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*Unité et diversité des
évangélismes actuels*

Éléments pour une typologie

Evangelical Movements and Churches in the Nordic Countries in a Historical and Contemporary Perspective

*Harald Hegstad
Centre for Church Research, Oslo*

Let me start my contribution with some definitions and clarifications. By the “Nordic countries” I am here talking about Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. Although Iceland usually is counted to this group, I will keep Iceland out of the discussion in this context. The reason is that the 19th century revivals that constitute much of the historical basis for evangelicalism in the other Nordic countries did not take place in Iceland. Due to close relations in the political, cultural and religious development in the Nordic countries, the four countries today show great similarities, but also distinct differences. It is therefore possible to make some sort of generalisation regarding this area, when also taking into account the differences and variations. Because of this combination of similarity and difference, the Nordic countries may be a good object for comparative studies.

In the cultural and political development there are close relations between Denmark and Norway on the one hand and Sweden and Finland on the other. While Norway has a history as politically dependant of Denmark (until 1814), Finland was a dependency of Sweden (until 1809). This history of dependency also connects Norway and Finland to each other, both having a history as a political periphery.

All the Nordic countries have Lutheran National Churches. These churches are state churches or former state churches, and all of them have a majority of the population as members (between 80 and 91%). Although the membership rate is very high, the number of church members attending church regularly is rather low. For many church members, being a member of the church is more a question of culture than of religious beliefs. This gives the Nordic folk church Christianity its distinct shape.

At the same time there is a more active and committed type of religious life, inside and outside the folk churches. To a great extent this activity has the revivals of the 19th and early 20th century as their historical presupposition. In these revivals are also the roots of what might be understood as evangelicalism in the Nordic countries (cf. Hegstad 1999).

The concept of evangelicalism

Before pursuing this any further, it is necessary to discuss the concept “evangelical”, and whether this is a useful concept in the Nordic context or not.

“Evangelicalism” can on the one hand be understood rather narrowly as a movement within the context of Anglo-American church life. This is the perspective in various books on Evangelism (e.g. Ellingsen 1988). The question of evangelicalism in the Nordic countries

would then be a question of the importance of the Anglo-American influences. This seems however to be a too narrow approach, and would give an a priori negative answer to the question for other roots to Nordic evangelicalism.

On the other hand the concept can be understood very widely, used to indicate different forms of conservative, Protestant Christianity. This option is however also very problematic, since the concept used this way will include too much and become rather useless as an analytical tool.

In the Nordic context it is not possible to choose the solution as Mark Ellingsen chooses in his study of the evangelical movement, defining the object of research as “those persons and organizations *explicitly identifying themselves* as Evangelical” (Ellingsen 1988 :p. 47). In the Nordic context “evangelical” is not a familiar term, or something large groups would use as a self-description. The term is to a great extent understood as an Anglo-American term, primarily used as a self-description when relating one self to the Anglo-American context. A person or organisation that would understand himself as an evangelical in an American context will not necessarily use the concept as a self description in a Nordic context.

Besides context, this has to do with language. In English, the term “evangelical” on the one hand serves as a translation of the German “evangelisch” and the Scandinavian “evangelisk”. In the German setting “evangelisch” is a synonym to Protestant (including Lutheran and Reformed), the counter concept being Roman-Catholic (“katholisch”).

On the other hand the German and Scandinavian languages have adopted the English concept directly, using the term “evangelikal”, making it possible to distinguish between the two meanings of the word evangelical – “evangelisch” and “evangelikal”. This linguistic difference between English (and French) and the Scandinavian (and German) languages means that “evangelical” is difficult as a self-description in the Nordic context. When used in the meaning of the German “evangelisch”, it tends to be too wide, when used in the meaning of “evangelikal”, it tends to be too narrow.

Trying to find a way in the middle between a very narrow and a very broad meaning of the concept, I will focus on some substantial, theological criteria. In that way we are not dependent on whether a movement chooses to use the term “evangelical” as a self description or not. According to this substantial approach I find it reasonable to understand the following as characteristics of evangelicalism :

- the authority of the Bible as the Word of God
- the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as Son of God and the only way to salvation
- the need of conversion and a personal decision as a way of establishing a personal relation to God
- the need of mission and evangelism
- ecumenically oriented towards evangelicals in other churches (“alliance”-type of ecumenical work)
- a certain openness towards culture and society (distinguishing evangelicals from fundamentalists)

To measure evangelicalism

To *measure* evangelicalism in the Nordic countries according to such criteria is not easy. Even if there have been done a lot of surveys on religion in the Nordic countries, no one has been specifically designed to measure “evangelicalism”. In addition many of the criteria used to define evangelicalism can be found in other contexts, also in non-Protestant groups and churches.

With this in mind I took a look at one of the latest surveys of religious beliefs and values, not only in the Nordic countries, but in other European countries as well, from the project “Religion And Moral Pluralism” (RAMP) (cf. Gustafsson and Pettersson 2000).

	<i>Denmark</i>	<i>Norway</i>	<i>Sweden</i>	<i>Finland</i>
<i>Belief in a personal God</i>	20%	28%	18%	37%
<i>Heaven and hell after death</i>	4%	11%	5%	13%
<i>Jesus is God and man – definitely true</i>	17%	22%	14%	27%
<i>Importance of propagating the Christian faith in the whole world – very important</i>	11%	10%	7%	18%

The table shows the results of four different questions from the four Nordic countries. Most of the results are no unambiguous indications of “evangelicalism”, even if they give some indications of the distribution of the phenomenon we are working with. At the same time the numbers give a picture of the relation between the different Nordic countries, giving Finland the highest score in all the variables, Norway in second place in most cases.

Historical roots of evangelicalism

The difficulties of getting hold of evangelicalism in this way, lead us to the use of historical methods. We have to identify the movements, churches and organisations which represent what may be identified as some sort of evangelicalism. So where is evangelicalism to be found today in the Nordic context ?

Using the description given above as criterion, one will find evangelicalism both inside and outside the Lutheran folk churches. Evangelicalism is a stream within the folk churches, while some of the Protestant free churches are more or less dominated by evangelical views, and as such may be considered as evangelical churches.

To understand this situation, we have to go back to the revivals in the 19th and 20th centuries. These revivals can be understood as a sort of vitalisation of traditional elements in the Lutheran and pietistic religion that dominated the Nordic countries. The revivals took place in a period when old structures in society broke down and new ones were established. In this situation religious revivals not only redefined the religious situation, but also had great impacts on the restructuring of society. As social movements, and later on as organisations and churches, they contributed to new forms of social activity, mobility and communication. At the same time they represented a link between the old society and the new. On the religious level the revival did not see itself as a breakaway from the old tradition, rather as a vitalisation of the true religion that was handed down from the Lutheran reformers. What had been handed down as knowledge and tradition had to be applied at a personal level by the individual. However, this positive attitude does not apply to all the non-Lutheran free churches, some of which rather understood themselves as a reintroduction of the ideals from the New Testament church.

The revivals were to a great extent lead by local leaders, both ministers of the state churches and lay persons. At the same time the movement received influences from other countries, both from other Nordic countries and from other countries. An early influence came from the Moravian movement in Germany in the late 18th century. From the middle of the 19th century influences from England, Scotland and America became more and more important, giving impulses to movements that to a great extent already were established. Among these external influences was the influence from *Methodism* without any doubt the most important. This influence did in no way limit itself to the establishment of a Methodist church in the Nordic countries.

This influence was in a certain conflict to the older revival. While Methodism is Arminian in its understanding of salvation, stressing conversion as a choice and decision of the individual, traditional Lutheranism denied the idea of the free will and understood salvation as a work of God alone (although not going to such extremes as Calvinism). In the Pietistic tradition the believer had to go through a long process (the *ordo salutis*) before he or she could be confident of his/her salvation. In the earlier revivals (for instance in Haugeanism in Norway and Schartaueanism in Sweden) the adherents characteristically designated themselves as the “awakened ones”, people that had *started* on their way towards salvation, seeking salvation without already possessing it. In the later revivals salvation was understood as something that could be received in an instant, in the moment the decision to dedicate one’s life to Christ was made. This understanding opened the field for a more aggressive and expedient methods for evangelism. An important element was the revival meeting where people were invited to come forward and give their life to Christ. In the main stream of revivalism after some years of tension and discussions this Methodist-influenced (and evangelical) understanding became the dominant position. This process, which took part in the last part of the 19th century, might be seen as the “evangelicalisation” of the revivals. That also means that the revivalist groups that did not accept this reorientation, cannot be considered “evangelical”, as I have used the concept in this paper.

This non-evangelical revivalism includes some “old-pietistic” groups, but also a peculiar movement found in the northern part of Norway, Sweden and Denmark, the *Laestadian* movement (named after the Swedish pastor Lars Levi Laestadius, 1800–1861). This

movement has many similarities with older pietism, but differs for instance in the question of *mission*.

A revival movement which is neither pietistic nor evangelical is the so-called Grundtvigian movement in Denmark (named after the Danish pastor N.F.S. Grundtvig, 1783–1872). (The movement has also had some influence in Norway, but to a far smaller extent than in Denmark.) This movement understood itself as an alternative to pietism, and stressed the continuity between culture and faith.

With these exceptions, which have been especially dominant in Denmark (Grundtvigianism) and the Arctic area (Laestadianism), the main stream of the revivals had, or developed, an evangelical profile. They were to a great extent the result of the encounter between a traditional Lutheran pietism and western impulses, from Britain and America. The 19th and early 20th centuries witnessed a formation of an international evangelical, revivalist and inter-confessional culture, spreading out also to the Nordic countries. This culture was characterised not only by some common theological concerns, but also with a common reservoir of texts, songs and styles. The importance of the influence from outside is expressed through the fact that these revivals often had their greatest impact on the coast, areas where the contact with other countries was at its closest.

The evangelical revivals took mainly two forms in the Nordic countries, a Lutheran and a Non-Lutheran. With the exception of some small Lutheran free churches, the Lutheran part of the revival stayed within the state church, forming organisations for outer and inner mission. These organisations often built their own meeting houses. The people who belonged to these organisations had their own religious meetings, but usually also participated in the services of the state church. The degree of loyalty towards the state church differed a lot. The revivalist movements in Norway tended to more independence towards the church than for instance in Denmark, where the Inner Mission was led by state church pastors.

The non-lutheran part of the revival often started as movements within the state church, which later separated from the church. This was especially the case in Sweden where the combination of the revival's radicalism and hostility from the church led to the Swedish Covenant Church (1878). This church (now belonging to the World Alliance of Reformed Churches) is the largest free church in the Nordic context. The formation of other free churches was the result of direct influences from churches and movements abroad. This applies for instance to the Baptist and the Methodist Churches in the Nordic countries.

In a special position in this context is the Pentecostal movement. It was brought from the United States to Europe through the Norwegian Methodist pastor T.B. Barrat, called the "apostle of Pentecostalism in Europe" (Ellingsen 1988 :p. 130). He founded the first Pentecostal congregation in Oslo in 1916. Among the Nordic countries the Pentecostal movement had its greatest impact in Sweden.

Recent tendencies

It is a commonplace sociological insight that religious groups and movements change as they become older and more established. So is the case with the movements we have described in the previous. Except for the first few years after the second world war, the post-war period was a period without the type of revivals that was so important for the movement in its formative phase. That means among other things that the movement shifted from a first generation movement of converts to a second and third generation movement of the converts' children and grandchildren. Socialisation replaced conversion as the primary mean of recruiting new members. Also the relation to the rest of society and to the common culture became less conflict oriented. In its early phase the revival understood itself as an alternative to the " world ". The revival represented an alternative to many aspects of the life style of common culture (for instance regarding sex, clothing, alcohol, sports – even if the understanding of what was sinful showed certain geographical variations). In the post-war period the differences between the revival and the common culture were diminished.

Another obvious tendency in this period is the development in the relation to the church and in understanding of oneself as a church. For the free churches the tendency has been to understand oneself more and more as churches, not primarily as movements or revivals. This has impacts for structure and for self understanding. Especially in the large Swedish free churches there have been strong tendencies towards becoming more liberal and open churches. Even if there still are strong evangelical elements in these churches, some of them cannot any more be characterised as evangelical churches as such.

For the evangelical movements inside the state churches this development has on the one hand meant a closer cooperation with the church. The official church has in many cases adopted many of the evangelical movement's world view and activity forms. This is especially true in Norway and Finland. The tendency of absorption into the church is however a threat towards the survival of the movements as independent organisations. On the other hand there is an opposite tendency towards stressing the independence from the church, including establishing congregations. This tendency might in some years turn some of these evangelical organisations into free churches.

The period following second world war also showed new types of contacts to international evangelicalism. In all the Nordic countries the crusades by Billy Graham represented important events, especially in the 1950's. In the same period international evangelical organisations for evangelism were established in the Nordic countries, and evangelical organisations in the Nordic countries participated in international evangelical conferences and organisations. A relevant example is the Lausanne Congress of World Evangelism and the later Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization. Evangelical organisations have in general been very critical towards the type of ecumenism which the official churches did engage in through the World Council of Churches. The establishing of a world wide evangelical network has served as an ecumenical alternative also for Nordic evangelicals.

An important influence from the 1970's has been the so-called charismatic renewal. Even if this movement has close historical and phenomenological relations to the Pentecostal movement, it functioned as a renewal movement within existing churches and organisations,

mostly with an evangelical profile. The charismatic renewal represented a source of vitalisation for the evangelical movement, but also a source of discussion and division, as parts of the evangelicals were negative to the charismatic renewal.

Evangelicalism and society

As I have mentioned, evangelical churches and organisations in parts of their history have defined themselves in opposition to the common culture, representing their own set of moral norms and life styles. The groups also represented a social milieu for their members, thus establishing the necessary plausibility structure in a society that had become more pluralistic. The social segregation between the evangelical and non-evangelical part of the population was, however, never a total one in the Nordic countries. The evangelicals participated in economy, politics, education and different aspects of civil society together with other citizens. With some exceptions (e.g. evangelical labour unions and even creameries in Denmark) we do not find the same pillarization as for instance in the Netherlands.

An apparent trait in this picture has been the forming of Christian parties after the second world war. Especially in Norway this party has been a success, and similar parties in the other Nordic countries has had this party as a sort of a model. In the parliament election 2001 the Norwegian Christian party received 12,4% of the votes. This party has traditionally been based on a coalition between the evangelicals within the state church and the evangelical free churches, even if no organisations or churches have officially supported the party. In the last years there is a tendency that the Christian parties have broadened their voters' basis, stressing ethics and family values more than personal faith (Aardal 2000).

It is necessary to give some remarks regarding the social composition of evangelicalism in the Nordic countries. Traditionally the revival movements have recruited their members among farmers and fishermen. In the cities the movement had limited success among workers in the industry, and recruited mainly from middle class groups. This failure of recruiting working class people also was related to the ideological conflict and organisational competition with the labour movement. At least in the first part of its history this movement was very critical to the church, even if the majority of the workers maintained their membership in the church.

Evangelicalism and the folk church

The Nordic situation represents a unique combination of the presence of a rather strong evangelical presence and a broad folk church. It is an interesting question to ask for the internal dynamics between these two factors. It has been argued that the existence of strong revivalist and evangelical groups within the folk church threatens and undermines the folk church. According to this perspective the dominance of a strong activist elite in the church alienates the common and more passive folk church members from the church. They become a sort of second class members compared to the first class members. This alienation will in turn lead to secularisation, both in beliefs and practices, and with consequences for the church's function as a folk church.

This connection is however very difficult to verify. When comparing the Nordic countries it seems that the countries with the largest influence of evangelical and revivalist groups within the church, namely Norway and Finland, seem to be the least secularised of the four countries. That seems to point in an opposite direction, namely that the presence of evangelical groups within the church also strengthens the position of the church as such among the population and the ordinary folk church members.

In a qualitative study I have analysed how the core group of active believers, often an evangelical profile, interacts with the local folk church culture (cf. Hegstad 1999). An important perspective in the study is to show how connection and interdependence between the two groups, even if there also are tensions and conflicts. On the one hand the core group contributes to maintain the folk church through its active contribution in the church, they are maintaining a church organisation and a church life that is necessary if the church should function not only for its active members, but also as a folk church. The core group e.g. plays an important role for instance in upholding the services through their participation, and in upholding Christian knowledge and identity among the church members through their work with Sunday school and other Christian activities.

The core group not only has a practical function, but also a *symbolic and representative function* vis-à-vis the folk church. Originally this function belonged, and still belongs, to the minister/priest as the person representing the holy. The minister however often shares this function with a wider group which are associated with the church and with an active Christian commitment. In many instances evangelical and revivalist groups have served to give Christianity a face in the local community, thus having a sort of normative function (Hegstad 1999).

The discussion of the relation between evangelical groups and the broader folk church points to a more general insight, namely the importance of not only discussing evangelicalism and evangelical groups as a phenomenon *per se*, but also to address the question of their function within the wider culture – in the church and in society as a whole. The dynamics of this reciprocity shapes evangelicalism itself and its external impacts.

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