Viktor Lennstrand and Sweden's Secularization

Viktor Lennstrand och Sveriges Sekularisering

Ronald Petrarca

Subject: History
Department: Department of History and Social Sciences
Level: Master's Thesis, 15 hp
Adviser: Martin Åberg
Examiner: Martin Åberg
Date: 23-09-2014
Number of pages: 60
Summary:

Viktor Lennstrand was the first person in Sweden to establish an organization completely devoted to atheist activism: *Utilistiska samfundet*. This in itself makes him an important figure in Swedish history; however, he is also significant in another way. Lennstrand had a personal connection to the leaders of the three groups which had the most influence on Sweden's long-term secularization: the Swedish Free Church movement, freethinkers, and the Swedish Social Democratic Workers' Party.

This master's thesis is a brief examination of Lennstrand's life. It will use the secularization paradigm to explain Lennstrand's place in the history of the secularization of Sweden.

Specifically, it will show that Lennstrand's philosophy and activism should be seen as the product of the secularization process rather than a significant cause for its further evolution.

It will also show that the reason for Lennstrand's failure to become a major influence on the secularization of Sweden was his inability to connect the *Utilistiska samfund* to a larger educational or political movement. This, in turn, was largely due to his personal animosity towards the SAP's leaders, the change in his personality which occurred after leaving prison, and, of course, his short life.
1 Introduction

Up until the 1880's, there were few people in Sweden who spoke or wrote publicly against religion. The country lacked any prominent anti-religious philosophers, such as those that had been found in France, Germany and the United Kingdom since the Enlightenment. However, by the 1950's Sweden had surpassed the aforementioned countries to become one of the world's most secular societies. How did such a transformation occur?

The process of secularization was complex, and depended on many factors, but there were three groups that were most responsible for the transformation: the Swedish Free Church movement, freethinkers, and the Swedish Social Democratic Party (SAP)\(^2\).

The Free Church leaders challenged the Church of Sweden's orthodoxy and dominance over the country's population, and most importantly helped to catalyze the development of religious pluralism in the country during the second half of the 19\(^{th}\) century. Paul Petter Waldenström, who was Sweden's most important leader within the Free Church movement, became a member of the Riksdag and was a successful advocate for several liberal social reforms, such as universal suffrage and the separation of church and state.

The freethinkers, which included Anton Nyström and Knut Wicksell, were the first organized group of Swedes that tried to spread anti-Christian philosophy via lectures, publications and the establishment of culturally radical organizations. The freethinkers tried to spread secular ideology and liberalism among the working class, and became quite successful in doing so via the establishment of Stockholms arbetarinstitut and other worker' schools throughout Sweden.

While many leaders of the SAP were at first important members in freethinking circles, as their power and influence grew, their animosity towards religion (at least as part of their official political platform) waned. In fact, a Christian branch of the SAP was even established.

Yet it was the SAP that was most responsible for the decrease in the Church of Sweden's influence on the nation's schools during the twentieth century, primarily through

\(^{2}\) Sveriges socialdemokratiska arbetpareri
their roll in elementary and secondary school reform.

Viktor Lennstrand, who was the first person in Sweden to found an organization completely dedicated to anti-Christian activism, had a connection to the leaders in all three of the above-mentioned groups. He was born into a Free Church family in Gävle and was educated as a boy and teenager by P.P. Waldenström. He also became a friend and comrade to several of the most important leaders in both the freethought movement and the SAP, most especially Anton Nyström, Knut Wicksell, Hjalmar Öhrwall and Hjalmar Branting.

This master's dissertation seeks to research Lennstrand's life, career, writings and his founding of the Utilistiska samfund³. It will explore Lennstrand's agitation against the state and the Church of Sweden and determine to what degree it was inspired by the Free Church and freethought movements. It will also discuss the degree to which Lennstrand was relevant to the long-term secularization of Sweden.

1.1 Formulation of Problems and Research Questions

There has been little research into the history of atheism in Sweden during the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, and there has not been any significant scholarly research into the life of Viktor Lennstrand since the 1970's. The goal of this paper is to contribute to the literature on both of these subjects. There are a number of angles that one could take in writing a biographical sketch of Lennstrand; however, portraying him against the backdrop of the long-term history of Swedish secularization seems the most productive since he had such a close connection to some of the most important figures in that process. Examining his life through those relationships answers a number of important questions about him. Specifically, the research goals for this dissertation shall be explored via the following questions:

1. What were Lennstrand's religious, philosophical and political beliefs?

³ I am assuming that any reader has a knowledge of Swedish; therefore, I will not provide English translations of Swedish words, terms and sentences.
2. What role did PP. Waldenström and the Free Church movement have on Lennstrand's philosophy and activism?

3. What influence did the freethinkers have on the development of Lennstrand's life, philosophy and activism?

4. How did Lennstrand's personality affect his relationships with other freethinkers and with the leaders of the SAP?

5. To what degree did Lennstrand impact Sweden's long-term secularization, and what were the reasons for his successes or failures?

1.2 Theoretical Bases

The secularization paradigm (also called classical secularization theory) is the overarching theoretical framework for this research paper. It is a theory which was first developed by Max Weber and Émile Durkheim during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It was later codified during the 1960's by a number of sociologists and historians, especially Bryan Wilson and Peter Berger. Today, one of the most prominent advocates of the secularization paradigm is Steve Bruce. It is his version of the theory which most guides this dissertation.

According to Bruce, secularization is, “the displacement of religion from the centre of human life”. He defines the traditional definition of secularization as occurring through the following processes:

A. “The decay of religious institutions.”
B. “The displacement, in matters of behavior, of religious rules and principles by demands which accord of strictly technical criteria.”
C. “The sequestration by political powers of the property and facilities of religious agencies.”
D. “The replacement of a specifically religious consciousness (which may range from

---

4 Green, 2011: p.6-7.
5 Bruce, 2013: Introduction VIII.
dependence on charms, rites, spells or prayers, to a broadly spiritually inspired ethical concern) by an empirical, rational, instrumental orientation.”
E. “The decline in the proportion of their time, energy and resources that people devote to supernatural concerns.”

There are a number of factors which Bruce gives to explain why the above characteristics develop in society; however, the ones most relevant to Lennstrand's place in the history of Swedish secularization are: structural differentiation, religious pluralism, democratization, and the spread of reason and knowledge about science via education.

In Sweden, the public school system is an excellent example of secularization through this paradigm. Almost all students attend a government-supported, public school which is run by the local city or town and is overseen by the national government. The church has lost its influence on the country's curriculum and administration. The majority of students are not religious and next to all the teachers have studied pedagogy at university in order to become employed. Additionally, science and comparative religion have replaced the Lutheran catechism as a requirement for graduation.

The secularization paradigm dominated research in the humanities, sociology and comparative religion up until the 1980's. It was in this decade that many researchers, especially those in the United States, became skeptical of it. Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart have discussed the various challenges to the secularization paradigm in their book Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide (2011). They note, for example, the increase in religion in Eastern Europe, and an upswing in protestantism in Latin America, as well as religion's political power in the USA. Norris and Inglehart do not want to discard the secularization paradigm, but rather replace it with a revised version of the orthodox model. The new model makes use of a concept called “existential security” in order to help explain secularization. “The existential security axiom” maintains that “societies become less responsive to the appeals of the metaphysical world when people's lives are lifted out of dire poverty and its life-threatening risks, and life in

---

6 Bruce 2013, p. 1.
7 A process where society becomes more complex and consists of many specialists who have taken over the roles once belonging to the church and clergy.
8 Bruce 2013, p 28-43.
this world becomes more secure with the complex process of human development.”

Bruce casts doubt on Norris and Inglehart's new interpretation of secularization in his book *Secularization: In Defence of an Unfashionable Theory* (2013). He demonstrates step by step that the decrease in religion across the globe (including in the US, South America and Eastern Europe) has, in fact, occurred precisely according to the secularization paradigm. In regard to “existential security”, Bruce comments that, “It is also a guess that is barely elaborated. It is not clear whether the imagined causal link is protection or compensation.”

What then does the secularization paradigm have to do with Lennstrand, and how can his biography be explained through this model? Firstly, in Sweden during the 19th century, the Free Church movement was the most powerful force in contributing to religious pluralism in the country, and P.P. Waldenström's anti-orthodox theology and activism had an enormous effect on Lennstrand's own philosophy and activism.

As it pertains to the spreading of democracy, education and knowledge about science and reason, Lennstrand is a useful model for both cause and effect. He became an atheist thanks to his time at Uppsala University and his contacts with Sweden's freethinkers and cultural radicals (who advocated democratic reform and mass education). Also, the degree to which Lennstrand influenced the process of Sweden's secularization (as shall be shown in the research) was directly related to the degree to which he affected democratization and the spread of science, rationalism and education.

**1.2.1 Biography**

In addition to the secularization paradigm, this paper will be written according to the genre of historical biography. There are many ways to write a scientific biography, and the methodology I will use is described in 1.5; however, it is important here to explain why biography is important.

---

9 Pippa and Inglehart 2011, p. 71 (This sentence is also cited in Bruce on pages 195-196).
10 Bruce 2013, p.196.
Obviously, it is useful to research historical movements, processes and time periods from the standpoint where society is dealt with as a whole and individuals are participants in a larger political, economic or cultural phenomena. However, historical processes are not just abstractions. They are produced by individuals and affect individuals. Therefore, it is also useful to research historical movements, processes and time periods by people who affected them and who were affected by them. Doing this is only possible when there is sufficient source material on the individual. In the case of Lennstrand, there is a copious amount of such material.

In justifying why Lennstrand should be a topic of scholarly research, it is important to point out that he was Sweden's first genuine atheist activist and his life, therefore, was an important milestone in the religious and intellectual history of Sweden. But how did Lennstrand become this person? Did he significantly affect future generations with his activism? The answer lies in the details of his upbringing and his personal friendships and connections, as well as aspects of his mental and physical health.

An analysis of Sweden's religious and intellectual history can partially explain why Lennstrand became Sweden's first atheist activist, and how affective he was in spreading atheism, but only an analysis of the details of his life can give a complete picture.

An important question that arises when dealing with biographies of people such as Lennstrand is the topic of whether an historian who has no psychiatric training is qualified to make judgments on his subject's mental health. Lennstrand's mental illness is an important aspect of this paper, and it is, therefore, important to explain why I feel competent to make some observations about his mental health.

Lennstrand suffered from severe hallucinations, and it is not unreasonable for a layman to make the observation that such a major and obvious disturbance in one's mind is indicative of mental illness. There are not many psychiatric diagnoses that can be made by an historian (especially over a century after his subject's death), but I feel comfortable in asserting that hallucinations are indicative of mental illness, since they are such an extreme and obvious abnormality.

Secondly, Lennstrand's hallucinations were documented by Anton Nyström, one of Sweden's first psychiatrists. These two facts together make it reasonable to say with near-certainty that Lennstrand was suffering from acute mental illness.
In regard to observations about long-term mental illness, I have been careful to not make any definitive conclusion, but rather to suggest the possibility.

1.3 Earlier Research

CJ Björklund's *En fritänkares levnadssaga: Viktor Lennstrand, banbrytare för den fria tanken bland Sveriges folk* (1926) is usually cited as reference literature on Viktor Lennstrand, but the book was written as leftist propaganda and portrays Lennstrand as an heroic figure rather than a topic of scholarly research. The largest scientific work on Lennstrand is a *licentiatuppsats* by Iris Kogeus from 1972, *Viktor Lennstrand och religionsdebatten*. Even though Kogeus' paper is relatively unknown, it is still the most comprehensive and objective work on Lennstrand. I have used Kogeus as reference material. Both she and I write about many of the same aspects of Lennstrand's life and have used much of the same source material. The difference between our two works is that I focus on Lennstrand's role in the long-term secularization process,\(^\text{11}\) while Kogeus deals with Lennstrand's role in the religious debate of the 1880's and 1890's, together with Lennstrand's philosophical connection with the English philosopher John Stuart Mill.

William Öhrmans article “Viktor E. Lennstrand, en anti-Waldenström” which is found in *Kyrkohistorisk årsskrift Sjuttiofjärde årgången 1974* also takes up another theme which I research: the connection between Lennstrand and Waldenström. I have also used this article as reference material.

“Sanningar om Lennstrand: hans ställning till kristendomen och socialdemokratien” (1908)\(^\text{12}\); “Viktor Lennstrands barndom, självutveckling och verksamhet” (1895) by Karl Oscar Ljungdahl; and “Brev från Lennstrand” (1906) by Karl Arvid Hessler are also some good academic works. Hessler's article analyzes letters between Lennstrand and his friend Hjalmar Öhrwall (1851-1929), a physician and cultural radical who was a professor of physiology at Uppsala University.

In addition to this there are also several book which mention Lennstrand, but they are

---

\(^{11}\) Kogeus mentions secularization on page 6, as well as this process being caused by the spread of rationalism, science and mass education, but she doesn't go into the process in depth.

\(^{12}\) The book was written by Frihetsförbundets red. kommitté.
rather sparse in the treatment of his life and philosophy.

One notable exception is *Att älska sin nästa såsom sig själv: om moraliska utopier under 1800-talet* (1995) by Inga Sanner. She writes a good deal about Lennstrand and the freethinkers; however, she does it from the perspective of the history of “moral utopias” which a number of Swedish groups had attempted to establish during the 19th century. She and I also touch upon a number of the same subjects. My take on Lennstrand is more focused on a textual analysis of his writings, his psychological connections to Waldenström, his mental breakdown, and his long-term affect on Swedish secularization.

Regarding the historical background of secularization in Sweden, Richard Tomasson's article, “How Sweden Became so Secular” in the Spring 2002 edition of *Scandinavian Studies* provides a good starting point for research in this area. Tore Frängsmyr's two-part *Svensk idéhistoria* from 2004 is absolutely invaluable for providing information on everything from secularization, the Church of Sweden, the development of religious liberalism, education, and a number of other issues related to the history of ideas and educational establishments.

A number of other books also provide valuable research information on the previous topics, among the most valuable are: *Vita Mössor under Röda Fanor: Vänsterstudenter kulturradikalism och bildningsideal i Sverige* (1991) by Crister Skoglund, *The Swedish Social Democrats: Their Ideological Development 1973* by Herbert Tingsten, and Stefan Gelfgren's *Ett utvalt släkte: Väckelse och sekularisering – evangeliska Fosterlands-Stiftelsen 1856-1910* (2003).

1.4 Limitations

This paper deals mostly with the writings and events in Lennstrand's life which occurred between 1888 and 1891, since this was the most productive part of his life. After he was released from jail, he suffered a great deal from both mental and physical illnesses, and was less active.

I must also admit that the existing letters from Lennstrand are limited to those between himself and Hjalmar Örhwall, as well as some to Anton Nyström. These are the ones that

---

13 Available in both Swedish and English versions. The English version was used for this paper.
1.5 Method and Material

The methodology used to study Lennstrand is largely philological, and, therefore, the presentation in the paper of actual text from Lennstrand is paramount.

Lennstrand left behind a great deal of published articles, brochures, debates and lectures. Most of these were published in the pages of his two newspapers, *Fritänkaren* and *Tänk Sjelf*, or were available for order (during Lennstrand's lifetime) via *Utilistitiska propograndans skrifter*. Some were published by companies such as G. W Wilhelmsson and J.W. Holms.

There are also, as mentioned above, a large collection of letters to Hjalmar Örhwall available at Uppsala University's library, as well as some important ones to Anton Nyström available on-line at [http://www.stockholmskallan.se](http://www.stockholmskallan.se). These two collections are almost the entirety of surviving letters from Lennstrand. No letters kept by Lennstrand could be found, and it is questionable if any still survive.

Lennstrand's published writings are clear, direct and quite reflective of his personal views on religion, and the important individuals in his life; therefore it is easy to do a qualitative analysis of his publications and letters in order to determine his precise philosophical disposition and to what degree important figures in his life affected his thoughts and career.

In regard to analyzing Lennstrand's friendships and mental illness and explaining how they affected his relationships with important individuals, it is his letters to Örhwall and Nyström which are most revealing. However, he writes fairly candidly in his articles about some of these personal battles. Additionally, as mentioned in section 1.2.1, Nyström wrote about Lennstrand's mental illness in his book *Kristendom och den fria tanken*.

Regarding Lennstrand's impact on the long-term secularization of Sweden, the method used to determine his effectiveness will be comparative in that it will look at his success (with success being measured by the criteria of the secularization paradigm) in affecting
political, social and intellectual change compared to that of Waldenström, Nyström and the SAP

1.6 Concepts

For the sake of clarity and precision, there are several terms used in this paper which should be defined. The first is “freethinker”. A freethinker can be a synonym for an atheist, but it is possible to be freethinker and not an atheist. The important and defining characteristic of a freethinker is that a he or she should have science and reason as his or her guiding principles rather than the supernatural.

The next is “cultural radical”. This is a term used specifically in the sense of Scandinavia. It was a movement which existed largely between the 1870's and 1900 and consisted of people who believed in religious freedom, freedom of expression, and an animosity towards the Scandinavian monarchies and the various Scandinavian national churches.

Utilismen and utilist are the last term, and the ones most difficult to define. These terms – as they apply to Lennstrand – are not synonymous with utilitarianism and utilitarian, even if John Stweart Mill and British utilitarianism were a strong influence on Lennstrand. Utilist is a term which refers specifically to a person who belonged to or sympathized with Utilistiska samfundet. A concise definition would be to say that a utilist was a Swedish atheist who was a follower of Viktor Lennstrand between 1888 and 1895, and utilismen or utilism was their philosophy.

While not really synonyms for one another, it is safe to say that anyone who was a member of Utilistiska samfundet could also be described as a freethinker and cultural radical.

2 Historical Background

In order to understand the environment in which Lennstrand lived, it is important to

14 Lennstrand sometimes used the word “utilism” as a substitute for “utilismen”.
first present several key themes in Swedish history which most directly shaped his philosophy and activism.

2.1 Secularization Before Lennstrand

The Enlightenment is generally considered to be a period where anti-Christian attitudes and progressive, secular ideas spread through large sections of the intelligentsia in Europe. No where was this more true than in France. However, while there were a number of important Swedish Enlightenment thinkers, there were none who were as adamantly opposed to religion as Condorcet or who had reached the level of notoriety as Voltaire.\textsuperscript{15}

Ironically, it was perhaps the Church of Sweden itself which played the most important role in the secularization of Sweden prior to the 1850's. This was due mostly to their efforts in spreading literacy. While the aim of the church was to spread knowledge of the bible and Luther's catechism, it also created a nation of literate people who would eventually become open to more liberal, secular ideology via the written word.

And the Swedish clergy itself had become greatly secularized by the beginning of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. It was required by the state that a clergyman receive a university education, and clergymen had about as many – if not more – secular duties (education, for example) as religious ones. In fact, men such as Esias Tegnéř, who had almost no true religious passions, were often promoted to the highest levels of the clergy as a matter of social prestige.\textsuperscript{16}

By the 1840's, there was a counter-reaction to this secularization, and a return to orthodoxy was again becoming in vogue amongst the clergy.\textsuperscript{17} However, this occurred at the same time as the arrival of biblical criticism from Germany, and it was this cultural development which would lead to the next major wave of secularization in Sweden.

Biblical criticism was the scientific examination of the bible and \textit{Das Leben Jesu} (1836) by David Friedrich Strauss was the most influential book within the genre. Strauss

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{15}Johan Henric Kellgren (1751-95) is called Sweden's Voltaire by some 9 (See Frängsmyrs \textit{Svensk Idéhostoia Part I} p.401-403), but he did not have much influence.

\textsuperscript{16} Tomasson 2002: p.77.

\textsuperscript{17} Tomasson 2002: p.77.
\end{flushleft}
denied the divinity of Jesus and considered the miracles described in the New Testament to be symbolic. His book shocked the German academic world and Strauss was expelled from both the universities of Tübingen and Zürich. A translation of Das Leben Jesu was published in Sweden in 1841 where it was met with opposition from both the government and the clergy, but with praise from both religious liberals and those who had a negative view of Christianity.

The most important Swedish publication that criticized traditional interpretations of Christianity during the middle of the 19th century was Viktor Rydberg's Bibelns lära om Kristus (1862).

It was not only Christian dogma and Christian mythology that Rydberg attacked in his book, but also the Church of Sweden's right to be a public voice for morality. Rydberg also wrote a novel which dealt with Christianity – Den siste athenaren (1859). One motif that is found in this book is that there was a synthesis between Christianity and paganism during the 4th century AD. Both the ancient Greek intellectual traditions and the early Christian philosophers were depicted in a positive light. Therefore, Rydberg should not be classified as an anti-Christian or an atheist, but rather a challenger of orthodoxy and the power of organized religion on government.

The first significant anti-Christian writer in Sweden was Anton Nyström (1842-1931). He was a physician who wrote a large body of work within cultural history, comparative religion and human sexuality. He was an atheist and his first work on Christianity predates Lennstrand's. In Jesus och Kristendomen ur Naturvetenskaplig och Historisk Synpunkt (1873) Nyström describes Christianity as a mythological belief system, with moral values that are detrimental to human health and well-being. Many of Nyström's later books on sexuality maintained that Christianity was the cause of mental illness.

In 1879 Nyström founded Positivistiska samfundet. It was an organization devoted to the spread of Auguste Comte's positivist philosophy, as well as religious freedom; however, it was a short-lived organization. Nyström then made another attempt to found a secular society in 1884 with the establishment of Föreningen för religionfrihet. It was not

---

18 Frängsmyr 2004, Part II p.80.
19 Kogeus mentioned G.J Leufstedt and Hjalmar Strömer as predecessors of Lennstrand; however, she is correct in saying that they were too obscure to be considered founders of a significant movement.
devoted to atheism, but like *Positivistiska samfundet* had as its purpose the spreading of religious freedom.\(^{21}\)

Nyström was not the only voice for secularization and atheism. During the 1880's anti-religious themes became all the more popular in Swedish literature.\(^{22}\) August Strindberg is a good example of an atheist author who wrote during this period.

It was also during the 1880's that the newly-established SAP introduced atheism as a political ideology. Anticlerical feelings and an animosity towards religion were indicative of the SAP during their first years. Even though a sharp criticism of religion and anti-Christian rhetoric was absent from their official program, one could read anti-Christian articles in socialist newspapers and hear anti-Christian lectures from important leaders of the SAP such as Hjalmar Branting, Axel Danielsson and August Palm.\(^{23}\)

In 1890 it had finally become possible for someone in Sweden to be an atheist and be a member of a political party which had atheism as it's goal, read atheist publications and listen to public lectures on atheism.

Lennstrand was certainly a part of creating this milieu, and was most certainly the most vociferous person expressing anti-Christian ideology; however, he had predecessors who began to establish the groundwork for his career, and he was surpassed – even in his own time – in literary output and practical accomplishments by his friend Anton Nyström, whom he was greatly influenced by and whom he admired. Yet no one was as passionate, as public and as purely devoted to the cause of spreading atheism as Lennstrand.

### 2.2 Uppsala During the 1880's

Lennstrand's arrival in Uppsala was perhaps the most important event of his life. It is here that he was exposed to freethought, cultural radicalism, Social Democracy and met the most prominent leaders in these movements. He also became a member of *Föreningen Verdandi*.

*Föreningen Verdandi* was the most important student organization in Uppsala dedicated to cultural radicalism. It was founded in 1882 as a reaction to Klas Pontus Arnoldssons

---

\(^{21}\) Ahlström 2007: p.11.

\(^{22}\) Tingsten 1973: p. 587.

\(^{23}\) Tingsten 1973: p. 588-592.
proposal in the Riksdag to revise Sweden's law of dissent. Arnoldsson wanted to abolish the law's requirement that anyone who leaves the Church of Sweden must join another Christian organization.  

Even if Arnoldsson failed with his proposal, the attempt caused Karl Staaff, Hjalmar Branting and Knut Wicksell to found an organization "hvilka omfatta tanke- och yttrandefrihetens grundsatser samt hysa intresse för allmän mänskliga och samhälleliga frågor."  

Between 1888 and 1954 Föreningen Verdandi published 531 articles. Some of the titles from the first two years were Om människans ursprung av Gottfrid Aldertz (1888); Voltaire och hans strid mot fördomarna i religion och samhälle av Hellen Lindgren (1889); Från människosläktets barndom av Ellen Key; och Om tanke- och yttrandefrihet av John Stuart Mill (which was translated by Hjalmar Öhrwall in 1889).  

Prominent freethinkers traveled to Uppsala in order to take part in Verdandi's activities. One of these was Hinke Berggren. Berggren's visit to Uppsala in 1887 caused a great deal of commotion and indignation from the university's faculty and administration. Verdandi's committee received a warning from rector Carl Yngve Sahlin, and several students were punished with a withdrawal of their student stipends.  

Members of Verdandi became prominent leaders in the Swedish worker's movement and the anti-Christian feelings which flourished there were eventually disseminated amongst the working classes from 1888 onwards thanks in large part to articles written by Karl Staaff.  

### 2.3 Education  

Aside from Straaf, other cultural radicals both from within and outside of Verdandi considered adult education in science and history as a means of spreading secularization. It was usual for socialist newspapers to publish articles championing anti-religious ideology. Bengt Lidforss (an atheist and biologist from Lund), for example, wrote a large
number of articles on science in *Arbetet*. His goal was to bring science to the masses.\textsuperscript{30}

In 1912 Carl Olsson (who eventually became a socialist member of the *Riksdag*) founded *Arbetarnas bildningsförbud*, a study circle for workers where education in popular science was very important.\textsuperscript{31}

However, it was through the schools that cultural radicals and social democrats were most successful in spreading anti-Christian ideology among a large number of workers. In 1880, Anton Nyström founded *Stockholms Arbetarinstitut*. This school would eventually become a model for the mass education of workers. Besides mathematics, astronomy, geography, physics, chemistry and the Swedish language and political science, cultural history was also a subject which was taught by the school's staff. The textbook that was used for this was Nyström's own *Allmän Kulturhistoria*,\textsuperscript{32} a massive book which consisted of three volumes that dealt with the old and New Testaments according to Nyström's own anti-Christian interpretation. (Lennstrand wrote a glowing review of this book in *Fritänkare.* ) Nyström was clear that he wanted to use workers' education in order to spread secularization.

During the 1880's worker's institutes were established in ten cities throughout Sweden.\textsuperscript{33} The new schools would become an important vehicle of disseminating a picture of Christianity to large numbers of adult students that was entirely different from the one given by the church and official state schools.

Yet even as freethinkers were successful in spreading secular ideas to adults, the SAP was far more successful in influencing the secularization of Sweden by affecting changes in educating children and teenagers.

Government education in elementary and secondary schools traditionally had a strong religious element to it and it was one of the SAP's earliest goals to separate the Church of Sweden from education.\textsuperscript{34}

The first important step towards the secularization of the *läroverk* was taken by liberal politicians between 1899 and 1906. During this period, the bishops lost nearly all influence on the *läroverk* and religious education in the schools became more liberalized.

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{30} Jonsson 1987, p.133.
\textsuperscript{31} Kärnfelt 2000, p.242.
\textsuperscript{32} Frängsmyr 2004, Part II, p. 139.
\textsuperscript{33} Frängsmyr 2004, p.139.
\textsuperscript{34} Rosenberg 1948, p.210-211.
\end{flushleft}
In 1919 Nils Edén’s government abolished Martin Luther's catechism from the elementary school educational curriculum. However, it was under the SAP's various governments after 1920 that secularization of the school system grew most quickly. Religious education became completely non-sectarian in 1950. One year later, total religious freedom was promulgated, and the requirement that anyone leaving the Church of Sweden join another religious organization was eliminated. In 1958 the Church of Sweden lost its right to be responsible for religious education in the schools.\textsuperscript{35} These gradual developments which occurred throughout the early and middle twentieth century reflected the SAP's goals of bringing about a secular welfare state built up of educated workers.\textsuperscript{36}

\textbf{2.4 Prosecutions for Blasphemy}

Lennstrand's periods of imprisonment were pivotal moments in his life, and the consequences of what happened to him there greatly affected his activism. During the 1880's and 1890's the conservative government saw the growth of cultural radicalism as a threat and used prosecutions against blasphemy as weapons for punishing prominent figures within the various cultural radical organizations. The government, therefore, promulgated the following laws in order to strengthen the previously existing laws against religion:

\begin{enumerate}
\item Hwar som hädar Gud, eller lastar eller gäckar Guds heliga ord eller sakramenten dömes till straffarbete i högst två år. Sker det af obetänksamhet eller lättsinnighet; vare straffet fängelse i högst sex månader eller böter
\item Gör man gäckeri af gudstjensten; straffes med böter eller fängelse I högst sex månader.\textsuperscript{37}
\end{enumerate}

\textsuperscript{35} Tomasson 2002, p.71.
\textsuperscript{36} Frängsymr 2004, part II, p.300-302.
\textsuperscript{37} Sveriges Strafflag 1864 \url{http://wisberg.se/wisberg.se/pdf/strafflagen1864.pdf}
The SAP was the primary target of the government. Several articles that were published by four social democratic newspapers (Social-Demokraten, Arbetet, Folkets Röst and Proletären) were the basis for fourteen prosecutions against prominent leaders of the SAP. The government received in total eleven and a half successful prosecutions, nine of which resulted in prison. Among those who were imprisoned were Axel Danielsson (eighteen months), Hjalmar Branting (three months) and Pehr Eriksson (one year).

Lennstrand's case was one of the most famous examples of imprisonment for blasphemy in Sweden during the late 19th century. Yet, as shown above, he was not singled out by the government as a special threat, but rather as a group of people who posed a threat.

2.5 Free Churches and Paul Petter Waldenström

The arrival of Pietism from Germany presented the first challenge to the spiritual monopoly of the Church of Sweden. And during the 19th century, baptists, methodists and other protestant denominations gradually began seeping in to Sweden from England, Scotland and the United States. Their members became all the more influential and vociferous during the first half of the century, and in 1860 the Riksdag passed the “law of dissent”\(^{38}\), which gave (with limitations) free churches the right to exist in Sweden. While this certainly did not immediately open the door to wide-spread religious descent, it was the first, major legal step towards complete freedom of religion.

The competition from other churches, therefore, introduced a degree of religious pluralism (one of the criteria for secularization according to the “secularization paradigm”) which had never before existed in Sweden, and caused real political changes to the country.

The free churches were an important element for the development of democracy in Sweden. Firstly, women played an essential role in these new churches, and in the meetings many members took on what the historian Tore Frängsmyr calls “den

\(^{38}\) See 2.3.
demokratiska styrelsentekniken.” In other words, people who were not clergymen would learn how to lead meetings, take transcripts at meetings and participate in discussions. All useful activities for people wishing to become politically active. And large number of people from the free church did become very politically active.\(^\text{39}\)

In order to fight against the Free Church movement, the Church of Sweden founded Evangeliska Fosterlandsstiftelsen (EFS) in 1856. EFS gave evangelically-minded Swedes the alternative to a free church that existed within the control of the Church of Sweden. One the EFS' most well-known priests was Paul Petter Waldenström (1838-1917).

Waldenström was born in Luleå and educated at Uppsala university where he received his PhD in 1863. He worked as a priest for the EFS, and in 1875 moved to Gävle. He became employed by the school board there where he taught theology, Greek and Hebrew.\(^\text{40}\) Viktor Lennstrand was one of his most noted pupils.

Two years after arriving in Gävle, Waldenström held an unlawful nattvardsgudstjänst in Uppsala's mission house. It was met with a stark reaction from archbishop Niklas Sundberg, and Waldenstöm was subsequently prosecuted for his crime.\(^\text{41}\) He left the EFS and founded his own free church, Svenska missionsförbundet, in 1878.

Textual analysis was a central theme in Waldenström's theology. He was famous for his translation of the New Testament into Swedish. An important phrase which is attributed to him is “var står det skrivet”. For Waldenström, the bible's text was the highest authority when it came to religious interpretation.\(^\text{42}\) Despite this, it is ironic that he was also a biblical critic. Waldenström maintained that the parts of the bible that were not written by the apostles did not have the same authority as the gospels.

Waldenström also had a successful secular carrier as a politician. He became a member of the Riksdag between 1885 and 1905, and gave support to many liberal reforms, including separation of church and state and universal suffrage.\(^\text{43}\)

### 3 Research

40 Svenskt biografiskt handlexikon 1906, p.681.
41 Bexell 2003, Part VII, p.299-301.
3.1 Childhood

Viktor Emmanuel Lennstrand was born at his parents' home on Norra Kungsgatan on January 30, 1861. His father was named Claes Johan Lennstrand (1833-10-25) and his mother was Eva Larsdotter (1828-05-28). Claes and Eva also had another son Karl Axel Gabriel (1866-11-11) and two daughters Eva Maria (1864-11-10) and Eter Elisabeth (1872-03-06). During a period of 16 years, the family suffered several tragedies. Eter Elisabeth died as a child on 23 December 1872 and Eva died five years later. Eva Maria committed suicide on June 23, 1888.

Claes Lennstrand was a carpenter who came originally from Kjula. His background was typical for Gävle during this time period. Between 1865 and 1890 the city's population grew from about 12,000 inhabitants to circa 24,000. A large portion of these were entrepreneurs and craftsmen who were born in other parts of Sweden and immigrated to Gävle in order to find employment. Just like the Lennstrand family, about one half of these men belonged to Gävles missionsförbund. Gävle was, in fact, a central location within the Free Church movement. By 1880 the city had more members in a free church (circa 1,400) than any other locality in Sweden. Petter Paul Waldenström had become the city's most important religious leader and a prominent educator.

Viktor had a warm and close relationship with his family, especially his mother. According to Oskar Ljungdahl (who knew Lennstrand) Eva played an important roll in her son's upbringing.

She and Viktor were very pious and the mother's wish for her son's future was that he would become a missionary in Africa.

---

44 Björklund 1926, p.12.
45 Eva was Claes Johans first wife. He had two other marriages. The second was to Maria Lovisa Wickaman in 1882 and Emma Charlotte Sundberg in 1887.
46 Gävle Heliga Trefaldighet, Svenska kyrkans arkiv.
47 Gävle Heliga Trefaldighet, Svenska kyrkans arkiv.
48 Åberg, 1975, p.4.
49 Åberg 1975, p.127-128.
50 Åberg 1975, p.35.
51 Ljungdahl 1895, p.4.
52 Björklund 1926, p.12.
53 Ljungdal 1895, p.7.
Lennstrand was an outstanding pupil in Waldenström's eyes. Regarding Lennstrand's childhood, Waldenström wrote the following about him in his Minnestekningar:


It seems from this description that Waldenström was more than simply Lennstrand's teacher, but was, in fact, his childhood mentor.

However, in his teenage years, a chasm began to form between the two. In 1881 (after the students had taken their final exam) Lennstrand, one of his teachers, and a number of classmates held a party in which Waldenström was not invited. Waldenström wrote about this slight: "Jag talade med honom och frågade, huru han kunde gå ut med kamraterne på ett sådant sätt. Han svarade, att han fann inte något orätt därin." 55

It seems that this episode particularly hurt Waldnerström since he felt alienated from the other teachers, as well as his own students:

“Flera lärare voro ju också med, och ibland dem även lektor

54 Waldenström, p.313.
55 Waldenström 1923, p. 313.
Ödman. Då frågade jag honom: 'Varför bjöd ni icke mig, när nu bjöd de andra lärarna?' Då teg han. Jag sade, 'Säg mig uppriktigt, var det icke därför, att ni förstod och kände på eder själva, att det icke passade mig att vara med i ett sådant sällskap?' 'Jo', sade han. Och därmed skildes vi åt.”

It is therefore possible that a serious personal chasm developed between Lennstrand and Waldenström before Viktor's arrived at Uppsala. Even if the chasm was not based on differences in theology, there was at least a hint of some sort of animosity.

3.2 First Years as a Student

Lennstrand began his days as a student at Uppsala University on September 27th, 1881. He was an important member in Gästrike-Helsinge nation and partook in the Christian student movement there. He was one of the students who founded Sveriges ungdom, a newspaper devoted to “religion, naturkunskap, magi och trollkonster.”

Viktor's first published literary productions were Gyllene ord: Steneser och maimer till själen och sinnets förädling (1883), Rosor och törnen i kärleken och äktenskapet: Tankar och reflexioner af öfver 300 in- och utländska författare (1884), Från min egen verld: Aforismer och dagboksanteckningar (1884), Familj-Album: En anteckningsbok för hemmet (1884) and Evighetstankar för kristlig andakt (1885).

Från min egen verld is a book somewhat akin to Marcus Aurelius' Meditations. It is very useful since it describes in detail Lennstrand's beliefs before he became an atheist. Lennstrand's belief that the Bible could be a source for social and moral progress provides a sharp contrast to his later philosophy:

“Det är med bibeln som med ett bokstafsspel. Liksom man af bokstafsspelets ord kan få otaliga meningar, så kan man ock af bibelns

56 Waldenström 1923, p. 313.
57 Björklund 1926: p. 15.
språk få oändligt många lärosystem...En ny tid med nya tankar och nya åskådningar vill hafta och behöfver nya former och nya system. Det är visserligen sant, att orden bibelspråken, maximerna äro desamma, men en ny tid sätter dem i ett nytt sammanhang och fordrar deras tillämpning i nya förhållanden.”

Yet even here it can be seen that Lennstrand is not an adherent to strict orthodoxy, He is open to applying biblical passages in new ways, suitable for new times.

**3.3 Conversion and First Days as an Atheist**

1887 was a year of great change for Lennstrand. It was in this year that he became both an atheist and an anti-Christian activist. He had been in contact with a number of freethinkers (Anton Nyström, Hjalmar Branting, Hjalmar Öhrwall and Knut Wicksell) and took part in *Verdandi* debates several months before he actually became a part of the organization.\(^{59}\) He wrote about these days to Hjalmar Öhrwall:

“När man som jag, från den mest inskränkta pietisem också från varma illusoriska förhoppningar, delade av hjärtevänner, med vilka man tyckt sig vara sammanvuxen, ensam sökt leta sig fram till en friare och sannare livsåskådning och för varje steg på vägen förlorat en vän och blivit ännu mera ensamt vet man att sätta värde på ett sådant deltagande som det Ni visat mig.”\(^{60}\)

Lennstrand found not only a new way of thinking, but also a new set of friends and acquaintances.

While there is no evidence of a single work or moment which transformed Lennstrand, Anton Nyström claimed that it was after reading Channing’s\(^{61}\) writings that Lennstrand

---

60 Letter from Lennstrand to Öhrwall 19.6.1887.
61 Nyström only uses the last name “Channing” when discussing Lennstrand's conversion, but he almost certainly was referring to the Unitarian preacher William Ellery Channing (1780-1842).
began to have doubts about his faith.\textsuperscript{62} It was also Öhrwall's introduction to John Stuart Mill's writings that were among the most important pieces of literature responsible for Lennstrands's conversion.\textsuperscript{63} And it was Mill's utilitarian philosophy that was the etymological origin of “utilismen.”

It was almost certainly not just literature which was responsible for Lennstrands's conversion, but also the new group of friends which he found himself among at Verdandi. Lennstrands's first letter to Öhrwall was addressed to Dr. Hjalmar Öhrwall, but by the second, Öhrwall was addressed as “broder”, reflecting the rapidity of the close friendship that they developed with one another.

Lennstrands's carrier as an agitator began on September 25, 1887 when he gave a lecture entitled ”Är kristendomen en religion för vår tid.” Uppsala's police chief, Nils Edvard Raab, had previously forbidden Lennstrand from holding any lecture that was hostile towards religion, but Lennstrand defiantly went ahead with his plans.

Raab wanted to arrest Lennstrand, but stadsfiskalen Kingberg was more lenient towards the young student's crime, and overrode the decision of his subordinate. However, both Raab and the university administration continued on with their persecution, and Lennstrand was forced to leave the university.\textsuperscript{64}

He eventually moved to Stockholm, but he found life there to be very hard. He also had problems with his family. Claes and Axel had sent money during Viktor's last year at Uppsala, but the financial support had now ended.\textsuperscript{65}

However, despite this, Lennstrand continued on with his activism. On January 10, 1888 he wrote to Anton Nyström about his wish to found an anti-Christian organization:

\begin{quote}
“Jag vill, den korta tid jag lefver, göra hvad jag kan för att befria vårt folk från kristendomens vidskepelse, myter och gudar och få folkets religiösa behof tillfredstäldt på ett bättre sätt än f. n. sker. Jag vet ej, om menniskan kan lefva utan religion – det synes mig vara en subjektiv fråga – några kunna det, men det är ju mestadels sådana, som ej äro fattade
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{62} Nyström 1890, 466.
\textsuperscript{63} Kogeus 1972: p.61.
\textsuperscript{64} Kogeus 1972: p.32-33.
\textsuperscript{65} Kogeus 1972: p.45-46.
Lennstrand's concept of a new religion did not have any supernatural element. It was only a replacement for traditional Christian beliefs and his use of the word “religion” in this context should be seen as a synonym for philosophy or what in the twenty-first century would be termed “spirituality”.

The enemy which he was fighting was, at least at first, Christianity and the Church of Sweden. And in order to achieve this goal he needed to establish some sort of substitute which would fill the hole left by the abandonment of Sweden's traditional religion, or the Free Church alternatives:


Lennstrand preliminary thoughts of founding a “religion” based on reason is reminiscent of the mentality that was present after the French Revolution when Notre Dame was turned into a “Temple of Reason.”

Yet it is important here to note that these were Lennstrand's preliminary thoughts on what he could do to combat Christianity. He was certainly not a

66 Letter from Lennstrand to Anton Nyström 10.1.88 http://www.stockholmskallan.se/Soksida/Post/?nid=25688
67 Letter from Lennstrand to Anton Nyström 10.1.88 http://www.stockholmskallan.se/Soksida/Post/?nid=25688
Deist, and made no attempts in his public writings to hide the fact that he was spreading atheism.

3.4 Anti-Christian Writings and Lectures

Lennstrand's primary means of spreading atheism was via lectures and publications. The rhetorical tools he used can be divided up into four major themes: biblical criticism, biblical immorality, historical analysis and anti-clericalism.

3.4.1 Biblical Criticism

Biblical criticism was the most important of these. It was crucial for Lennstrand to try and convince people that the Bible was neither divinely inspired nor true. He used two methods of criticism.

The first was to point out contradictions. Lennstrand used this type of criticism often and his lengthiest publication in this genre was Motsägelse i bibeln (1893). The book consists of a large number of citations from the Bible listed side by side which contradict one another. The following is one example:

Är gud barnhertig?

*Herren är kärleksrik och*  
*barmhertig*  
*Och jag skall slå sönder*  
*dem, den ena mot de andra*

The second type of biblical criticism was based on attempts to try and demonstrate that the Bible was mythological in nature. In his lecture entitled *Gud* (1889) Lennstrand gives details on how Christianity developed as a reflection of man's inner self:

“De kristne neka, att gud har en historia. De säga, att han i dag är densamme, som han varit för millioner år sedan, och
att han i evighet förblir densamme – oföränderlig och höjd öfver tidens vexlingar och skiften.

Och dock har äfven gud en historia. Äfven han föddes en gång – äfven han är underkastad utvecklingens lagar. Det är i dag en helt annan gud, som menniskorna bedja till och i andakt sträcka sina händer mot, än den gud, som menniskorna bådo till och trodde på i forna tider..”

According to Lennstrand, God was a cultural construction that had a history which could be studied and analyzed. The origin of the “God concept” was largely based on the fear of primitive people of their surroundings.

Lennstrand often wrote the name Jehova, presumably in order to point out that the Christian god had the same origin as Zeus and Thor, two deities which Swedes already accepted as mythological. The use of the name Jehova was, therefore, an attempt to desanctify him, and delegitimize Christianity and the Church of Sweden.

This type of biblical criticism had been common among freethinkers, atheists and other critics of Christianity since the Enlightenment. In Sweden, Anton Nyström dedicated an enormous amount of literature to the cultural history of religion, and to the mythological bases of Christian beliefs and dogmas. He began his work before Lennstrand, and produced a vast scholarly literature on the subject during his lifetime.

There was nothing original in the substance of Lennstrand's rhetoric, yet the colorful and passionate way in which it was presented was something that no other public figure had previously attempted so vociferously and so publicly. It was aimed at the heart as much as it was aimed at the mind.

3.4.2 Biblical Immorality

---

68 Lennstrand 1890: Gud, p.2.
69 Lennstrand 1890: Gud, p.2.
70 Lennstrand 1890: Gud, p.4.
That the Bible was fictitious was only the first stage in Lennstrand's attempt to convince Swedes to abandon Christianity. There were those (for example Viktor Rydberg) who thought that the bible – even though it was not inspired by a supernatural being – was a good source for morality. Lennstrand attacked this position and wanted to prove that the stories that were found in the bible were not only false, but irrational, harmful, and a bad source for secular morality and laws. This goes beyond simple biblical criticism. It is an attempt to refute anyone who would think of the bible as a work of literature which contained useful and wise commentary on human morality.

Lennstrand often posed rhetorical questions as a literary device in order to argue against the perceived superiority of biblical morality:


The aim of this type of criticism was to point out the barbarity of the stories of the Old Testament. Jehova was a blood-thirsty misanthrope asking his children to obey bizarre and cruel rules. Reason was, therefore, a better guide for laws and morality.

While discussing the nature of the immorality of the Old Testament was a genre onto itself, it is easy to see how it worked well in reinforcing Lennstrand's biblical criticism and the attempt to convince people that these morals were, in fact, nothing more than man-made superstitions.

As it applied to Jesus and the New testament, Lennstrand was unrelenting in his criticism. In 1890 he wrote Är du en kristen. The book consisted of a list of sentences

---

71 Lennstrand 1890: *Socialism och utilism*, p.15.
72 Lennstrand 1890: *Hvorför uppträder jag mot kristendomen*, p.11.
which began with the phrase, “En kristen måste tro...” which were then followed by a
certain dogma or belief. The following is a typical example: “En kristen måste tro, att
oblaterna äro Jesu kött och vinet Jesu blod”.

There were non-Christians who believed that while the Old Testament contained
abominable stories and morals, that the life of Jesus presented a positive development in
the development of human morality. Lennstrand was, however, adamant in not portraying
Jesus as a moral leader worthy of emulation by secular people.

Lennstrnad's criticism of the morality of Christianity was not original. In fact, it was
Anton Nyström who again wrote far more voluminously on the subject of the detrimental
effects of Christianity on morality. But, while Nyström took a far more intellectual and
detailed approach, Lennstrand's critique was polemical in nature.

3.4.3 History Writing

“Jag har med historiska exempel visat, att religionen är
farlig nog i folkens politiska och sociala lif och att det här ej
är fråga om en liten detalj endast utan om en ny
verldsåskådning med vigtiga praktiska konsekvenser.”

Branting, Nyström and others used history writing as a propaganda tool to argue
against Christianity. Lennstand often made use of historical analysis in his speeches and
lectures in order to point out Christianity's negative influence on the course of European
history.

He was a francophile, and often wrote about examples from French history in order to
make his points. (France was the first nation in Europe to develop a modern, anti-
Christian movement during the Enlightenment, so Lennstrand's affinity for the country is
easily explained.)

It is not surprising then that he drew from French history a belief that it was the spread
of atheism which caused positive social change. According to Lennstrnad, the French
Revolution occurred in part because between 1758 and 1775 there were a number of

73 Lennstrand 1890: År du en kristen, p.3.
74 Lennstrand 1890: Utilism och socialism, p. 15.
prominent atheist thinkers (Condorcet, D'Alembert, Diderot, Helvetius, Laplace and Mirabeau) who spread Enlightenment thinking among the French.\textsuperscript{75} It was Christianity's downfall just before the Revolution which cleared the path to social change.\textsuperscript{76}

Just as Lennstrand credited the French revolution to the spread of atheist ideas, he attributed the downfall of Spain during the 17\textsuperscript{th} and 18\textsuperscript{th} centuries to the growth in power of the priesthood.\textsuperscript{77}

In regard to Sweden, Gustav Vasa was a notorious figure since it was he, according to Lennstrand, who created the union between the Swedish state and a national church.\textsuperscript{78}

Unlike Nyström, however, Lennstrand did not produce any important works of anti-Christian historical analysis. It was simply something which colored his writing and gave it some intellectual bulk. While using history as an example of the negative impacts of Christianity was an important element in his writing, it was not thoroughly developed enough to be of any scholarly importance or educational use.

3.4.4 Anti-Clericalism

While Lennstrand did at times have nice things to say about the more polite and open-minded members of the clergy, as a general rule, he was viciously and passionately anti-clerical in his writings and speeches. While the theme of anti-clericalism, as seen above when discussing Spanish history, often tied in with historical analysis, Lennstrand credited modern Swedish ills to the clergy, as well. He pointed out the hypocrisy of clergymen and their theology, bemoaned their salaries and what they cost the Swedish tax payers, and condemned them for being part of the oppressive ruling class. And there was one clergymen to whom he was particularly critical – his old mentor, Waldenström.

3.5 Lennstrand and Waldenström

\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Utilism och Socialism}: p.8.
\textsuperscript{76} \textit{Utilism och Socialism}: p.7.
\textsuperscript{77} \textit{Utilism och Socialism}: p.8.
\textsuperscript{78} \textit{Fritänkare} August 1, 1889.
While the substance of Lennstrand's anti-Christian writings and speeches were definitely inspired by freethought, there was a very clear aspect of both Lennstrand's writing and activism which had its roots in the Free Church movement, most especially in the writings and activism of P.P. Waldenström.

On the first of June 1891, Lennstrand wrote an article in *Fritänkare* with the title "Lektor Waldenström förnekar Bibeln". In this article, Lennstrand was reviewing Waldenström's book *Gud är min tröst*. The article was ostensibly written as a letter to Waldenström. It consists of three citations written by Waldenström placed side by side with citations from the bible in order to illustrate that Waldenström's writings are contradictory to biblical texts. He finished the article with the following citation:


One of the most important things to take from the above paragraph is Lennstrand's admission that it was Waldenström's own biblical criticism that was a model for Lennstrand's anti-Christian writings. It was a point that he would repeat more than once.

At a lecture held in Gävle on the 13th of March 1892, Lennstrand gave an even bitterer critique of both Waldenström and *Gud är min tröst*. The transcript for this lecture was published by *Fritänkaren* on the 15th June in the same year. The following paragraph is one of the most telling excerpts:

79 *Fritänkaren*, June 1, 1891: p.89.
När man läser igenom detta senaste alster af lektor Waldenström's penna, känner man sig gång på gång ha anledning fråga om ej författaren dog 1700 år sedan.  

There are a number of other personal attacks on Waldenström. The fact that Lennstrand was giving this lecture in the town in which he grew up and the place in which Waldenström resided, probably meant that much of this speech was aimed at an audience who knew Waldenström personally, and had elected him to the Riksdag. The attacks on his Waldenström's character and intelligence in this instance were probably a tool used by Lennstrand to bring Waldenström down from the pedestal in which many in Gävle had put him on.

Regarding Waldenström's biblical criticism, Lennstrand again recites passages from Waldenström's books, and then cites biblical passages which directly contradict him. This would make Waldenström's look especially foolish in the eyes of the audience since the basis of his theology was the sanctity of biblical texts.

Lennstrand criticized Waldenström a great many times in the pages of Fritänkare. While Waldenström was an important religious leader in Sweden, the personal animosity Lennstrand had towards his former teacher makes his writings about him seem far more personal than intellectual.

Even so, it was Waldenström and the Free Church movement's political and social success that presented a model for Lennstrand's own activism, and it was a model which Lennstrand himself acknowledged several times.

He wrote to Hjalmar Öhrwall on March 19th, 1888 about this very fact:


---

80 Fritänkaren: June 15, 1892 p. 89.
And it is not only in private that Lennstrand admitted this. In his public lecture at Moseback, he credits Methodism as a means of spreading religious descent in societies dominated by a state church.

Waldenström's biblical criticism was Lennstrand's first introduction to viewing Christianity outside of the one portrayed by the majority of Swedes. He learned from Waldenström to use biblical language to criticize religious authority. While both men aimed their criticism at the church of Sweden, Lennstrand would eventually turn his criticism towards religion itself and to his old teacher.

Waldenström's practical success (as well as those of free churches in general) at attracting a large number of followers and in influencing political life was also an inspiration to Lennstrand.

It may seem ironic that both men were charged with blasphemy at one point in their lives, but Waldenström's defiance of the Church of Sweden very well could have been a model for a later act of defiance by his student.

3.6 Utilistiska samfundet, Fritänkaren and Tänk Sjelf

In order to spread his philosophy and to focus on his activism, Lennstrand founded Utilistiska samfundet on April 1, 1888. There were originally 71 members, but by 1891, it had grown to approximately 8000. The organization had two newspapers: Fritänkaren (1889-1894) and Tänk Sjelf (1890-1894). Both of these newspapers were published by G. Walfrid Wilhelmsson's boktryckeri and cost 10 öre per issue.

Fritänkaren was first published on June 1, 1889, and functioned as a virtual meeting place for atheists and others who wanted to express their negative thoughts on

---

81 Letter from Lennstrand to Öhrwall March 19, 1888.
Christianity and the state church. The newspaper consisted partly of articles authored by Lennstrand, as well as other free thinkers. Besides articles there were also letters to the editor, translations of writings from other languages, poems, songs, advertisements, notices, and transcripts from debates.

Some of the authors and letters to the editor were written under pseudonyms, or only with the author's first name. This is almost certainly indicative of the stigma attached to holding atheist or anti-Christian attitudes in Sweden.

Lennstrand and Alfred Lindkvist were the editors of the newspaper, but Knut Wicksell took over Lennstrand's place while he was in jail.

Letters to the paper did not only come in from Sweden, but from other parts of the world, as well, including Swedish emigrants residing in America.

Notices and announcements that were found in *Fritänkaren* were often advertisements for printed versions of Lennstrand's lectures, as well as those from other like-minded authors. One could see, for example, advertisements for Lennstrands *Hvad jag sagt och hvad jag ick sagt* which could be bought for 50 öre or *Finns det ett lif efter detta* for 25 öre. These were could be purchased from *Utilitiska propagandans expedition* at Jakobsgatan 28 in Stockholm.

On the first page of *Fritänkaren* on October 1, 1891 there was an advertisement for another newspaper which was titled *Tänk Sjelf*. It more or less had the same format as the first paper.

There is no precise data on the readership of either paper, but neither were widely-read. 83

### 3.7 What is a Utilist? Social and Political Reforms

Lennstrand was not just an intellectual. He had clear and specific political goals. In his pamphlet *Vad vi Tro och Vad Vi Vilja* (1888) Lennstrand compiled a list of protests against the government and Church of Sweden. Some of the more important ones were as follows:

---

Vi protestera mot att 12 millioner kronor årligen skall tagas ur folkets fickor för underhållandet af ett okunnigt presterskap, som står i afgjord och öppen kamp mot upplysning, sanning och menniskornas lycka i detta lifvet. Vi protestera på det allra bestämdaste mot att luteranernas skola gynnas af staten på bekostnad af alla andra samfund. Och det är hög grad orättvist, att vi fritänkare skola aflöna och underhålla luteranernas prester. Det är lika orättvist, som om vi skulle tvinga de kristna luteranerna att aflöna och underhålla våra anti-kristliga talare. 84

The four pages of this pamphlet are reminiscent of Martin Luther's 95 theses. It is clear from reading Vad vi tror and Lennstrand's other writings that his most important political goal was to separate the church from the state.

On the 1st of July, 1890 Lennstrand addressed the question of possible representation in the Riksdag. He acknowledged that Sweden lacked any political parties which gave support to his goals, and that one was very much needed. These goals were listed in detail on July 15th, 1890. The following are among the most important:

1. Fullständig religionsfrihet fullständigt särskiljande af kyrka och stat.

2. lagstadgdad normalarbetsdag om tio timmar, som efter hand sänkes till åtta; en för alla yrken och näringar genomförd arbetareskyddlagstiftning; afskaffande af sådant

84 Lennstrand 1888, s. 4.
söndags- och nattarbete, som icke är för samhället nödvändig; förbud för anställning i arbete af barnföderskor under tiden närmast före och efter nedkomsten; lagstadgade arbetarkamrar till afgörande af tvister mellan arbetare och arbetsgifvare...

As can be seen, Lennstrand more or less had the same political goals as the SAP. And aside from his fervent devotion to atheism, there is very little to separate his political wishes for Swedish society from those of the SAP. However, he did not wish to be represented by the SAP because of both personal animosity towards its leaders and because of its soft stance towards the promotion of atheism. He therefore went on to call for the establishment of a demokratiska valpartier that would represent himself, his followers, and other like-minded people.

Lennstrand made several other calls for the establishment of a political party which he hoped would come about with the growth of a fritänakrrörelse. However, no such party was ever founded. Lennstrand was more of a rhetorician than an actual political leader. This is not because he did not see real political organization and activism as important, but more likely because he lacked the time, energy, resources and a critical mass of people to put together an effective political movement.

3.8 Education and Science

Lennstrand believed that science and education were important (he wrote, for example, that his struggle against religion was “en strid för vetenskapen”), and he certainly did credit scientists and scientific discoveries in his articles and speeches. In fact the purpose of a freethinker's movement for Lennstrand was to “sprida kunskap och vetande och befira vårt folk från okunnighet och vantro.”

The fact that education was so heavily influenced by the church was of enormous

86 See 3.14.
89 Utilism och socialism 1890: p.5.
concern to Lennstrand, and it was certainly a goal of his to eradicate this influence, and establish secular education. *Utilistiska samfundet* did have a Sunday school for children that was advertised in *Fritänkare* but it had only about 60 children in 1890, and the school did not last.

Considering the fact that the number of freethinkers and utilists in Sweden numbered at least several thousand, it is a wonder that Lennstrand's school did not have more pupils. It is interesting that one of the first teacher's of this school was Nyström's own daughter, and that the physical location of the school was in Nyström's house. Perhaps Lennstrand may have attracted more students had he himself been the teacher.

Lennstrand, therefore, failed to create a lasting means in which to educate future generations of atheists.

### 3.9 Prosecution

Åtala mig igen, döm mig skyldig och fängsla mig åter, och sedan jag tillbringat fem, tio, tjugo år i fängelse, skall det första ord jag uttalar, då jag åter blir fri, vara: den guden finns ej till och har aldrig funnits till. Han är död. Han är inbillning blott!

Lennstrand was forbidden many times from holding lectures in Uppsala, Helsingborg, Malmö, Lund, Norrköping, Linköping, Eskilstuna and Stockholm. And it was his lectures which caused him the most trouble with the authorities.

The first time Lennstrand was prosecuted for blasphemy was after a lecture in Örebro in May of 1888. A jury freed him for blasphemy, but fined him 250 kronor for the denial of the existence of God. Lennstrand appealed the decision, but *Svea Hovrätt* gave him a 3-month prison sentence. Lennstrand was in prison in Malmö from the 30th of November 1888 until March 1, 1889.

---

90 *Fritänkaren* September 1, 1890: p. 132.
91 Letter from Lennstrand to Öhrwall 18.4.1888.
94 *Fritänkaren* August 1889: p.3.
During the summer of 1888 Lennstrand was one of two men who translated Joseph Symes book *Vem bör bliva fördömd, om kristendomen är sann* into Swedish. Alfred Lindkvist was the other. For this crime, both of them were prosecuted. Lennstrand was freed by a jury; however, Lindkvist received a one month prison term.\(^95\)

The cruelest case of imprisonment for Lennstrand came about due to his lecture "Hvarför uppträder jag mot kristendomen." Skåne-Blekinge Hovrätt sentenced him to three months prison. Svea Hovrätt sentenced him to a further 6 months for the same lecture. This was eventually shortened to 3 months by Oscar II, but Lennstrand had to sit in Långholm prison between October 28, 1889 and May 2 1890.\(^96\)

Långholmen did not stop Lennstrand from his activism. He wrote a number of articles for *Fritänkaren* while still in his cell, and adamantly continued to condemn the government, religion and his own imprisonment.

He also wrote several letters to Hjalmar Örhwall during this time. They are lucid and include proof that he had a considerable degree of freedom of expression in Långholmen, and access to atheist and liberal literature during the period. On New Year's eve, 1889, he wrote a rather short, but sympathetic letter consoling Örhwall on the death of his wife.\(^97\)

5,338 utilists sent a petition to the king protesting Lennstrand's sentence, and another 3,821 freethinkers did the same.\(^98\) During the time that Lennstrand was in prison, his struggle was a major topic in the pages of *Fritänkare*, not only with articles being written condemning the imprisonment, and detailing Lennstrand's circumstances, but with a slew of letters from around the country commenting on the injustice being done. Lennstrand's case caused international reaction, as well. In the British newspaper *Freethinker*, there was a publicized effort to raise money for Lennstrand cause. The “Swedish Prisoner's Fund”\(^99\) collected 25 pounds for the effort to have Lennstrand released.\(^100\)

Yet Lennstrand had asked his friends not to seek a pardon, since he thought it would have been hypocritical of him, as can be seen in this letter to Nyström:

\(^{95}\) Kogeus 1972: p. 98.
\(^{96}\) *Fritänkaten*: July 15, 1890.
\(^{97}\) Letter from Lennstrad to Öhrwall, December 31, 1889.
\(^{98}\) *Fritänkaren*: July 15, 1890, p. 105.
\(^{99}\) *Freethinker*: March 16, 1890, p.128. (*Freethinker* was a British newspaper).
\(^{100}\) *Freethinker*: June 1, 1890, p.256.

But it was Nyström who ended up securing the pardon. Lennstrand had fallen extremely ill during his time in prison, suffering sever hallucinations, and even claiming to have spoken to god. Nyström visited the Minister of Justice, August Östergren, to ask for a reprieve. It was granted.\(^{102}\)

### 3.10 Mental Illness

Lennstrand's jail-time hallucinations were indicative of severe mental illness. These can be at least partially attributed to the extreme circumstances of sitting alone in a cell, together with the deplorable conditions of late 19th century prisons. It is also a possibility

---

\(^{101}\)Brev från Lennstrand till Nyström 23.2.1890 [http://www.stockholmskallan.se/Soksida/Post/?nid=25696](http://www.stockholmskallan.se/Soksida/Post/?nid=25696)

\(^{102}\)Nyström, Anton Kristendomen och Den Fria Tanken 1908 467-468.
that these hallucinations were indicative of a much more serious, long-term condition.

Lennstrand made no secret of his hallucinations:

Till följe af en brutal och hänsynlös benhandling der – jag öfverfölls ett par gånger med otidigheter af fängelsedirektören och fornärmades af vaktmanskapel, antagligen på befällning från högre ort – blev jag så uppskakad och enerverad att jag den 21-24 april tillfölje af denna behandling framkallade sinnesoron försattes i ett abnormalt sinnestillstånd, i hvilket jag under dessa tre nätter i den ensamma cellen såg flammande ljussken och hörde ljud, hvilka jag då ej kunde förklara på naturligt sätt. I det öfverspända sinnestillstånd i hvilket jag befann mig, fingo dessa hallucinationer, hvilka för mig hade objektiv verklighet ehuru de voro fullkomligt subjektiva...

The illness lasted even after he was freed and for a short period he reverted back to Christianity. In a letter to Hjalmar Öhrwall on June 13, 1890 Lennstrand acknowledged his lapse:


103 Fritänkaren, July 15, 1890, p.105.
Jag är fysiskt friskare än någonsin, men likväl en skugga och jag tvivlar på att jag kan bli något annat...\textsuperscript{104}

That Lennstrand's reversion to Christianity and his mental illness coincided is almost certainly proof that the first was caused by the latter. Sometime after the above letter was written, Öhrvall responded with a letter of his own (which is now lost), to which Lennstrand wrote a reply on the 17\textsuperscript{th} of June. He mentioned that the previous Friday and Saturday (the 13\textsuperscript{th} of June 1890 was a Friday) were “förfarliga dagar” for him, but that he was now better. He was cheered up by a visit from Daniel Fällström that Saturday evening. (Fällström was an actor and poet from Gävle.) However, he was still in the midst of a spiritual crisis.

It is clear from these two letters that Lennstrand (and he admits this himself) was undergoing some sort of intense psychiatric crisis. Kogeus describes his personality from reading these letters as “mannodepressiv”\textsuperscript{105}. While a proper psychiatric diagnosis for Lennstrand is beyond the purview of an historian, there is no doubt that he suffered at least one acute case of severe mental illness. This is attested to by Anton Nyström.\textsuperscript{106} The possibility of Lennstrand having bi-polar disorder can not be overlooked, especially in the light of his sister's suicide.

Whatever the cause of Lennstrand's relapse, he had returned to his atheistic beliefs by July of that same year.

Lennstrand's had a severe, long-term personality change after leaving prison. One of his closest friends, Julia Ödmann, wrote about the changes which she saw:

”misstänksamhet övergår alla gränser, hans oförsiktighet att stöta sig med alla sina vänner, hans slöseri med penningar, hans retlighet och ständigt ombytliga sinnelag ingiva mig stora bekymmer.”\textsuperscript{107}

Lennstrand's irascibility degraded some of his personal relationships, which

\textsuperscript{104}Letter from Lennstrand Hjalmar Öhrvall June 13, 1890.
\textsuperscript{105}She uses the term “mannodepressiv.”
\textsuperscript{106}Nyström 1908: p.469
\textsuperscript{107}Kogeus 1972: p.105.
directly affected his career. He became very bitter, even towards people who were his allies. An example of this was a lecture he held on November 23, 1890 in which he excoriated Henry V. Berghell, a fellow freethinker who had been sentenced to three months for blasphemy. Berghell responded and commented on Lennstrand's unstable mental condition, and called for the formation of a separate atheist organization.108

The exact nature of his mental illness is unknown, but even if he had a genetic predisposition to a disease such as bipolar disorder, his imprisonment most certainly exasperated it, and there is no doubt that his personality drastically changed after his time in prison (becoming more irascible) and this greatly affected the rest of his life.

One may at first admire the honesty and openness of Lennstrand making his illness public, but it should be noted that it probably served a practical purpose, as well. Attributing religious experiences to mental illness (especially hallucinations) was a common theme in Nyström's writings about Christianity. And it is also a theme which Lennstrand took up in his letters and articles. While making his illness public was probably done both to garner sympathy and to document the awful conditions of Swedish prisons, it had a propagandist purpose, as well.

3.11 Lennstrand och SAP

"Kamp mot statskyrkan och kristendom är nu min huvudpågif, men jag tror nu att det är min plikt att öppet mot kristendomen sätta ej allenast utilism utan även socialdemokratin. Förr ansågs de tu skilda. Nu ser jag tydlig, att vad kristendomen varit, det blir i framtiden socialdemokratin...Men med tiden menar jag att detta samfund ej kan låta bli att uppgå i den socialdemokratiska

108 Berghell 1890, s 10-15.
rörelsen eller åtminstone förena sig med den, de äro syskon.”

The animosity that Lennstrand had towards the SAP is clear from the above paragraph. But how did the party which he once considered to be an ally become the enemy?

In the beginning, the SAP had a strongly negative disposition towards religion. They took the Marxist line against the Church of Sweden and Christianity in general. Hjalmar Branting, who was sentenced for blasphemy in 1888, was anti-Christian and believed that it was one of the bases for social inequality.

Despite this, as the SAP gained in numbers and political power, their anti-Christian rhetoric became tone down. Even Branting himself became less hostile towards Christianity. For the SAP, achieving practical goals for the working class was of more immediate important than spreading atheism.

However, the growth of Lennstrand's movement caused concern among the SAP, who saw it as competing with them for the minds and votes of leftist citizens. It was considered so much of a threat that Hjalmar Branting called for a public discussion and debate with Lennstrand at Mosebacke on the 9th of November 1890. It was attended by 1,100-1,200 people, and was quite contentious.

Lennstrand gave a long lecture about how the struggle for eliminating Christianity from Swedish society was of the highest priority. He wanted to bring about a fritänkarröelse, akin to the arbetarrörelse which was trying to be created by the SAP.

Lennstrand, who was concerned very much with social reforms, thought that the best way of achieving those reforms was to frid society of the church (which was primarily responsible for society's ills). One of his most telling phrases regarding this was, “Det är lättare att bryta ner altaret än tronen.” In other words, he felt that it was not only necessary to deal with the downfall of religion first, but it was actually an easier matter for a leftist movement.

The debate was a very personal one. August Palm had previously criticized utilists and

112 Lennstrand 1890, Socialism och utilism: p.11.
113 Lennstrand 1890, Socialism och utilism: p.11.
114 Lennstrand 1890, Socialism och utilism: p.11.
said that, “endast är dårar och idioter som sysselsätta sig med bibeln.”
Naturally, Lennstrand had quite a vitriolic response, and retorted with the same words used to describe his own followers:

Om de äro idioter och dårar som sysselsätta sig med bibeln för att vederlägga den, för att få bort den – då äro också de dårar och idioter som sysselsätta sig med de rådande sociala missförhållandena i vår tid, äfven om de göra det endast för att få bort dessa missförhållanden.  

Branting himself was also a target in Lennstrand's speech, with Lennstrand noting Branting's new found belief that religion should be a “private matter.”

Yet this was not entirely a one-on-one battle between Lennstrand and the SAP. There had been a contentious and ongoing conflict between Anton Nyström and August Palm over the nature of workers' education. Nyström believed in a well-rounded, liberal arts education at his arbetarinstitut, while Palm believed in a more practical education. Palm's animosity was part of a larger problem he had with freethinkers who were competing with the SAP.

Lennstrand's personal animosity towards the leaders of the SAP was detrimental to his movement. He could have worked from within the organization to increase the importance which was placed on spreading atheism, but instead chose to make a new enemy out of his old friends. The cause of this animosity seems to be as much personal as it was philosophical, and the acidic nature which Lennstrand had towards the leaders of the SAP was very likely, at least in part, caused by the change in personality he had after his release from prison. Lennstrand had become more puritanical in his insistence on the spread of atheism, and saw no room for compromise with the SAP.

115 Lennstrand 1890, *Socialism och utilism*: p.11.
3.12 Lennstrand's Last Years and Death

Prison caused Lennstrand to suffer from serious, long-term physical and mental illness. He was not a well man for the remainder of his life. He partook in two important debates in 1891, one with Ludvig Meijer and another with Per Nymansson. He was quite loquacious on both occasions. On September 3, 1893, he partook in a large protest held in Stockholm which attracted between 4 and 5 thousand people.\textsuperscript{119}

However, after his thirty-second year, he was becoming weaker and sicker and his activism diminished heavily. Between 1893 and 1895 Lennstrand underwent fourteen operations.\textsuperscript{120} In this letter from August 1895, Lennstrand described his operations and sicknesses:

“Sedan september förra året befinner jag mig härstädes och har fem gånger opererats för s. k. strålsvamp. Nu stundar inom ett par dagar en ny operation, denna gång djupt in i magen, hvarifrån det onda lär komma, och jag antager, att det förr eller senare blir döden. Redan nu ha de kristne spridt ut en mängd lögner om mig: att jag har kräftan i tungan (det lär omtalas i missionshusen och bönesalarne öfver hela landet), att jag ligger här och delar ut kristliga traktater till sköterskorna, att jag återkallat allt hvad jag förut förkunnat (det ha stått i en notis i Östgöten). Efter min död blir det naturligtvis ännu flera olika historier. Derför anser jag det vore rent af nödvädigt att i mina sista stunder några fritänkare äro tillstädes för att sedan kunna vederlägga lögnerna om omvändelse på dödsbädden eller en olycklig död. Då jag hela tiden här varit omgifven af kristna, skulle det också vara mig kärt, att i mina sista stunder få se hos mig några af dem som i huvudsak tänka lika med mig. Hvad jag derför nu ville fråga är, om doktor Nyström skulle tillåta kalla på Eder, då det håller på att bli slut för mig.”\textsuperscript{121}

\textsuperscript{119} Kogeus 1972: p.155.
\textsuperscript{120} Kogeus 1972: p.156.
\textsuperscript{121} Letter from Lennstrand to Nyström March 8, 1894 http://www.stockholmskallan.se/Soksida/Post/?nid=25712
The technical name for the “strålsvamp” infection that he writing about is aktinomykos. It is a bacteriological disease that affects both humans and animals. It begins in the mouth and spreads to other parts of the body.¹²²

Lennstrand died on December 31, 1895. The following is the inscription on his tombstone:

Jag dör nöjd i tron på ett lyckligt framtidsfolk som lefver utan illvilja fördamor och vidskepelser och ett samhälle där välvilja och godhet råda att arbeta för det samhället är den högsta religionen.¹²³

4 After Lennstrand

Utilistiska samfundet did not survive Lennstrand's death. In 1895, a new publication named Nya Sanningar took up Fritänkarens agenda; however, this paper had a more upbeat tone than Lennstrand's publication, and was published up until 1898. Frihetsförbundet, another organization devoted to freethought, was funded in 1899 by Oscar Ljungdahl. This organization also published a newspaper called Fria Ord which ended in 1903.

However, no one was as passionate and vociferous a champion for the spread of atheism as Lennstrand. It would not be until Ingemar Hedenius began his campaign to promote atheism during the 1950s that Sweden would see another public figure with as much enthusiasm as Lennstrand.

And secularization continues, largely as a result of the social and educational policies of the SAP.

¹²²http://www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se/amnesomraden/smittskydd-och-sjukdomar/smittsamma-sjukdomar/actinomycos/

5 Conclusion

Viktor Lennstrand was not the first atheist in Sweden, but he was the first person in that country to found an organization devoted to atheist agitation and to become a vociferous proponent for the spread of atheism. He was, therefore, Sweden's first atheist activist.

The small amount of previous research on Lennstrand has more or less relegated him to the status of an historical footnote, and even taking into account Kogeus' dissertation, there has been no comprehensive effort to portray his life as part of the larger phenomena of Swedish secularization. Yet Lennstrand as an historical subject is rich ground for research into the causes and effects of secularization, much more so than those who have previously written about him have been able to detail.

The methodology used in this paper, which makes use of textual analysis and a comparative analysis of Lennstrand's accomplishments with those of other important figures, was successful in answering the research questions posed in section 1.1. The concise answers to those question provided below show how the theoretical models of biography and the secularization paradigm were useful tools for analyzing Lennstrand's life and career via the above mentioned methodology.

1. Lennstrand was a devout Christian from a free church family who became not only an atheist, but an atheist activist with the goals of eroding the power of the Church of Sweden, displacing religious rules and principles with secular ones, secularizing schools and national institutions, replacing Sweden's Christian culture with one based on reason, and discouraging people from religious activities. All of these efforts are indicative of the five criteria that Bruce gave as causes for secularization.124

2. Paul Petter Waldenström, and the Free Church movement had a strong influence on Lennstrand's mentality and his activism. Biblical criticism, criticism of orthodoxy and an animosity towards the Church of Sweden were things which Lennstrand had been

124 See 1.2.
exposed to all during his childhood and adolescence. The success that Waldenström and the Free Churches had in achieving substantive political goals and in converting minds to their cause was something which Lennstrand sought to emulate. In this way, therefore, the decay of religious institutions and the sequestration of political power caused by Waldenström and the Free Church movement motivated Lennstrand's own activism.

3. Lennstrand's arrival at Uppsala exposed him to cultural radicalism. “The replacement of a specifically religious consciousness by an empirical, rational, instrumental orientation” as described by Bruce as a social phenomena, can be seen occurring in Lennstrand as an individual during his days as a university student. This is an essential point when trying to show the importance of biography as a means of exploring the secularization paradigm.

4. Lennstrand's personality change after prison (for which there is a strong possibility was due to long-term mental illness), caused him to have increasingly hostile feelings and relationships towards people who could very easily have been his allies. This was most consequential in regard to his relationship with August Palm and Hjalmar Branting. The SAP would become Sweden's most successful political party in the 20th century and would have an enormous influence on the development of Swedish society after 1920. It was they who were probably most responsible for Sweden's long-term secularization via all the processes of Bruce's secularization paradigm. Had Lennstrand worked from within the SAP, he could have made his movement an important faction within the party. Had he been less hostile towards the SAP's leader, they may not have seen Utilistiska samfundet as a rival political faction. That Lennstrand's bitter personality severely harmed his relationship with the people who would go on to shape modern Swedish society indicates how important the details of an individual's personal life can be.

5. In many respects, Utilistiska samfundet was a cult of personality, rather than an

---

125 Criteria A and C from 1.2.
126 See 1.2
organization of like-minded individuals. This explains why it did not survive Lennstrand's death. Virtually all of Lennstrand's wishes for Swedish society eventually came true, but he himself had almost nothing to do with making them happen. He therefore had very little effect on Sweden's long-term secularization. He achieved no political reforms, established no long-term educational institutes, and his importance in the hearts and minds of even his friends seems to have waned over time. His failure at this can be seen as his failure to achieve any Bruce's criteria for secularization. Lennstrand's activism was caused by secularization rather than being a significant cause for its further development.

Why then is Lennstrand's biography important, and what use can this paper have for future research?

Firstly, the processes which caused Lennstrand to convert from a devout Christian to an atheist were processes that would go on to affect other Swedes (to varying degrees) in the decades after his death. In many ways, Lennstrand could be seen as the “canary in the coalmine” for religion in Sweden.

Secondly, it demonstrates the importance of personal relationships in an activist's life, and how they can steer the long-term political and cultural influence of that activist.

The analytical model used for this dissertation also presents a useful framework for further research into the history of Swedish secularization, especially as it pertains to the late 19th and 20th centuries.

One of the most important criteria of Bruce's version of the secularization paradigm is: “The replacement of a specifically religious consciousness (which may range from dependence on charms, rites, spells or prayers, to a broadly spiritually inspired ethical concern) by an empirical, rational, instrumental orientation.” When researching biographies of people who lived during the time in Swedish history (between circa 1880 and 1950) that the SAP and freethinker-inspired publications, lectures and educational institutes were inculcating in Swedish minds more rational and scientific ideologies, it would be useful to analyze the degree to which an individual changes his or her belief system over the course of their lives as it relates to their exposure to these ideologies.

The biographer should ask whether their subject had religious or supernatural beliefs as a child, and compare them to the beliefs that they had later on in their lives. And, most
importantly, they should then study their subject's letters, diaries and other such material in order to find out why their subject's beliefs did or did not change. If their subject did become a more secular person, what caused it? Was it direct exposure to the material being taught at the schools, read in publications and heard at lectures? Did conversations with friends and acquaintances play any role?

It is through the lives and experiences of the individual that larger social changes such as secularization are recorded. Studying those changes through the lives of individuals, as has been done here with Lennstrand, helps one to understand the mechanisms that caused those social changes.

As it pertains to intellectual history, the biographical model used for Lennstrand is also useful for studying how successfully a person affects secularization via structural differentiation. As was shown, it was largely Lennstrand's inability to produce lasting educational or political organizations (which would spread reason, knowledge of science and an appreciation for democracy) or form important social and political networks which relegated him to relative obscurity. If one is studying other figures who were important (or seemingly could have been important) to Sweden's secularization, it is imperative to see how well they exerted influence of failed to exert influence in the areas in which Lennstrand failed. Specifically, it is essential to show how effectively and by what means they replaced the Church of Sweden in such areas as education, politics and moral and political authorities.

127 See 1.2.
Viktor Lennstrand var inte den första ateisten i Sverige, men han var den första att grunda en organisation tillägnad ateist-aktivism. Även om Lennstrands antikristna filosofi inte var unik, så var hans roll som Sveriges förste ateist-agitator historisk betydande.

Denna uppsats använder biografi för att föra att föra på Lennstrands roll i kasusen och effekten av Sveriges sekulariseringsprocess. Frikyrkorörelsen, fritänkarrörelsen och SAP var de viktigaste organisationerna för Sveriges förändring från en religiös till en sekulär stat och Lennstrand hade personliga förbindelser till ledare från alla tre rörelserna.

Resultaten från forskningen visar att Lennstrands misslyckande med att grunda en framgångsrik politisk eller pedagogisk rörelse förminskade hans roll i Sveriges långsiktiga sekulariseringsprocess, men det ger emellertid insikt i de andra rörelsernas inflytande på denna process.
Bibliografi

Unpublished Sources

Brev från Lennstrand till Öhrwall finns i Uppsala Universitetsbibliotek

http://gavledraget.se/

Stockholms Stads Arkiv

Svenska Kyrkans Arkiv, Gävle Heliga Trefaldighet

Sveriges Släktforskarförbund
http://www.genealogi.se/

Published Sources

Lennstrand, Viktor E

– Fritänkaren. Organ för Sveriges utilister, 1889-1894
– Tänk sjelf! :utilistiskt flygblad, 1890-1894
–1884: Från min egen verld. Aforismer och dagboksanteckningar, Uppsala
–1888: Hvad jag sagt och hvad jag icke sagt, Stockholm
–1889: Hvad hafva myndigheterna uträttat med sitt straff?, Stockholm
–1889: Svar på tal, Malmö
–1890: Gud, Stockholm
–1890: Hvarför uppträder jag mot kristendomen?, Stockholm
–1890: Socialism och utilism, Stockholm,
–1890: Är du en kristen, Stockholm
–1893: Motsägelser i bibeln, Stockholm
Litteratur

Unpublished

Ahlström, Michael, 2007, ”Svensk Fritänkarrörelse : idé och debatt under sent 1800-tal"
Magister-uppsats, Högskolan i Gävle/Institutionen för humaniora och samhällsvetenskap


Published


Bexell, Olof 2003: Sveriges kyrkohistoria. 7, Folkväckelsens och kyrkoförnyelsens tid


Bruce, Steve

The Freethinker, 1881-

Frihetsförbundetsredaktions kommite, 1908: Sanningar om Lennstrand: Hans Ställning till Kristendomen och Socialdemokraterna, Stockholm

Frängsmyr, Tore Viktor E. Lennstrand En anti-Waldenström i ”Kyrkohistorisk årskrift sjuttiofjärde årgången, 1974”

Frängsmyr, Tore “Föreläsningar för folket: Om arbetarinstitut och folkbildningen” i Lychnos, 1991
Frängsmyr, Tore, 2004: *Svenska idéhistoria: Bildning och vetenskap under tusen år Del I 1000-1809*, Stockholm


Green, Todd, 2011: *Responding to Secularization: The Deaconess Movement in Nineteenth Century Sweden*, Boston


Hall, Bo, ”Kan biografisk metod vara vetenskap” i *Historisk Tidskrift* 127:3, 2007

Hessler, Carl Arvid ”Brev från Lennstrand” i *Festskrift Till Arthur Thomsom* 6 November 1961


Kärnfelt, Joan, 2000 *Vetenskapen och Livet, Mellan Nytta och Nöje*, Ett bidrag till populärvetenskapens historia i Sverige, Stockholm

Ljungdahl, Oscar, 1895: *Viktor Lennstrands Barndom, själsutveckling, och verksamhet*, Stockholm

Lundkvist, Ingmar, 2011: ”Med tematik som berör”Om att avgränsa biografiskskrivandet” i *Med livet som insats: Biografin som humanistisk genre*, Lund

Nyström, Anton, 1886: *Reformerande eller Revolutionär Socialism det är frågan*, Stockholm

-- 1894: *Allmän kulturhistoria eller det mänskliga lifvet i dess utveckling: systematisk framställning af civilisationens gång och naturlagarnes upptäckande Vol III-IV*, Stockholm

-- 1908: *Kristendomen och Den Fria Tanken*, Stockholm

Rosenberg, Sven-Åke, 1948: *Kyrkan och Arbetarrörelsen*, Lund

Rydberg, Viktor, 1862: *Bibelns Lära Om Kristus*, Stockholm

Sanner, Inga, 1995: *Att älka sin nästa såsom sig själv om moraliska utopier under 1800-talet*, Stockholm


*Svensk Biografisk Handlexikon* (1906)

Thrower, James, 2000: *Western Atheism: A Short History*, New York,

Tingsten, Herbert, 1973: *The Swedish Social Democrats: Their Ideological Development*, Totowa, New Jersey

Tomasson, Richard, ”How Sweden Became so Secular” in *Scandinavian Studies*, Volume 74, Number 1, Spring 2002


Waldenströms, Peter Paul, 1928: (Nyren, Bernard, Red *Paul Peter Waldenströms*
Minnesteckningar 1838-1875, Stockholm


Zennström, Per-Olov, 1983: Axel Danielsson: En biografi, Lund

Åberg, Ingrid, 1975: Förening och politik: Folkrörelsernas politiska aktivitet i Gävle under 1880-talet, Stockholm

Öhrman, William: ”Viktor E. Lennstrand, En anti-Waldenström” i Kyrkohistorisk årskrift Sjuttiofjärde årgången 1974

Web Sites

Förening Verdandi
http://www.foreningenverdandi.se/ettan.htm

Projekt Runeberg
http://runeberg.org/

Folkhälsomyndigheten
http://www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se

Stockholms Källan
http://www.stockholmskallan.se/

Svenska Akademinms Ordbok
http://g3.spraakdata.gu.se/saob/

Sveriges Strafflag 1864
http://wisberg.se/wisberg.se/pdf/strafflagen1864.pdf