.²⁷ Cardinal Dezio Assolini was close to Sixtus V and received information from Possevino, the papal nuntius to Poland, Alberto Bolognetti was one of the informants of the cardinal of Como, and one of the leaders for *Congregatio Germanica*, that handled the Swedish problem, was the cardinal Giovanni Francesco Commendone.

Italian Philosophy via Germany

The Lutheran orthodoxy was during the last decades of the 16th century and the first decades of the 17th century influenced by the revitalised Roman Catholic scholasticism and the Italian theologian and philosopher Giacomo Zabarella in Padua (d.1589).²⁸ His influences reached Sweden via two German universities, which is symptomatic, namely Helmstedt and Wittenberg. In any case two of the most important Swedish bishops were decisively influenced by Zabarella, namely Lenæus and Rudbeckius. Johannes Canuti Lenæus (1573–1669) was teaching philosophy, theology and languages at the University of Uppsala. He became archbishop of Uppsala in 1647, which is after the period dealt with here, but he was during his professorship one of the most important Aristotelian philosophers. The other important person, influenced by Giacomo Zabarella, was Johannes Rudbeckius (1581–1646). He had been a theology professor in Uppsala and became 1619 bishop of Västerås. He defended his Aristotelian philosophy in two important works, »Logica» (1625) and »Controversiæ logices» (1629). The powerful bishop of Västerås used quite extensively the work of Marsilius of Padua (1275–1342) whose »Defensor pacis» from 1324 was published in 1522 and put on Index 1559.²⁹

Theology Received Positively and Negatively

As I understand it, the only outstanding Italian theologian during the 17th century is Roberto Bellarmin (1542–1621). He was a theologian and Jesuit, appointed cardinal 1599 and archbishop of Capua 1602. He became the most prominent defender of the Roman Catholic faith after the Council of Trent. Bellarmini was discussed also in Sweden. The archbishop Laurentius Paulinus Gothus refers in his »Etica Christiana» 1630 to Bellarmin in a positive way, agreeing with him that the priests stand in line with the Levites of the Old Testament.³⁰

To the Swedish bishop the Church was as visible and structured as in the writings of Belarmin. Paulinus makes formal references to Luther but interprets the text in line with Paulinus own scholastic theology. He defends »the Church catholic» against all types of heresies, Calvinism, popery and others. This gives him an opportunity to attack Bellarmin because he does not pay proper attention to the certainty of faith in matters of salvation; Bellarmin, according to the Swedish bishop, underestimates the need for a belief which is put into practise, a praxis pietatis: »non tantum doctrina orthodoxa, sed vitam etiam inculptata», the bishop addresses his priests.

Architecture and Music

The queen Catharina Jagellonika introduced to her husband the italian renaissance architecture. The ideas stamped the end of the 16th century and several castles were reconstructed or build during that time. That implies also the presence of a great deal of Italian constructors.³¹ She invited Italian artists to work on the kings castles such as Uppsala, Svartsjö, Kalmar, and Stockholm.³² One example 1573/74 is the Paar (Pahr) family with builders and contractors, Dominicus (d.1602), Franciscus (d.1580), Giovanni Baptista, who brought to Sweden several Italian builders and artists. They actually founded what has been called the Vasa-rennaissance in Sweden.³³

We also know that works by the Italian architect and author Sebastiano Serlios (1475–1552) was found in the library of Johan III.³⁴

There are also influences on portrait paintings during the period. Already during the regime of Gustav Vasa the Italian »taste» dominates. The dominance is broken later on by Flemish and Dutch styles.³⁵

After the Westphalian peace-treaty 1648, the Swedes started to travel to Italy again. The most famous Swedish architect at the time Nicodemus Tessin (1615–1681) could return to Sweden and without any scruples build the new cathedral in Kalmar as a copy of the Jesuit church Il Gesù in Rome. So one generation after the turbulence of reformation and the expulsion of the Jesuits, it is possible to copy their church.

Even if it is obvious that very much of our knowledge about Italian printed music in Sweden is from the 17th century, we know that Palestrina and others were known and probably used in Sweden during the 16th century.³⁶ We also know that the court during the period imported Italian string musicians.³⁷

Italian Literature in Sweden

In late renaissance Italy Pietro Bembo and Giangiordio Trissino during the 1520's had written programmatic books on the need for a national literature.³⁸ The idea of a literary genre in the native language and including national motives arrived in Sweden after having passed France and Germany not until the Middle of the 17th Century, i.e. after the period dealt with here. The late arrival of the late Renaissance ideas in Sweden is one of many indications that the Reformation caused not only a religious narrowness and a break with the European culture, which earlier had been a fostering culture also in the North, but it also indicates that the restricted possibilities to travel hindered the free exchange of ideas. From time to time the kings demanded loyalty allowed only studies at some very well defined universities in Germany. What, of course, was the ultimate criteria for this was that anything which could be suspected for undermining the religious-political stability in the kingdom should be avoided. And, as all history teaches us, the most dangerous threat to any dictatorship is the book. That was the case also in the Reformation period in Sweden. There is, according to what I have found, very few traces of the Italian so called classic period in literature (1495–1595). But this changes from the middle of the 17th century. In spite of that, there are small streams of the old cultural relations. 1577 a work of one of the leading Italian humanistic poets, Hieronymus Vidas, »Poeticorum libri tres», was even printed in Stockholm. Generally seen, it is surprising to notice how much of the Italian language was known and

used and how much correspondence during the 16th century is written in Italian.

It seems also as if devotional literature has a tendency to transcend all boundaries. One can, for example, find in a sort of adaptation to the Swedish depressing situation during the 30years war, Savonarola's explication of the 51st Psalm of David.³⁹

Conclusion

The Reformation was fundamentally anti-intellectual and anti-modernity, as it was interpreted. It took almost 50 years after the introduction of the German Reformation ideas before the schools and universities, which had been closed down, could be reorganised. The classic education which the Swedish students had been given in Bologna,⁴⁰ Siena,⁴¹ Rome, Paris and other universities was not possible after the Reformation. What was offered was Wittenberg (from time to time) and other German universities.⁴²

In conclusion, how to characterise the Italian influences in Sweden between 1527 and 1632? First is to say that there are not really any direct theological influences during the period. The only internally recognised theologian, Bellarmin, played a certain role in Sweden, in spite of the general confessionalistic polemics. During the first part of the 17th century there are new inputs of Aristotelian-Thomist philosophy which affects theology, but they are indirect and must be traced back to Italy by means of analyses of general diffutoric tendencies. One could also find influences in art and literature. The Italian curia is, in various ways and through its representatives influencing the development. It is also noticeable that the political theory is grounded in Italian soil.

This brief introduction raises some questions to the research field. If we talk of Italian influences, this is a sort of un-precise terminology, we could define them positively or negatively, as direct or in-direct. They are in any case present. The main influences 1527-1632 were from Holland, France, and absolutely dominating, from Germany. There are also some influences from England. If one traces influences as I have done, and elaborates on them, do they contribute to our understanding of history, or in my case, theology? Yes, I think so. I am sure that the knowledge about the English-Swedish historical relations is very thin, not only in Sweden but also in

England. If one accomplishes historical overviews this also implies a rather thorough inventory of earlier research being made and in this one could make surprising discoveries. In my case it was the fact that Bellarmin really was known and read in Sweden. If he is used by one of the Swedish theologians and bishops, then one should look also into the writing of others. The question will be how an Italian theologian and representative of the so called Counter-Reformation effected the orthodox Lutherans in Sweden.

This presentation builds on earlier, sometimes very early, research. It would be a suitable task to form a research project to see how ideas from different parts of Europe interplayed in forming the Swedish Reformation period. Very much of earlier scholarship seems to assume that the dominant source, Germany, is the only source. It would then also be interesting to find a way of incorporating various disciplines in such a way that one could integrate into the spectrum the whole of the Swedish religious culture.

NOTER

1 The essay is a revised lecture given to The University College, Chichester, June 14, 2000

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