

---

# Introduction

THIS STUDY WILL FOCUS on explaining one of the riddles that puzzled political scientists and historians through much of the twentieth century, namely the origin and development of Swedish Social Democracy. While other countries in Europe experienced dramatic swings between radical and conservative political parties, which resulted in tragic experiments with totalitarian regimes, Sweden by contrast managed miraculously to avoid these extremes. What made this “middle way” appear miraculous was the fact that between the 1860s and the 1910s, Swedish society had rapidly been transformed from a patriarchal, agrarian society in which parliamentary representation still reflected the medieval “four estates,” to a bicameral legislature with universal suffrage and true parliamentarianism. The conclusions that will be drawn from this study indicate that this rapid, yet successful, transformation was facilitated by political actors who crafted the discourse of these societal debates in such a way that pluralism came to be valued as an ethical good and then vigorously defended. This ideological preference for pluralism allowed the very emergence and maintenance of civil society, despite the fact that the political climate was far from tranquil, as various parties with contrary interests vied for control in this fledgling democracy.

At the center of this study is one Swedish politician, Paul Peter Waldenström (1838–1917). In addition to a career in politics, Waldenström was a clergyman, revival preacher, educator, author, and newspaper editor, who has typically been identified as one of the foremost figures in the spiritual awakening of the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> His contributions to spiritual life and his theology have received a great deal of attention, particularly by those religious groups directly impacted by his ideas. The two chief custodians of his theological legacy have been the church institutions directly founded by his followers: the Mission Covenant Church of Sweden (*Svenska Missionsförbundet*, now part of *Equmeniakyrkan*) and the Evangelical Covenant

Church, located in North America. By contrast, his very long and active political career has received little attention, perhaps eclipsed by the interest in his theology, perhaps indicative of the secular orientation of much of contemporary Swedish society. Waldenström's political career began in 1868, with his participation in the Church Assembly of the Church of Sweden (*Svenska kyrkans kyrkomöte*), a consultative body to the Swedish parliament (*Riksdag*), and expanded during his years of service in the *Riksdag* from 1884–1905. Furthermore, he remained a frequent commentator on politics and societal developments throughout his career and until his death. The years 1868–1917 thus serve as the framework for this discussion.

That Waldenström was merely a religious figure and not a consequential political actor is an assumption that will be challenged in this study. Historians of Swedish history have long been aware of the active participation of religious figures in politics during the so-called “folk movements” of the nineteenth century and the subsequent breakthrough of democracy after the turn of the century. However, this participation has at times been evaluated as having been non-conclusive in the nature of its impact, as historian Sven Lundkvist suggested as late as the 1970s. Lundkvist, furthermore, encouraged more research into the connection between these religious revivals and overall political developments.<sup>2</sup> Even today, the ambiguity that remains in evaluating the role that religious movements and their ideologies played in Swedish politics risks overlooking a dynamic aspect of nineteenth century popular culture. Waldenström serves as an ideal subject for better understanding the view of democratic values among the religious revival groups for three reasons: he was a prominent leader within this population, he was vocal on democratic values and praxis, and he was directly connected to the debates on these matters within the *Riksdag*. He thus serves as a direct point of contact between a large popular movement and the apparatus of government. His political speeches and newspaper articles frequently contain commentary on the development and maintenance of pluralistic values and debate, as well as prescriptions for how these ideals could be implemented and safeguarded.

This study brings a new perspective to the discussion of this period, in that many of Waldenström's writings have never before been analyzed within the context of democratic pluralism. Some of these writings have rarely, if ever, been analyzed at all. Among the primary sources used during the research for this study is a collection of Waldenström's carbon copy books from 1906–1915, which include imprints of numerous letters to the editors of Swedish newspapers and private persons. This collection was rediscovered in 1988, when it was catalogued and transferred to the Swedish National Archives (*Riksarkivet*) in Stockholm. Analysis of these writings

alone brings new material to the discussion of Waldenström's career, and a fresh perspective on his evaluation of the Swedish political and social developments after his career in politics formally ended in 1905. Also included in this study are contemporary critiques of Waldenström as they appeared in several Swedish newspapers preserved at the Royal Library (*Kungliga biblioteket*) also in Stockholm. Finally, the development of Waldenström's political philosophy has been traced as it appears in the great body of his theological books and writings. These writings have seldom been analyzed with political questions in mind, and so this study has intentionally re-read these theological works with an eye to understanding how his theology informed his engagement in political questions.

If Waldenström has been a neglected figure among Swedish scholars, he remains virtually unknown outside of Sweden. Born in Luleå in northern Sweden in 1838, Paul Peter Waldenström was the son of a country doctor and, as such, was privileged to attend Uppsala University, beginning in 1857.<sup>3</sup> By 1863 he had earned a doctor of philosophy degree, and the following year, he completed an examination for ordination as a priest in the Lutheran Church of Sweden (which until the year 2000 functioned as the Swedish state church). Although ordained, Waldenström chose not to serve in a congregation, but instead in an educational position. His primary occupation was as a teacher at several upper secondary schools (*högre läroverk*) where he taught theology and classical Greek, Hebrew, and Latin. The first of these positions began in 1862 in the town of Växjö, followed by schools in Umeå and Gävle, the longest of these being his tenure in Gävle from 1872–1905. In 1868, he took over as editor of the religious devotional journal *Pietisten* ("The Pietist"), a central organ of the revival movement within the Church of Sweden, which enjoyed a subscription base conservatively estimated at around 10,000 subscribers in 1860 (roughly one out of 385 Swedes was a subscriber).<sup>4</sup> *Pietisten* retained its significant influence for the remainder of his life. Even as late as 1914, *Pietisten* had grown to 17,000 subscribers,<sup>5</sup> thus remaining slightly ahead of population growth (one in 340 Swedes subscribed). As the name of the paper suggests, the community of readers that it served drew heavily from the religious heritage of Lutheran Pietism. Waldenström's own gravitation toward the revival movement had begun following a conversion experience at the age of nineteen, at which point he had become familiar with the writings of classical Lutheran Pietism, including the German theologian Johann Arndt (1555–1621) and the preachers within the contemporary Swedish branch of that movement, known as "new evangelicalism" (*nyevangelismen*), such as Peter Fjellstedt (1802–1881) and Carl Olof Rosenius (1816–1868).<sup>6</sup> His avocation as a revival preacher also

began shortly after his conversion, and it was his preaching and authorship which launched him to national prominence.

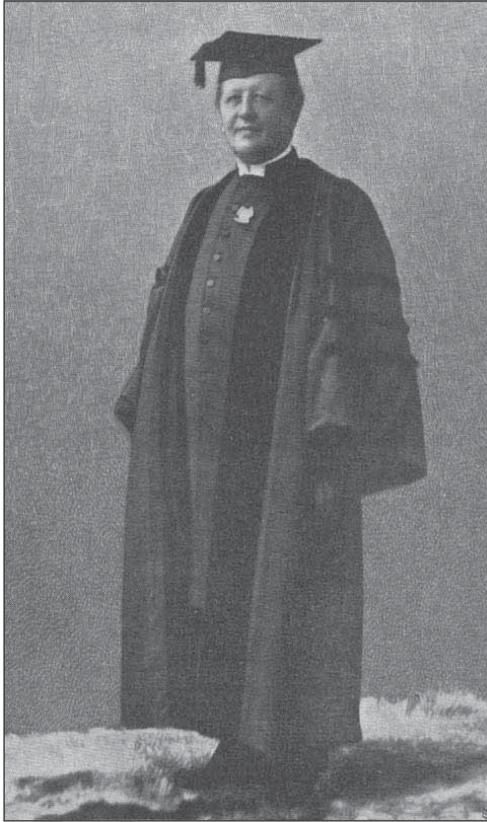
Waldenström became branded as a radical in 1872, when he came into conflict with the authorities of the Church of Sweden regarding its doctrine of the atonement. The orthodox Lutheran view on the atonement held that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross had functioned to reconcile God to human beings, who, according to Christian theology, had been estranged from God as a result of original sin. Swedish Lutheranism, as well as the early revival movements, had traditionally emphasized the interpretation of the atonement as informed by Anselm of Canterbury, which implied that God had allowed himself to be reconciled to fallen humanity as a result of Christ's sacrifice.<sup>7</sup> Waldenström's 1872 sermon in *Pietisten* defended an alternate (though not entirely new) critique of this view, asserting that it was not God who was reconciled to human beings by the crucifixion, but instead human beings who were reconciled to God, since the nature of God cannot be expected to change.<sup>8</sup> The climate of strict orthodoxy among the clergy at the time opposed this, as it denied the teaching on the issue as articulated in one of the Church of Sweden's founding documents, the Augsburg Confession, which had been binding since 1593. Following a prolonged and heated public debate on this matter, as well as on the nature of the congregation and communion, a large group of his sympathizers, dubbed "Waldenströmi-ans," broke away from the Church of Sweden and in 1878 founded a free association of congregations called the Swedish Mission Covenant (*Svenska Missionsförbundet*). This was not the first such group to break away from the religious monopoly of the Church of Sweden, but it quickly became the largest, which by the time of Waldenström's death had surpassed 100,000 members (roughly 2 percent of the population). The editors of the encyclopedia *Nordisk Familjebok* in 1921 estimated that the church had 270,000 adherents (thus 4–5 percent of the population), and further postulated that as many as one million Swedes had at one time in their lives looked up to Waldenström as their "spiritual father" (about 16–17 percent).<sup>9</sup> Although a central inspiration to the creation of this church, Waldenström maintained a distance, and it was not until 1904 that he assumed the principle leadership role as president (*föreståndare*). This position increased his already active travel schedule as an itinerant preacher.

In the course of his career Waldenström made several extensive tours through North America, made frequent trips to Germany and Europe, a trip to Palestine and Asia Minor, and a visit to China to inspect the Swedish missionary stations there. His trips to North America were prompted by requests from the large community of Swedish immigrants who had settled there, and who had founded a church denomination inspired by the

Swedish Mission Covenant in 1885, *Svenska Missionsförbundet i Amerika* (now the Evangelical Covenant Church). Waldenström enjoyed a long publishing career, writing no fewer than 34 books on devotional topics, including six travelogues and one novel, numerous pamphlets, monthly articles for *Pietisten* and several other newspapers, both religious and secular. A handful of his books were translated into English, including *The Blood of Jesus. What is the Significance?*, 1888 [*Jesu blod: Betraktelser* 1880]; *The Reconciliation*, 1888 [*Om försoningens betydelse* 1873]; *The Lord is Right*, 1889 [*Herren är from* 1875]; and the novel *Squire Adamson; Or Where Do You Live?*, 1928 [*Brukspatron Adamsson; Eller hvar bor du?* 1863]. The English translations reflected the fact that his audience of Swedish immigrants had begun transitioning into their English-speaking context. It also was an indication of a certain amount of recognition that he had gained within the English-speaking academic world. The foremost example of this was the distinction of being awarded an honorary doctorate from Yale University in 1889. The school of theology maintained an interest in Waldenström in subsequent years, and included him as a guest of honor at the university's 200th anniversary celebrations in 1901. With this distinction, he shared prestigious company, as the celebrated and controversial Mark Twain had also been awarded such a degree that same year. Another indication of the attention he had garnered was the fact that Waldenström had been one of the international figures invited to participate in the world parliament of religions in 1893 in Chicago (though he was not able to attend).

Waldenström's political career began in 1868, when he was elected as a delegate to the Church Assembly of the Church of Sweden. This body had been a compensatory measure to the church following the parliamentary reforms in 1866, which abolished the four-estate structure of the *Riksdag* (nobility, clergy, burgers, and farmers), and thereby deprived the clergy of the house they previously held. Under the new model, all questions that arose in the *Riksdag* regarding religion and the state church would be referred to the Church Assembly, thereby preserving some indirect representation for the Church of Sweden. In his participation in the Church Assemblies of 1868, 1908, 1909, and 1910, Waldenström was most known for his attempts to pass measures that would separate the church from the state, as well as democratize its structure (critical aspects of this are addressed in detail in Part II). In 1884, Waldenström was elected to represent the city of Gävle in the *Riksdag*. In his seven terms as a representative, Waldenström emerged as one of the leading supporters of temperance legislation, as well as an opponent of protectionism during the so-called "tariff debates" of the 1880s, an advocate for educational reform and the reform of the state-church

relationship, and a prominent critic of socialism (his stances on socialism and temperance are treated in detail in Parts III and IV respectively).



Waldenström in academic robe at Yale University in 1901, one of many guests of honor at the anniversary celebrations. *Nya Färder i Amerikas Förenta Stater*. 48.

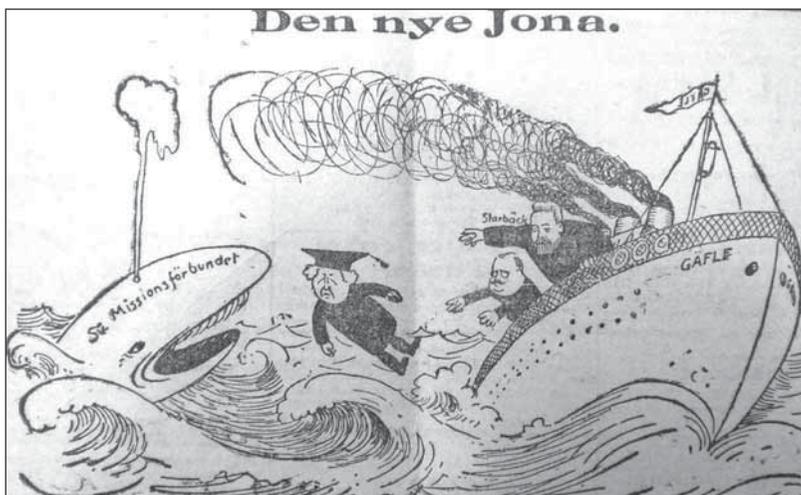
There have been several waves of interest in Waldenström as a historical subject, including at least sixteen biographies. The first major period of interest in Waldenström came during his lifetime. In 1872, the controversial sermon that he published in *Pietisten* started a flurry of responses, and in the next few years, several hundred books and pamphlets were published both supporting and refuting his theory of the atonement. He was not the first in history to present such an idea, but his very public challenge of this doctrine made a sensation throughout the Lutheran world, and even in other denominations and abroad. Even as late as 1889, when he arrived in the United States on his first American preaching tour, both English and Swedish language newspapers heralded him as the “Martin Luther of Sweden” . . .

or as an “Anti-Christ” among those seeking to defend Lutheran doctrine. The *Chicago Sunday Times-Herald* referred to him as one of Sweden’s “four greatest living men.”<sup>10</sup>

While Waldenström’s theory was significant on theological levels, the implications for religious practice among Swedes were far-reaching. Through his close reading of scripture and his plain-speech explanations to the Swedish layman, Waldenström had turned theology into a spectator sport. Like other religious reformers before him, he had made the case that anyone who could read should be able to understand Christian truths and challenge whatever incorrect assumptions might exist in the dominant paradigm. For lower- and middle class Swedes, this became an opportunity to challenge the rigid hierarchy of the Lutheran state church. Many embraced Waldenström’s slogan “Where is it written?” (*Var står det skrivet?*) and took this as an opportunity to discontinue their participation in the state church and formalize their own private Bible studies into congregations and denominations in their own right, the so-called “free churches” (*frikyrkorna*, adj. *frikyrklig*). The movement marked a general trend away from a unified, centralized, and hierarchical form of faith toward a very diverse, decentralized form that exalted the layman participant. The implications that this religious paradigm shift had on Waldenström’s understanding of the relationship of church and state will be treated in Part II. What should be pointed out now is what this early period (the 1870s) did for his legacy. Waldenström’s bold challenge of church doctrine created an opening for others who were dissatisfied with the Church of Sweden to make their own protests, both likeminded Pietists, as well as people with other motivations. He was seen as a threat by the religious establishment. The commentary on him during this period was therefore sharply polarized and primarily concerned theological issues. His reputation as a radical reformer emerged at this time.

The second era of high public interest in Waldenström occurred during his two-decade-long career in the *Riksdag* from 1884–1905. The interest this time was centered on social issues, namely those issues surrounding the labor movement, temperance legislation, and the separation of church institutions from the state. For those people engaged in the temperance movement, Waldenström was generally the object of high praise, with the exception that he was sometimes seen as too moderate on the issue of prohibition (see Part IV). However much of the attention he received from the press was that which appeared in the newspapers covering the labor movement (see Part III). Waldenström’s criticism of socialism gained him plenty of enemies in the Social Democratic and left parties. The sources used in this study come from the Swedish newspapers of the period, but

particularly from the city of Gävle, which Waldenström represented in the *Riksdag*. The coverage by the Socialist-leaning newspapers in this period was often starkly negative, as these papers worked to support Waldenström's political opponents. In his campaign against socialism, Waldenström even estranged some of the temperance people and free-church members, who were rather centralized within the Liberal party.<sup>11</sup> The net result of these political debates was that Waldenström increasingly came to be regarded as a conservative, an evaluation that will be problematized in this study.



“The New Jonah.” Waldenström is pictured being ousted from politics in Gävle, only to be attacked by the whale of the Swedish Mission Covenant. Reproduction: Riksarkivet Marieberg, Stockholm. Waldenströmska släktarkivet, P.P. Waldenströms samling I, volym 20.

The posthumous interest in Waldenström has also come in waves. The majority of this attention has been from within the Swedish Mission Covenant. After his death, several commemorative biographical works helped to enshrine him as the founder of that church. These served the purpose of defining his role as a church builder, and focused mostly on the positive contributions of his theology. Around the 100th anniversary of his birth in 1938 came another wave, which lasted through the 1940s. It was during this time that the most critical and comprehensive biographies were written. It was started by a short, but critical book by Jakob Grundström, *Waldenström och Samhällsfrågorna* (“Waldenström and Social Questions”). This book represented a turning point between earlier generations which had had a laudatory view of Waldenström as church father and visionary. Instead Grundström presented Waldenström as having been firmly planted in

the classical liberal tradition of political thinking, and despite some radical tendencies, was in fact no radical at all when it came to politics and social questions. What is clear in this analysis was that Grundström was representing a younger generation of free-church leaders who thought it time to take Waldenström down from the pedestal on which previous generations had placed him. A divided image emerges at this point, in which Waldenström retains his legacy as a radical in terms of his reforms of church institutions, but in politics he began to be seen as solidly conservative.

Grundström's critique seems to have inspired one of Waldenström's former assistants, Ragnar Tomson to respond to Grundström's assessment that Waldenström was not a radical. Thus Tomson took on the momentous task of tracing Waldenström's activity in politics, writing not one but three biographical works in the 1940s, each taking up a different aspect of Waldenström's career. *En hövding* ("A Chieftain") is a general summary of his career, and *En politisk vilde* ("A Political Maverick") outlined Waldenström's political career in twenty years of the *Riksdag*. The third and most important book came in 1945, *Den Radikale Waldenström* ("The Radical Waldenström"). Here Tomson laid out a detailed account of Waldenström's engagement on a series of social issues, including the tariff debates of the 1880s, the "muzzle law" of 1889 concerning freedom of speech, and the rights and protections of workers. Tomson presents Waldenström as an essentially radical politician, who only grew conservative after the turn of the century toward the end of his career. In it he sketches a portrait of Waldenström as having two phases, an early radical phase pitted against a later one, in which he became a reactionary conservative.

One of the critiques of Tomson's portrayal of Waldenström is that while a progression of ideologies is assumed to have taken place in Waldenström's development, the reasons for this change are not sufficiently accounted for or traced. This weakness was pointed out by William Bredberg, who wrote one of the definitive Waldenström biographies in his 1948 dissertation *P. P. Waldenströms verksamhet till 1878* ("P. P. Waldenström's Work up to 1878"). Although this work focused on Waldenström's earlier career, Bredberg also commented that Tomson failed to account for the evolution of Waldenström's philosophy, particularly why Waldenström became so conservative in his later years, if indeed there was a change. Bredberg does not go into depth on this, but does point out that the contemporary Swedish view of the era when Waldenström was active was dominated by a Social Democratic bias.

*For those who believe that Christianity in and of itself is the most radical of all and comes with the farthest reaching claims, then it is not necessary to hesitate in using the attribute "radical" on the*

*young Waldenström. On the other hand, it will seem odd for the person who judges his position from the modern social democratic viewpoint. Such a person will find a great resemblance between him and “the bishops.”*<sup>12</sup>

The 1978 centennial of the Swedish Mission Covenant was another opportunity for re-evaluation of Waldenström. Bror Walans *Året 1878* (“The Year 1878”) and Erland Sundström’s *Arvet från Waldenström* (“The Inheritance from Waldenström”) served the purpose of reasserting some of Waldenström’s lost place as patriarch, albeit with more critical distance than Tomson. These works also reflected modern tendencies to de-emphasize “great men” and place leaders against the background of broad popular movements, particularly asserting the influence of other church leaders such as Erik Jakob Ekman (1842–1915), who occupied almost as central a place in the Mission Covenant as Waldenström.

The most recent and perhaps also one of the most interesting of these works is Harry Lindström’s 1997 dissertation on Waldenström’s novel, *Squire Adamsson*. This religious allegory was a bestseller in Sweden, being reprinted nearly a dozen times since its initial publication in 1862, as well as in English, Norwegian, and Danish. The valuable addition that Lindström’s dissertation gives to the study of the religious revivals is that it identifies Waldenström’s novel as having had widespread influence in Swedish popular culture and engaging broader social issues than simply theology. Furthermore, Lindström pointed out that religious authors have typically been ignored in modern Swedish history, and made the case that those authors who have the most influence in their own time are not necessarily those who end up being enshrined in the national canon. As evidence of this, he notes the fact that Waldenström’s book sales rivaled even the most popular secular authors of the day.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, Lindström identified that there still remained unresolved questions regarding the influence of the religious awakening on general developments in Swedish society.

This study will attempt to fill out the previously under-researched political side of Waldenström’s career and shed light on the influence that he had in the era of the Swedish popular movements. Since pluralism, both religious and political, was a central idea in his career, it is only fitting that pluralism serves as the common thread of this study. This book has been organized according to the three main social questions that Waldenström addressed in his political career—questions of religious freedom, democratic practice, and the role of the state in enforcing standards of public health. These three subjects correspond to the three traditionally recognized “folk movements” (*folkrörelser*), which included the religious awakening

(*väckelserörelsen*), the labor movement (*arbetarrörelsen*), and the temperance movement (*nykterhetsrörelsen*). The point of analyzing them together is to help answer the question of how these movements were interrelated. Part I will offer a definition of pluralism as it appeared in Waldenström's discourse and as it pertained to the unique political situation at the turn of the century. Part II will focus on Waldenström's attempt to implement ideas of religious pluralism within the complicated context of Sweden as a Lutheran kingdom. How to disentangle the institutions of church and state was the first question, but was followed up by the equally important question of what role religion should take on once Sweden evolved into a more pluralistic society. Part III will focus on the reasons for Waldenström's opposition to socialism and his concerns over the nature of its revolutionary discourse. This chapter will also suggest ways in which Waldenström's critique influenced the evolutionary development of the Social Democratic party ideology, as well as the overall shape that Swedish democracy took in the decades that followed his career. Part IV will analyze the insights and contradictions that the temperance movement posed to notions of pluralism, focusing on Waldenström's leadership in this debate.