Mission undertaken by Swedish Pentecostals has had a major role in the transformation of the world religious scene. As case studies have indicated, their contribution has been highly individualistic and not conducive to easy generalizations. Despite the frequently-remarked omnipresence of Swedish (and other Scandinavian—see Bundy forthcoming) missionaries, at crucial developmental moments, in the areas where Pentecostalism has grown most quickly, little historical, theological or sociological study has been done. That which has been done is remarkable but often not easily accessible to scholars outside Sweden. For example, Åke Boberg described Swedish mission history and provided for the first time careful statistical material (Boberg 1990). The Missions Institutet-PMU has also given attention to the historical development in particular countries. Thus Jan-Endy Johannesson provided detailed historical data and an analysis of Swedish Pentecostal mission in China (Johannesson 1992) and Barbro and Eric Andrénsson have provided similar material on India (Andrésson 1989). Knowledge of Brazilian Pentecostal history has been enhanced by the publication of a revised volume by the son of early Pentecostal missionaries to Brazil (Vingren 1994). Swedish Pentecostal influence in Greenland, Iceland and the Faroe Islands has been studied (Pétursson 1990; see Bundy 1994a). Histories of Swedish Pentecostalism also contain important surveys of mission involvement (Söderholm 1993 and Sundstedt 1969-1973), and there is an enormous number of biographies, popular histories and partisan documents.

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Probably because mission was so important to the identity of the Swedish Pentecostal churches, many of the major conflicts in the history of that tradition have had to do with mission and mission theory. Initial scholarly analyses have been made of the period in which this struggle took place and have appropriately recognized the centrality of the discussion about mission. The first effort to analyze the problem was that of Bertil Carlsson in a political science thesis at the University of Stockholm (Carlsson 1974). Carlsson argued that there was a contradiction between the rhetoric of the Swedish Pentecostal churches which eschewed organization and the elaborate, carefully structured decision-making processes which allowed for cooperative activity on a multitude of issues. Carl-Erik Sahlberg, a Lutheran scholar, interpreted the period in light of an evolution from sectarian values to the values of a Christian community. The mission struggles, he argued, were to be understood as part of the struggle over those values, a conflict between activities motivated by the “Holy Spirit” over against those produced by “organization” (Sahlberg 1977). Rhode Struble focused on the ecclesiology of the Swedish Pentecostal churches and the conflict which, as he understood it, arose over having a radical congregationalist ecclesiology in Sweden and a highly organized mission society which functioned outside of Sweden (Struble 1982; see Bundy 1984). Once again the focus was on the issue of “organization.”

Building on the work of these scholars, I want to argue for a more complex framework within which to understand the early development of Swedish Pentecostal mission theory. Early Swedish Pentecostal mission theory and practice took over aspects of the theory and practice of the models of the Svenska Missionsförbundet and the Örebro Missionsförening (which argued for a faith mission approach). This evolved to take into account: (1) the Scandinavian Pentecostal ecclesiological and missiological environment; (2) the de facto control of Swedish Pentecostal structures by Lewi Pethrus; (3) problems posed by aspects of Pentecostal pneumatology as exemplified by the conflicts in Denmark; and, (4) the conflict which evolved with the leaders of the Svenska Missionsförbundet, especially Axel Andersson, over issues of biblical interpretation and mission theory. The method will be to look at the early Pentecostal mission