

CHAPTER 45 : DECLENSION OF SWEDEN AND ITS ESTABLISHED CHURCH 1648-1775

Politically, the Protestant nations began the modern era from a position of great strength. The four great world powers in the aftermath of the Thirty Years' War were Sweden, Britain, the Netherlands, and France – the three former nations enjoying established Protestantism. These nations had all avoided the disastrous impact of the Thirty Years' War being fought on their own territory. The sphere of dominion and influence of each of these nations far surpassed their national borders. But Sweden and the Netherlands, as we shall see, quickly faded as world powers, leaving primarily Protestant Great Britain and Romanist France to compete for the prize, with Russia also entering modernity and challenging the western nations.

King Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden had bequeathed to that nation a mighty inheritance, though he had been killed in the Thirty Years' War. Sweden was the major political and military power of the Baltic Sea and the lands surrounding it. Protestantism too, of the Lutheran variety, was firmly planted in Sweden. The constitution of 1634 had required all Swedes to adhere to the Augsburg Confession, and many areas of false religion and worship were rooted out of the nation. The Roman Catholic Church was banned in Sweden. Foreigners with business in the realm, who wanted to practice another form of Christianity, or another faith, were obliged to worship in their homes, behind closed doors, and in privacy. Military and political might followed hand in hand with spiritual might.

But the converse also was true: spiritual declension precipitated military and political decline. The first great spiritual challenge came at the top. The good king Gustavus Adolphus had a most wicked daughter named Christina. After the death of her father, Christina became the queen-elect at the age of six. Five agents headed by the chancellor Axel Oxenstierna governed the country in her youth. Meanwhile, Christina was tutored by Johannes Gothus (1592-1670). Unlike the majority of the Swedish clergy, he held a more liberal theological stance, and exercised a most unwholesome influence upon young Christina.

When Christina came of age and was crowned queen in 1644, she opposed Oxenstierna, and there was constant friction between them thereafter. Christina called for learned men – as the world calls 'learned' - to form her court of learning. Christina also sponsored artists and musicians, and financed hundreds of immoral theatrical and operatic performances. For several years learned men, specialists in all branches of humanistic philosophy and science arrived in Stockholm and formed the Court of Learning. Because of this Sweden became known as the "Athens of the North", a sure sign of pagan tendencies.

Christina became a disciple of the Jesuit-educated French philosopher Rene Descartes. His philosophy was quite contrary to the Protestant faith, but Christina readily embraced it. A number of letters passed between the two, which influenced Christina to eventually

call Descartes to her home in Sweden in order for him to better tutor her in the Cartesian methods of philosophy. Descartes came and succumbed to Stockholm's cold in a mere five months. Descartes died from a cold caught after grueling, infamous 5 a.m. philosophy sessions with Cartesian Christina, in the cold of her Swedish castle. Christina was profoundly depressed by his death.

Christina soon thereupon decided to abdicate the throne, probably because she wanted to convert to Roman Catholicism. In 1651 she suffered a severe breakdown and was confined to her bedroom. She was sufficiently certain of her inclination towards the Catholic faith to take direct contact with the General of the Jesuit Order, Francesco Piccolomini. In a brief and cautiously formulated letter, she expressed admiration for the Jesuits and requested direct contact with the order. The Jesuits Paolo Casati and Francesco Malines were sent to Sweden in 1652. After brief conversations with the queen, they concluded that she was on all essential points already convinced of the veracity of Catholic doctrine. The major part of their discussions with her touched upon the practical question of whether she might remain Queen of Sweden while secretly a Catholic or not.

In 1654 Christina abdicated the throne and converted to Roman Catholicism. She moved to Rome and chose that branch of Romanism of the libertines, the "free-thinkers". Thus, her decision in 1654 led her to leave Sweden to spend the major part of her adult life in Rome, closely connected to the court of the Roman pontiffs. Christina was described by the director of the National Museum of Fine Arts in Stockholm as "one of history's greatest rebels and one of Sweden's first modern minds".

To their credit, the Swedes sought to remove the Romanizing influence of Christina upon the nation. Christina was not even allowed to bring any Catholic priest on visits she made to Sweden. And once it was discovered that Christina was indeed traveling with a Catholic priest, the government of Sweden prevented her progress to Stockholm and it was decreed that she would not be allowed to enter the country at all during a period of time.

Nevertheless, the deleterious effects of Christina's short-lived reign persisted, and additional Enlightenment influences arose over time. Enlightenment concepts of liberty especially became in vogue during the reign of Gustav III.

Furthermore, many Protestant leaders in the established church grew spiritually cold in their religious affections. In response, people began to gather in homes for prayer and Bible study, without Church supervision. But as well meaning as this may seem, it also served as an avenue for more heresies to creep into the Christian community in Sweden. Among these heresies was "Swedenborgianism", founded by a Swedish scientist and philosopher, Emanuel Swedenborg, who denied the doctrine of the Trinity. In 1726 the authorities issued an ordinance that prohibited this type of home gathering.

In 1658 Sweden under Charles X had held Danish provinces, Finland, Estonia, Latvia and parts of northern Germany, but Sweden's political and military status crumbled in the early 18th century when Russia took the reins of northern Europe in the Great Northern

War. The Great Northern War was fought between a coalition of Russia, Denmark-Norway and Saxony-Poland (from 1715 also Prussia and Hanover) on one side and Sweden on the other side from 1700 to 1721. It started by a coordinated attack on Sweden by the coalition in 1700 and ended 1721 with the conclusion of the Treaty of Nystad. As a result of the war, Russia supplanted Sweden as the dominant power on the Baltic Sea and became a major player in European politics. Russia received the territories of Estonia, Livonia, Karelia and Ingria and Tsar Peter I of Russia replaced King Frederick I of Sweden, as ruler of the conquered provinces.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

CHAPTER 45 : DECLENSION OF SWEDEN AND ITS ESTABLISHED CHURCH 1648-1775

This second volume in a two-part series on church history is primarily an edited version of the following works on church history and Biblical interpretation:

James A. Wylie, *The History of Protestantism* (Cassell & Company, Limited: London, Paris & New York. 1878). (see electronic version at <http://www.whatsaiththescriture.com/Fellowship/James.A.Wylie.html>)

Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Logos Research Systems, Inc.: Oak Harbor, WA, 1997). (see electronic version at <http://www.ccel.org/s/schaff/history/About.htm>)

J. Parnell McCarter, *Sabbath Bible Survey Tests and Assignments* (PHSC: Grand Rapids, MI, 2003). (see electronic version at <http://www.puritans.net/curriculum/>)

J. Parnell McCarter, *Let My People Go* (PHSC: Grand Rapids, MI, 2003). (see electronic version at <http://www.puritans.net/curriculum/>)

The on-line resources of Historicism Research Foundation at <http://www.historicism.net/> also proved invaluable for my understanding of Biblical prophecy. Biblical prophecy concerning Christian church history, especially as revealed in the book of Revelation, serves as the foundation upon which all church histories should be based.

Other references especially consulted for this chapter include:

The Church of Sweden website <http://www.svenskakyrkan.se/>
<http://philtar.ucsm.ac.uk/encyclopedia/christ/cep/lcs.html>

This rule was reversed in 1741, when citizenship was granted to members of the Anglican and Reformed churches, and in 1781 with the Edict of Toleration which provided religious freedom to all Christians.

http://www.algonet.se/~hogman/church_org.htm

In 1784, in Stockholm, a public Roman Catholic mass was allowed in Sweden for the first time since the Reformation.

<http://www.trincoll.edu/depts/phil/philo/phils/christina.html>

http://www.kings.edu/womens_history/christina.html

http://www.sweden.se/templates/FactSheet____4403.asp