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Pentecostal Politics in a Secular World

The Life and Leadership of Lewi Pethrus

Joel Halldorf

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This book is the result of almost twenty years of research on Pentecostalism and the Swedish Pentecostal movement. The journey began when, as a young Pentecostal, I stumbled over a book by the historian Donald Dayton. It not only enlightened me about the roots of Pentecostalism but also illuminated much in my own background—and my family’s history. I have encountered many great teachers since then, some in classrooms and others through books. My debt to them goes beyond what is traditionally recognized as learning. In the words of St. Augustine: “The first subject students learn is the teacher. Teachers offer themselves for imitation. This is the essence of what people call teaching.” In gratitude, I dedicate this book to them.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joel Halldorf is a Swedish church historian, writer, and columnist whose work revolves around the intersection of religion and modernity, with a particular focus on evangelicalism and Pentecostalism. He received his master's in theology from Lund University and his Doctorate in Church History from Uppsala University, and has spent a year as guest researcher at Duke University, North Carolina. He is a lecturer at the University College Stockholm (previously Stockholm School of Theology) and a docent at Uppsala University. His other books include *Av denna världen?*, on the Swedish holiness preacher and mystic Emil Gustafson, and *Gud: Återkomsten*, an examination of the political implications of postsecularism. He is also a regular contributor to several of Sweden's most important newspapers and magazines, including *Expressen*, *Dagen*, *Fokus*, and *Axess*, as well as the Norwegian newspaper *Vårt Land*.

LEWI PETHRUS: LIFE AND WORKS

- 1884 Born in Västra Tunhem, in the west of Sweden.
- 1899 Conversion and baptism in the local Baptist church. Works at paper mill.
- 1901 Moves to Oslo to work in a shoe factory.
- 1902 Travels as itinerary evangelist in Norway and has a spiritual experience which he later interprets as his Spirit baptism.
- 1903 Returns to Sweden as pastor in the Baptist church in Bengtsfors.
- 1904 Begins studies at the Bethel Seminary, Stockholm.
- 1906 Becomes pastor in the Baptist church in Lidköping.
- 1907 Encounters the Pentecostal revival through Methodist pastor T. B. Barratt. Begins to speak in tongues.
- 1911 Becomes pastor at the Filadelfia Church, Stockholm.
- 1912 Publishes his first book, *Jesus kommer*, on the imminent return of Christ.
- 1913 Filadelfia is excluded from the Baptist denomination, and Swedish Pentecostalism turns into a distinct movement led by Pethrus. Marries Lydia Danielsen.
- 1915 Launches the magazine *Evangelii Härold*.
- 1919 Pentecostal pastors reject denominational organization in a joint statement. Pethrus writes *De kristnas enhet* (“Unity Among Christians”) to argue for the movement’s radical congregationalism.
- 1921 Authorities intervene against British healing evangelist Smith Wigglesworth. Poet and author Sven Lidman joins the Pentecostal movement and becomes Pethrus’s colleague.
- 1929 Conflict with A. P. Franklin.
- 1930 Filadelfia inaugurates Scandinavia’s largest church in terms of seating. The congregation approaches 5000 members.

- 1941 Pethrus resigns and moves to Chicago, but returns after six months.
- 1945 Starts the daily paper *Dagen*.
- 1948 Conflict with Sven Lidman
- 1950 Pethrus endorses Latter Rain, and invites William Branham and William Freeman to Sweden. Massive critique in media.
- 1955 The radio station IBRA begins to broadcast, and challenges the Swedish state monopoly on radio.
- 1956 Organizes the political lobby group “Kristet Samhällsansvar” (“Christian Social Responsibility”)
- 1958 Resigns as pastor from Filadelfia.
- 1964 Starts a political party, the Christian Democrats (*Kristen Demokratisk Samling*).
- 1972 Endorses the Charismatic renewal.
- 1974 Dies in Stockholm



Lewi Pethrus in his office. The sign reads "God with us!"



CHAPTER 1

Introduction: A Life Bent Toward Politics

In 1953, a young Swedish filmmaker named Ingmar Bergman chose to include a glimpse of Harriet Andersson's naked breast in his new film, *Summer with Monika*. Whatever the artistic merits of the choice, it shocked audiences and catapulted the film to international attention. Along with a number of increasingly licentious movies, it gave rise to talk of “the Swedish sin,” an expression that captured a trend among moviemakers as well as a general cultural mood in the Nordic capital. Sweden was rebranding itself.

In only a few decades it moved from a Lutheran, agrarian, and anything-but-egalitarian to a modern, enlightened identity.¹ Secularization played a role in this shift, which saw the exchange of traditional morality for “sexual liberation.” Academics, politicians, and the cultured agreed: modern Sweden ought to be rational, scientific, liberal, and individualistic—an identity that was contrasted to religious and traditional.

Today, Sweden is firmly positioned in the top right corner of the World Value Study map: more characterized by the so-called secular-rational and

¹See Elisabeth Björklund and Mariah Larsson, eds., *Swedish Cinema and the Sexual Revolution* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2016). On the struggle to define modern Swedish identity, see Martin Wiklund, *I det modernas landskap* (Eslöv: B. Östlings bokförlag Symposion, 2006). For an overview of Swedish modernization from an economic perspective, see Lennart Schön, *Sweden's Road to Modernity* (Stockholm: SNS förlag, 2017). A philosophical and cultural perspective is offered in Ola Sigurdson, *Den lyckliga filosofin* (Eslöv: B. Östlings bokförlag Symposion, 2000).

self-expression values than any other country in the world. It might be heralded as a beacon or regarded as a cautionary tale, but the image of Sweden as a secular nation is seldom questioned.²

It might be surprising to learn, then, that in the twentieth century, Sweden was also home to what was, for a time, the largest Pentecostal church in the world—*Filadelfiakyrkan*. But it wasn't an accident, for Filadelfia belonged to the Swedish Pentecostal movement that emerged in the early 1900s and quickly became one of Europe's—and the world's—strongest and most influential Pentecostal movements. The man behind Filadelfia's explosive growth was the same person who led the country's Pentecostal movement through seven decades and also started a prominent Christian political party. His name was Lewi Pethrus (1884–1974). A former factory-worker and seminary dropout, he indelibly shaped the Swedish religious, social, and political landscapes of the twentieth century.

In this book, I chart how Pethrus led the Pentecostal movement, tried to shape modern Sweden with it, and guided the people that critics commonly referred to as “fanatics” through an increasingly secular culture. This is a story seldom told, a story about a person who defied a host of prejudices about modern Swedes, but also about Pentecostals and their political engagement. Hopefully, the book can broaden the perception of both.

A WORKING-CLASS PENTECOSTAL

In 1973 a journalist asked Lewi Pethrus which of his many achievements he valued the most. “I think,” the eighty-nine-year-old leader of the Swedish Pentecostal movement began, “that I without any doubt can say: my work among the poor and downtrodden. Those who I have helped back on their feet—that is the greatest of all. I will cling to that on the day of judgment.”³

²For a presentation and analysis of the World Value Studies, see, for example, Ronald Inglehart and Wayne E. Baker, “Modernization, Cultural Change, the Persistence of Traditional Values,” *American Sociological Review* 65, no. 1 (2000): 19–51. For discussions of Sweden's position in this study, see Lars Trägårdh, ed., *State and Civil Society in Northern Europe* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007). There is a tremendous amount of literature on secularization in Sweden, see, for example, Grace Davie, “The Changing Nature of Religion in Northern Europe,” in *Welfare and Religion*, ed. Anders Bäckström (Uppsala: Diakonivetenskapliga institutets skriftserie, 2005). Lately David Thurfjell has contributed to new perspectives; see David Thurfjell, *Det gudlösa folket* (Stockholm: Molin & Sorgenfrei, 2015). See also Ann af Burén, *Living Simultaneity* (Stockholm: Södertörns högskola, 2016) who describes modern Swedes as “semi-secular.”

³Ivar Lundgren, *Lewi Pethrus i närbild* (Stockholm: Den kristna bokringen, 1973), 84.

When he began his work in Stockholm in the 1910s, it was a city of poverty and desolation. People escaped the penury of the countryside only to end up in the city slum. There was no welfare to speak of, and in 1917 food scarcity led to bread riots. Pethrus and the Filadelfia Church, which he pastored, ran homeless shelters and soup kitchens to alleviate the need. Many, especially among the poor, came to prefer life in the Pentecostal congregation to the misery of the capital. The early twentieth century was a time of political, economic, and social disorder—but when modernity hit, Pentecostal churches functioned as airbags offering material, communal, and existential support.

While Pethrus's social work is by no means unique among Pentecostal communities, his turn to professional politics a few decades later was ahead of the curve. Pentecostals in the global south and the US became involved in this kind of politics from the 1970s, but Pethrus involved himself in the public debate through the founding of a daily paper in the 1940s, started a political lobbying organization in the 1950s, and a political party in the 1960s.

Much changed throughout his long life, but one thing remained the same: the preferential option for the poor. Pethrus became a Christian politician with conservative values who embraced the welfare state. Near the end of his life he described economic justice as a “wonderful blessing” and lamented that the labor movement in Sweden had not retained a stronger connection with Christianity: “It belongs in the church,” he concluded.⁴ Pethrus himself was brought up in the working class, and “this is where I have always seen myself as belonging,” he wrote in his memoirs. He held this opinion his whole life: “Christianity and social justice are intimately connected.”⁵

SAINTS IN A SECULAR WORLD

When Swedish historians tell the story of the twentieth century, it belongs to the labor movement. The Social Democrats held power without interruption from 1932 to 1976. The atheist element of the movement was always there, and after World War II they and other parties actively promoted a secular agenda and shaped society accordingly. The Swedish Pentecostals were an odd bird in this secular landscape—and deviation came with a price.

⁴Ibid., 61.

⁵Lewi Pethrus, *Den anständiga sanningen* (Stockholm: C. E. Fritzes Bokförlag, 1953), 288.

The works of social psychologist Stanley Milgram shed light on their situation. Milgram is best known for his infamous psychological experiment from the 1960s, where study participants were instructed to give painful, even dangerous, electric shocks to students when they gave wrong answer to a question. The test persons were told that the experiment had to do with memory and teaching. But the students, who sat behind a screen and could be heard but not seen, were in fact collaborators in the study. Their groans of pain were faked; the electricity never reached them. Instead, the test measured an individual's resilience toward pressure from authority.

The disheartening result was that most of the subjects agreed to electrocute their students. They bent to the authority of the white-robed leader of the experiment, and his assurance that this was necessary for science, rather than to their own conscience or the student's cries for mercy.⁶

Milgram was interested in the force of social norms. Under what circumstances is it possible for an individual to challenge these norms? In a less malevolent experiment he gave his own students an assignment that allowed them to experience this force themselves. They were to approach a person on the subway, look them in the eyes, and, without providing any justification, ask for his or her seat. Milgram assumes that this is an easy task—and compared to electrocuting someone it certainly is. But then he tries it himself. He gets on the New York subway and approaches a fellow passenger, ready to make the request—but finds that he cannot: “the words seemed lodged in my trachea and would simply not emerge. I stood there frozen, then retreated.” He is, it turns out, unable to go through with this socially awkward act. So he retreats, takes a deep breath, and makes another attempt. This time, he is able to utter the words:

“Excuse me, sir, may I have your seat?” A moment of stark anomic panic overcame me. But the man got right up and gave me the seat. [...] Taking the man's seat, I was overwhelmed by the need to behave in a way that would justify my request. My head sank between my knees and I could feel my face blanching. I was not role-playing. I actually felt as if I were going to perish.

At the next station, Milgram rushes off the subway, away from the situation, and the anxiety evaporates. The experiment shows, he concludes,

⁶ Stanley Milgram, “Behavioral Study of Obedience,” *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 67, no. 4 (1964): 371–378. Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority* (London: Pinter and Martin, 1974).

how strongly we react to social norms. They are not only external rules. We internalize them and are thus patrolled by an “enormous inhibitory anxiety.”⁷

A society is governed not only by laws and regulations but also by norms: that which is considered normal behavior. To deviate from accepted norms makes us uncomfortable, something that is a challenge for minorities of all sorts, including religious minorities in secular societies. In this respect it makes little difference that the society is liberal and democratic, for even if no law prohibits their activities, they are still different—deviant, apart, outliers. And that comes with a price: anxiety.

This is one of the paradoxes of modernity. The appreciation of freedom and authenticity—the right to be and express your true self—seems to be combined with homogenization. Twentieth-century philosophers and sociologists spoke of the advent of the mass society. When individualism eroded the social fabric, this created homogenization rather than freedom, they argued.⁸ The reason was that the absence of strong local communities made it much more important to fit into the one community that counted: the nation state.

This would be true in any western society, but Sweden is a particular case in point. It is not only one of the most individualistic countries in the world but also very homogenous,⁹ not only in terms of language, religion, and ethnicity but also with regard to norms and values.¹⁰ This has a historical underpinning. Sweden is a small nation, isolated in the north of Europe, seldom invaded, and untouched by large waves of migration. While the US is founded on some degree of diversity, especially religious

⁷ See Stanley Milgram and Thomas Blass, eds., *The Individual in a Social World* (London: Pinter & Martin, 2010). The experiment is discussed in Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (London: Profile Books, 2019), 473–474.

⁸ This perspective goes even further back to Edmund Burke and Alexis de Tocqueville. After World War II, Erich Fromm and Hannah Arendt reflected further on this theme.

⁹ On the historical and political roots of the Swedish statist-individualism, see Henrik Berggren and Lars Trägårdh, *Är svensken människa?* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 2015). See also Lars Trägårdh, “Statist Individualism,” in *The Cultural Construction of Norden*, eds. Bo Stråth and Øystein Sørensen (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1997).

¹⁰ In his classic study of Swedish culture and politics, Childs notes “the remarkable homogeneity of this people.” See Marquis William Childs, *Sweden* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1938), xii. For an overview of studies of Swedish culture, see Henrik Berggren and Lars Trägårdh, *Är svensken människa?* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 2015), 29–42. It is also a feature noted by Jenkins; see David Jenkins, *Sweden and the Price of Progress* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1968), 134. A recent study discusses the difficulties of religious pluralism in Sweden due to its homogeneity of values; see Eli Göndör, *Religionskollision* (Stockholm: Timbro, 2017), particularly 21–22, 112, 132–133.

pluralism, Sweden has been shaped by a religious unity, strongly enforced at least since the Reformation. The result is what is commonly described as the Swedish consensus culture: a culture that focuses on compromise and consensus. Swedes are agreeable because they like to agree, and this has shaped Swedish political life. There have been no violent revolutions. Swedes have preferred negotiation as a means to reach nuanced agreements between parties. But this consensus culture is based on an assumption of underlying agreement in terms of core values and goods.¹¹

The Pentecostals challenge the Swedish story of secularization, not just by their numbers but also through their vitality. They defied consensus and refused to adapt. They were ecstatic enthusiasts in a culture that promotes self-control and extols the ability to stay cool. Pious saints in a century when intellectuals disdained religion and politicians did their best to leave it behind. They seemed to have found a way to turn Milgram's anxiety into something positive: a counter-cultural identity that held the movement together and propelled them into defiant witnessing.¹² But below this confident surface one also senses a secret longing for respectability. When someone well educated and respected joined the movement, the Pentecostals rejoiced: how wonderful that "a person so respected" has joined the ranks of "the despised tongues-speakers."¹³ The Pentecostals longed to be part of society, but to the brilliance of Pethrus's leadership belonged his ability to turn deviation into a virtue. He was able to find energy and identity in the position as outliers *contra mundus*—Pentecostals against the world. This tied the saints together and helped them to form a *polis*: a distinct community with a degree of independence from the formal and informal politics of the wider society.

Ultimately, however, Pethrus's goal was to change society: to re-Christianize Sweden. This was necessary, he argued, if democracy and

¹¹ Olof Petersson, "Democracy and Power in Sweden," *Scandinavian Political Studies* 14, no. 2 (1991): 173–191. Abby Peterson, Håkan Thörn and Mattias Wahlström, "Sweden 1950–2015," in *Popular Struggle and Democracy in Scandinavia*, ed. Flemming Mikkelsen et al. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017). Eli Göndör, *Religionskollision* (Stockholm: Timbro, 2017).

¹² See the definition by J. Milton Yinger: "I suggest the use of the term contraculture wherever the normative system of a group contains, as a primary element, a theme of conflict with the values of the total society, where personality variables are directly involved in the development and maintenance of the group's values, and wherever its norms can be understood only by reference to the relationship of the group to a surrounding dominant culture." See J. Milton Yinger, "Conraculture and Subculture," *American Sociological Review* 25, no. 5 (1960): 629.

¹³ The quotes are from the main organ *Evangelii Härold*, when they rejoiced over the recruitment of a Lutheran priest. *Evangelii Härold* 2 (1916), 189. Ulrik Josefsson, *Liv över nog* (Skellefteå: Artos), 299.

religious freedom were to survive. To this end, as this book will show, Pethrus concluded that evangelism and soup kitchens needed to be complemented with public debates and party politics. But the goal remained the same: politics was merely mission by other means. The Swedish Pentecostals were a sect aiming at the transformation of society. It was God's will, but there were earthly rewards as well. If Sweden became at least nominally Christian, it would make Pentecostalism a little less odd.

LEWI PETHRUS AND SWEDISH PENTECOSTALISM

Pentecostalism arrived in Sweden in the fall of 1906 and quickly found sympathizers in most denominations. By the 1910s, it emerged as a distinct movement and grew rapidly. Soon, the Pentecostals were a force to be reckoned with: culturally, socially, and, eventually, even politically. It became the largest free church in Sweden, the strongest Pentecostal movement in Europe, and it sent missionaries all over the world, in the process of becoming the mother of Pentecostalism in countries such as Brazil, Congo, and Mexico.¹⁴

Pethrus grew up on a small farm and worked as a shepherd and in factories before he became a Baptist minister. In 1911, he began his work in the Filadelfia Church in Stockholm. When the congregation was expelled from the Baptist denomination two years later, Pethrus ventured into uncharted territory. But Filadelfia gathered more worshipers than any church in Sweden; it became the largest Pentecostal congregation in Europe—and until the 1960s, it was one of the largest in the world.¹⁵ Pethrus emerged as the unelected but de facto leader of the Swedish Pentecostal movement. He shaped the movement, not only through teaching and preaching but also through the institutions he built: a publishing house, a magazine, a Christian newspaper, a radio station, and a political party. His contacts in and numerous trips to the US meant that he also influenced Pentecostalism in North America and around the globe.¹⁶

¹⁴ On Pentecostal mission, see David Bundy, *Visions of Apostolic Mission* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2009).

¹⁵ Andreas Thörn, *En framgångsrik främling* (Örebro: Örebro universitet, 2014), 13.

¹⁶ On Pethrus's influence on Pentecostalism in the US, see Joseph Colletti, "Lewi Pethrus: His Influence upon Scandinavia-American Pentecostalism," *Pneuma* 5, no. 2 (1983): 18–29. Tommy Davidsson comments that Pethrus's "extensive personal network with key leaders across Europe and the United States provided him with an unprecedented platform to promote his own ideas and limit the influence of others." Tommy Davidsson, *Lewi Pethrus' Ecclesiological Thought 1911–1974* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 2.

This is one of the most remarkable biographies, not only in Swedish religious history but in the history of Pentecostalism. Pethrus embodied the movement, shaped its ecclesiology and self-understanding, and created the institutions necessary to sustain it. He was not only able to unite this dynamic movement, with its well-attested tendency to divisions, but also able to renew it time after time. Pethrus was a gifted leader, and while some have decried his power plays—cynical at times—no one can deny his skill. It is doubtful if there has ever existed a Pentecostal leadership that has been so dominant for such a long time.

Despite this, research on Pethrus has been scant. There are a few articles and one monograph in English—barely enough to fill a modest footnote.¹⁷ Pethrus's relevance for global Pentecostalism is confirmed by the fact that he surfaces in most classical studies of the movement, but these occurrences are not matched by articles or books that analyze him or his contribution.¹⁸ Part of the reason is, of course, that the source material is in Swedish and thus only accessible to a fraction of the scholarly world. But even Swedish scholars have published relatively little on Pethrus, particularly in English. Theological departments in Sweden have been primarily composed of Lutherans, who generally have turned their attention elsewhere. The Pentecostals themselves have been too busy doing other things—and too skeptical of the academy—to probe their own history.¹⁹

The result of this neglect is not only a lacuna when it comes to knowledge of Pethrus but also a distorted image of Pentecostalism. Classical, or first-wave, Pentecostalism becomes overly skewed toward the Anglo-Saxon world, where research is indeed vast. Today this is balanced to some extent by a rising interest in Pentecostalism in the global

¹⁷Joseph Colletti, "Lewi Pethrus: His Influence upon Scandinavia-American Pentecostalism," *Pneuma* 5, no. 2 (1983): 18–29. David Bundy, "Social Ethics in the Church of the Poor: The Cases of T. B. Barratt and Lewi Pethrus," *JEPTA* 22 (2002): 30–44. Torbjörn Aronson, "Spirit and Church in the Ecclesiology of Lewi Pethrus," *Pentecostudies* 11, no. 2 (2012): 192–212. Joel Halldorf, "Lewi Pethrus and the Creation of a Christian Counterculture," *Pneuma* 32, no. 3 (2010): 354–368. There is one monograph as well: Tommy Davidsson, *Lewi Pethrus' Ecclesiological Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 2015). Pethrus also plays a big part in David Bundy's dissertation; see David Bundy, *Visions of Apostolic Mission* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2009).

¹⁸See, for instance, Walter J. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1977), 7, 430, 473. Donald Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2000), 178. Allan Anderson, *Spreading Fires* (New York: Orbis Books, 2007), 51, 194, 205.

¹⁹There is considerably more on Pethrus in Swedish, but neither author of the two first dissertations concerning Pethrus—Carl-Erik Sahlberg and Carl-Gustav Carlsson—have published anything on him in English.

south—third-wave Pentecostalism—but studies of classical Pentecostalism from the non-English-speaking western world are still few. This needs to change to broaden the image, not least to challenge the often implicit understanding that western Pentecostalism equals that of the US.

Pentecostalism is a religion made to travel: a chameleon with an uncanny ability to contextualize in ever-new cultural conditions.²⁰ And every new context reveals some new aspects of this strange and multifaceted movement’s meaning and identity. The Swedish Pentecostal movement is part of a society shaped by a Lutheran heritage, popular movements, and Social Democratic politics. They are tongues-speaker with a certain, Scandinavian dialect. As we shall see, this results in many differences.

PENTECOSTAL POLITICS

This book is tied together not only by the person of Lewi Pethrus, but also by the concept of politics, and connected to this, leadership. To put a finer point on what is meant by “politics,” it is helpful to turn to ethicist Luke Bretherton, who highlights three dimensions of the concept in his book *Christ and the Common Life*.

First, politics refers to the nature and form of the *polis*—Greek for city or community. How is the nature of the common life understood, and toward what does the community strive? Secondly, the political refers to the structures—norms, hierarchies, and institutions—that shape this common life, so it can be sustained over time. This includes statecraft, which in this case concerns the governing of the Pentecostal *polis*, not the nation. Finally, politics is relational and communicative practices that make a common life that includes friends, strangers, and enemies possible—the shaping of a society that includes citizens of different religious and political outlooks. Here, this includes the Pentecostal mission as well as the involvement in professional party politics; both are expressions of Pethrus’s ambition to influence and shape society in general.²¹

This broad understanding makes it clear that politics includes, but is not limited to, statecraft through professional politics. Swedish Pentecostals

²⁰ See Murray W. Dempster, Dyron D. Klaus, and Douglas Petersen, *The Globalization of Pentecostalism* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1999).

²¹ Luke Bretherton, *Christ and the Common Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), 32–35. I borrow Bretherton’s taxonomy with slight changes to make it fit my object of study. The differences have to do with the fact that I study a community within the larger body of national politics. Statecraft—politics in the second sense—then becomes the government of the Swedish Pentecostal movement, not the state.

eventually become a force in party politics, but their habits, community, and way of being in the world have political implications. Or to put it more succinctly: The Pentecostals don't just have a politics, they are a politics.²² This book investigates the ideals that characterize the communities (*polis*) of the Swedish Pentecostal movement, the political structures that sustain this movement, and the political work to shape society at large.

The politics of Swedish Pentecostalism is shaped by an interaction between visions and institutions: between theological ideals and the means by which they are realized. The political is always there, but changing, taking on new forms, and is expanding its reach. Swedish Pentecostalism is an attempt to answer the question William Cavanaugh places at the heart of modern political theology: "In one way or another, all political theologies at the end of the twentieth century can be read as so many attempts to come to grips with the death of Christendom without simply acquiescing in the privatization of the church."²³ The Pentecostal response to this predicament has more often taken the shape of a life together than a written systematic theology, and it is the politics of this life that this book tries to capture. At the heart of their response to the "death of Christendom" is mission: to transform individual lives, communities, and ultimately the nation.

The book begins with a brief overview of Pethrus's early years, a chapter that also charts the religious landscape of Sweden in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. This is followed by three chapters on politics in the first sense: the nature of the *polis*. Chapter 3 looks at Pethrus's understanding of the congregation. What kind of organization—or "organism," as Pethrus would say—is this? Chapter 4 discusses by what means an "organism" that refuses to be an organization be led. With the help of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu it explains how Pethrus's position as leader in this *polis* is envisioned and established. Chapter 5 focuses on life within this *polis*: the attempt to shape reactions that are different than the perceived impersonal ties of the modern iron cage.

The second part focuses on the institutions, hierarchies, and norms that structure and sustain the common life in the Swedish Pentecostal *polis*. This includes church politics and the struggle for power within this movement. Chapter 6 shows how he uses these institutions to guide and guard the movement, particularly through the theological norms he establishes. His

²²The perspective of church as politics is generally associated with theologian and ethicist Stanley Hauerwas.

²³William Cavanaugh, "Church," in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, eds. Peter Scott and William Cavanaugh (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 393.

leadership is optimistic and center-oriented, while simultaneously attentive and generous to the radical edges of the movement, where a necessary energy can be found. Chapters 7, 8, and 9 focus on the practice of statecraft and church politics. They analyze Pethrus's response to conflicts and his strategies for dealing with them. Emerging revivals within the movement—for instance, the Latter Rain revival—provide a particular challenge, but Pethrus has a strategy to keep the movement both sound and intact when these emerge.

In the final chapters, politics in the third sense comes into focus: the political as the attempt to shape society. The Swedish Pentecostal movement is affected by political decisions by the state, but it also influences the surrounding society. Pethrus works to do this through not only mission but also party politics. Chapter 10 shows that the ecclesial centralization of the Swedish Pentecostal movement—the idea that each city can contain no more than one Pentecostal church—is motivated by a vision of mission through large-scale projects. In practice, this creates an episcopal structure in what is formally a non-denominational movement. Chapter 11 charts Pethrus's turn to party politics from the 1940s to the founding of a political party in 1964. This is a reaction to what Pethrus perceives as secularization from above. His party, the Christian Democrats, is a proponent of a progressive economic politics—that is, they embrace the welfare state—and a conservative cultural politics. Pethrus's rhetoric during these years has a certain populist flavor, as he presents secularization as something done to the people against their will by a secular elite.

The last chapter analyzes the political profile of Swedish evangelicalism, including the Pentecostal movement, and compares it to that of the American Religious Right. As noted, Pethrus's political involvement was already taking shape in the 1940s, a full three decades before what is commonly seen as the political awakening of evangelicals in the US. But Pethrus's politics has a different shape than that of the Religious Right—a voter block that would eventually support Donald Trump. Not only is Pethrus pro-welfare, but Swedish Pentecostals today tend to be more optimistic about pluralism and even Muslim immigrants than the average secular voter. What are the causes of these differences between Swedish and US Pentecostals, and what do they tell us of the political nature of Pentecostalism? By answering these questions I hope to contribute to a deeper and more nuanced understanding of Pentecostal politics.

This structure is at the same time largely chronological and follows Pethrus's life from cradle to grave. This is no coincidence: it begins with his early vision of the church, continues with the practice of leadership and shaping of the Swedish Pentecostal movement, and ends with his attempts

to widen the circle beyond the movement and shape the Swedish society at large. The arc of Pethrus life is long and it is bent toward politics.

A few other themes are intertwined throughout the book. The first and most obvious is leadership. I study Pethrus's strategies and exercise of this ecclesial practice. In a time when management literature is abundant and also influences the churches, historical studies of ecclesial leadership are surprisingly rare. Another theme is modernity and the question how Pentecostalism relates to it. Modernity refers to the modern era as a whole, including both material changes, such as industrialization and urbanization, and cultural changes such as democratization and individualism. Like evangelicalism in general, Pentecostalism is both a child of and a protest against modernity. It is, I would argue, one of the many modernities in the west.²⁴ Pentecostalism grows in the cities, uses modern media, and attracts the working class. But it also challenges secularization, the disappearance of traditional morality, and atomistic individualism. Pentecostalism is constantly negotiating the modern cultural condition—attacking it, but also riding on the tide of the times.

For example, while Pentecostals certainly did not want the world to be secular, their emphasis on conversion is dependent on the possibility to say no to the gospel. In other words, it implicitly endorses secularization, for it is necessary to have an option.²⁵ Further, Pentecostalism is revived by the secular disenchantment of the world: it can provide an attractive alternative by proclaiming that the world is not only God's creation but a site of signs and wonders even now. While some in the early twentieth century tried to re-enchant the world through drugs, nationalism, and even total war, Pentecostals offered community and the Holy Spirit instead.²⁶ Other key concepts of modernity that Pentecostalism has to negotiate, and which are discussed in the book, are authenticity, instrumental rationality, social engineering, self-control, equality, and democracy. And of course deviation: the relationship between mainstream and the counter-cultural. Is it possible to create a distinct *polis* despite the politics of mass society?

²⁴For more on this, see Joel Halldorf, *Av denna världen* (Skellefteå: Artos, 2012). The concept of multiple modernities is introduced by Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt, "Multiple Modernities," *Daedalus* 129, no. 1 (2000): 1–29. His focus is however on the occurrence of different modernities worldwide, not within the western world.

²⁵Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). See also Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

²⁶For more on this, see Chaps. 5 and 6.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

A few remarks on the vocabulary. The movement Pethrus led was radically congregational and not organized as a denomination with an official name. Still, it comprised a distinct movement, and in line with what has become the scholarly standard I will refer to it as the Swedish Pentecostal movement. This is not equivalent to the Pentecostal revival in Sweden, which includes persons in other denominations—Baptists, Salvation Army, Mission Covenant, and even the Church of Sweden—who accepted the teaching on baptism in the Holy Spirit and the practice of tongues.

As is the case with many Baptist and Pentecostal congregations in Sweden, the congregation Pethrus led in Stockholm between 1911 and 1958 took its name from The Book of Revelations and one of the congregations addressed there: Filadelfia. I will, however, keep the Swedish rendering and call it the Filadelfia Church, sometimes abbreviated as Filadelfia. I will omit “in Stockholm,” unless it is necessary for the context. The Filadelfia Congregation would have been slightly more accurate, but linguistically less comfortable—and the popular way of referring to the congregation is actually “*Filadelfiakyrkan*.”²⁷ The source material used for this book is mainly in Swedish and as noted above that goes for most of the research on Pethrus as well. When these sources are quoted, the citations have been translated into English.

Finally, it is worth noting that the Swedish Pentecostal movement belongs to the free churches in Sweden. These are defined as protestant churches that were not part of the Church of Sweden, which was a state church until the year 2000. The freedom in free churches refers to freedom from the state. These denominations are largely evangelical, that is, they stem from seventeenth-century pietism and/or Baptism—but there are also evangelicals within the Church of Sweden. I see Pentecostalism as a version of evangelicalism but emphasize that the latter should be understood with reference to pietism rather than some version of fundamentalism. The emphasis of pietism was on conversion, a personal heartfelt spirituality and virtues such as simplicity and humility—not first and foremost inerrancy or doctrinal purity. In Chaps. 2 and 3, I explain further how I view these relationships and the historiographical consequences of this perspective.

²⁷Tommy Davidsson uses “Filadelfia Church,” and Andreas Thörn uses “Philadelphia church.” See Tommy Davidsson, *Lewi Pethrus’ Ecclesiological Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 2015) and Andreas Thörn, *En framgångsrik främling* (Örebro: Örebro universitet, 2014).