
Reviewed by David Bundy

This volume is the first publication of Trons Värld, an organization established in 1988 by Torbjörn Aronson and others to undertake research about Swedish religious life. Aronson graduated with a doctorate from the University of Lund in 1990; his dissertation was published as *Konservatism och demokrati* (Stockholm: Norstedts Förlag, 1990). *Guds eld över Sverige*, despite the expectation which might be raised by its full title, does not discuss all revivalism or religious movements in Sweden since 1945 but focuses on the Pentecostal Movement and closely related phenomena, including the Later Rain Movement, Maranatha, the Charismatic Movement in the established churches, and the Jesus Movement. Aronson’s thesis is that the development of all subsequent related groups in Sweden is either due to or influenced by the relation between the established Pentecostal church and the efforts to renew a less than vibrant church. An impressive array of consultants from each of the traditions examined are listed in the forward to the volume (5). In addition to the informants, the author is well-versed in the literature of the movements studied and able to discuss complex theological, historical and political issues with lively prose. The result is a readable and carefully researched series of essays which provides an initial survey of the problems posed.

The first chapter (11-31) provides a brief overview of the development of the Swedish Pentecostal churches between 1900 and 1940. He notes the basic acceptance of Pentecostal ideals within the Wesleyan and Baptist Holiness traditions before the arrival in 1910 of Pethrus from Norway with the “new” Pentecostal understanding. The rapid growth and aggressive missionary program of the new movement is described as well as the development of rigid power and ethos structures which focused all initiatives in the hands of a few and which encumbered the tradition with socially wrenching prudentials. The resulting developments are carefully, albeit briefly, placed in the context of Swedish Pietism and the Scandinavian myth of America.

The chapter on the Latter Rain Movement focuses on the development of the American-originated renewal movement in one church, the Östermalms Fria Församling. It was through this congregation that the American healing movements of the 1940’s and 1950’s influenced Sweden. Unfortunately, the author did not have access to the American sources and publications by and about this
period which would have provided a larger context for his analysis of the American impact upon Swedish Pentecostalism. Contrary to most of the movements studied, the Maranatha Movement, which began in the late 1950's and early 1960's, was an indigenous Scandinavian renewal movement. Building on the pioneering work of Curt Dahlgren, *Maranatha: En sociologisk studie av en sektörelses uppkomst och utveckling* (Vänersborg: Plus Ultra, 1982), Aronson summarized the history and development of the movement which sought to reestablish a spirituality and ecclesiology modeled after perceptions of early Pentecostalism in Oslo (T. B. Barratt) and Sweden before the development of restrictive institutional structures. Unfortunate claims and statements on both sides led to many misunderstandings and an inability of both groups to appreciate the strengths and contributions of the other.

The same problems arose between the Pentecostals and the Charismatic Movement ( Chapters 5-6, 116-161) and the Pentecostals and the Jesus Movement (Chapter 7, 162-180), both of which were heavily influenced by styles of worship, theology and mores imported from the U.S.A. Aronson carefully chronicled the story of these evolving relationships with numerous quotations from primary source documents.

The final chapters described the efforts of the Swedish Pentecostal Movements to come to terms with the new developments and to renew itself spiritually and intellectually. It is a story which is still in progress (and not only in Sweden!). The Swedish Pentecostal Movements generally ceased to grow after the 1940's. That is a widely documented phenomenon, although the author did not recognize that just to maintain their numbers and influence during the period of 1950-1990 was no mean accomplishment in the context of European culture. Because of the leadership and polity structures, there was, he argued, an inability of the churches to incorporate diversity and a radical spirituality which challenged those structures. The prudentials (dress, hair, hats, etc.) became crystallized and particular practices were valued in themselves rather than used as contributory to the development of other values. A recurring theme of the analysis is the quirky genius of Levi Pethrus who was a masterful entrepreneurial leader, but who could tolerate no others of similar talents. Most recently the Living Word and Faith Movement (191-233) has arrived to challenge the existing churches. Aronson demonstrated that Swedish Pentecostals, and others, used the American and regional imports to gain leverage against the established structures.

What the volume did not discuss were the constructive theological and missional efforts to deal with these issues within the church. For example, Sven Lidman, Allan Tornberg, Erik Martinsson, John Ongman, R. Fris and others like them are marginally discussed if at all.