



A Most Secular Nation

Religious persons: Sweden and Croatia

Sweden has a reputation of being one of the most irreligious countries in the world. This is not mere slander, as in a recent poll only 19 percent of the almost ten million Swedish citizens said they were “religious persons,” while 59 percent said they were not, and 17 percent claimed to be convinced atheists.ⁱ

To put this into perspective, you should know that the global average for considering yourself a religious person is 60 percent, and that Croatians are closer to the golden mean, as in 2010, 70 percent maintained that religion was an important part of their life.ⁱⁱ

Values and Religion: Sweden and Croatia

In the same way, people in Sweden distinguish themselves by espousing liberal values. The ideal is an ideological consensus slowly becoming ever more liberal, enlightened, and emancipatory, managed by the state and implemented, for example, in schools or by the Church.

A good indicator of the Swedish ideological climate is the latest World Value Survey chart, which has two axes: vertical, Traditional vs. Secular Rational Values, and horizontal, Survival vs. Self-Expression values.ⁱⁱⁱ The countries most influenced by Lutheranism are all present in the upper right corner with Sweden as the most extreme case, combining the level of secular rationality of Japan with the Self-Expression value of Canada.

Croatia, on the other hand, is right in the middle of the value chart; the voice of moderation, if you like.

As Sweden ideologically occupies an extreme position in a global comparison, almost all immigration nudge Sweden towards the middle, towards a more Croatian position, one could say.



The religious groups that have grown the most through immigration is the Catholic Church, Orthodox Christianity and Islam, which now have at least between one and two hundred thousand members each.^{iv}

There are also a number of evangelical and Pentecostal churches and sects that together have almost 500 000 members. After a period of decline, the situation looks somewhat brighter for them mainly due to new immigrant parishes in the larger cities.^v

Still, the majority of Swedes belong to the Church of Sweden, the old Lutheran state church, but it is in a process of inevitable decline. In 1972, 95 percent of the population were members: in 2015, it was down to 63 percent.^{vi} And of those only approximately two to three percent go to Sunday services every week.^{vii} The Church loses approximately one percent of its members each year, and immigration is of no help as there are very few Lutherans fleeing to Sweden.

Sweden a model of modernization

When it comes to religious enthusiasm and identity, Sweden is, thus, the opposite of Croatia, which is close to the global average. In Sweden only a small minority is religious while in Croatia it is those without religious attachment who constitute the minority.

Sweden is, therefore, an interesting pioneering modernist experiment showcasing where the combination of low religiosity and high levels of emancipative values might lead.

The Cracks in the Edifice

After this brief characterization of the Swedish religious landscape, it might be interesting for you to gain a more detailed understanding of the present Swedish situation, and its prehistory, but that could easily degenerate into a catalogue of strange facts, making you think: "Oh my, those Swedes are really strange."

Instead, I think it is more interesting to probe the cracks in the edifice: to look at the social, religious, and political challenges that are presently putting pressure on the secularist consensus model, to the point of bursting.

In other words, I would like to gaze into the turbid crystal ball of the future. And, at the same time, learn something about the present.

The End of Communism

It is common to feel that one stands at an important crossroad of history, of a turning of the volatile balance of fortune; it is in a sense the nature of time itself one then senses, and one's own responsibility. Every moment contains a decisive choice between alternative possible worlds.



Nevertheless, at certain points, an era is really closed and something new opens up. We who are somewhat older, remember the death of Soviet communism and all the repercussions of that unexpected event. There is a clear before and after the fall of the Iron Curtain, at least in Europe.

And it is not surprising when the socialist, totalitarian regimes fell one after the other, as it were by their own inherent weaknesses, that many saw the new era dawning as one of liberalism and freedom. Francis Fukuyama, an American political scientist, incarnated this spirit in his 1992 book, *The End of History and the Last Man*, in which he wondered if not boredom would be the greatest challenge now when all ideological battles had been decided.^{viii}

Samuel Huntington, a fellow student of Fukuyama and Harvard professor of political science, disagreed in his fiercely opposed, but I think prescient book, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*.^{ix} In it, he argues that the fault lines of international conflicts would henceforth mainly be determined by cultural and religious differences, with civilizations functioning like tectonic plates. With other words, there would be no time for boredom; at least, if you lived above one of those fault lines.

The End of Freedom As We Know It

My hypothesis is that we are living through a similar ideological, political, and religious shift, as when Soviet communism lost its power and collapsed. Let us, preliminary, call it *The Self-destruction of Liberalism*.

At the same time as the dominant liberal ideology, underlying the present political and religious consensus, by an integral logic, presses to ever more extreme cases of freedom: freedom from truth, freedom from the physical body, freedom from life, and so on; signs have begun to appear which makes me wonder if it will stand the test of the present civilizational crisis.

Increasingly, emancipation and empowerment are coming into sharp conflict with other central values of liberalism: like freedom of speech and freedom of religion, tolerance and non-discrimination. These internal contradictions are brought out in the open, often in bizarre ways, by the force of the present “stress test” of Europe, that is, mass emigration from mostly Muslim majority countries. For example, the spectacle of police officers ordering women to undress on beaches.

The combination of an internal contradiction of values (a so-called liberal dilemma) and external pressure is leading to what I would like to call a “*Liberal Neurosis*,” which is increasing in strength with the radicalization of the ideal and practices of emancipation.

The moving liberal frontier, including ever new freedoms, is also disconnecting the West



from its Christian origins in a more thorough and definitive way, which makes its value foundation increasingly purely modern. The secular Western societies cannot, therefore, any longer suppose or fall back on diffuse set of Christian values; they will have to live according to the principles of modernity, for good or bad. The contradictions inherent in liberalism (and basically modernity) will, therefore, manifest themselves with greater force and in purer forms.

The most likely solution when this liberal neurosis will reach a certain critical magnitude is that freedom will have to be given up, or radically restricted, to make place for a mandatory ideal of emancipation, which will be enforced in accordance with the maxim, "You must be free."

I think this anti-Christian and totalitarian nature of modern freedom will become apparent to Christians when they will have to share the stage with not only Jews, Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists, but also Satanists, who are guided by an extreme form of emancipation, that from God himself.^x At that point, Christians who have internalized liberal principles will have to suffer a liberal neurosis of their own and face a fundamental choice. Does religious freedom include all forms of "religion," even Satanism? Or only nice religions? And who decides who are nice?

With other words, we are entering a time when the secular, liberal canopy supposed to harbor radical pluralism, a truly multicultural society, will not any longer provide space for a large spectrum of religious and political positions. It will be obvious that such generosity will involve grave, self-destructive contradictions. Therefore, many will think that "Our Values" must be enforced.

The Crowded Center

Now let us return to the Swedish situation, after having indulged in some speculation on the lofty issues of world history, and see how these principles are active in my home country.

The post Cold War development of Sweden very much followed the liberal optimistic pattern. The old parties already established in parliament all assembled in the ideological middle. When governments changed, not much in the manner of politics changed, there was merely a different emphasis in the relation between the free market and state control.

The old "conservative" party with the very Swedish name, the moderates, even renamed itself as the New Moderates in 2005, and left all remaining residues of value conservatism behind and even aspired to be the new working class party.

There was thus a large vacuum to the right in Swedish politics, while to the left, the old communist party, The Left (previously, The Left Party, the Communists) was still present in parliament as a support party to the Social Democrats together with the Green Party.



Stress Test: Mass Immigration

However, the increasingly visible and noisy elephant in the Swedish IKEA living room was, of course, the question of mass immigration. In the election campaign of 2014, the center right government went to the ballots on the promise of, more or less, open borders to refugees. The Prime Minister, Fredrik Reinfeldt, of the New Moderates held an important election speech named “Open Your Hearts,” in which he appealed to the Swedish people to open their hearts and welcome those who were fleeing from oppression. He wanted the Swedes to show tolerance, he said, but added that it would carry an economic cost.

In the previous election of 2010, the Sweden Democrats, a nationalist party, obsessively focused on limiting immigration, and accused of racism by the other parties, had gained nearly 6 percent of the votes. There was thus a growing threat to the consensus: an alternative had appeared for those dissatisfied with the status quo.

To the disappointment of the prime minister, not all Swedish hearts were open to mass immigration. The result of the election was that the four parties of the center right coalition could not govern on their own, but only with the support of the Sweden Democrats, who increased their share of the votes to 13 (12.9) percent.^{xi} Instead of changing party policy, and risk being called a racist, or a collaborator of fascists, Reinfeldt decided to resign and let the socialist coalition form government.

The left wing parties had the same politics of Open Hearts, so, again, change of government did not mean change of policy, but the next year the social systems were overwhelmed by the extreme number of persons (163 000) arriving in Sweden applying for asylum.^{xii} To prevent a collapse, the government was forced to more or less close the borders, to introduce once again passport controls and make it more difficult, for example, to get a permanent residence permit.

The Liberal Neurosis

The U-turn of the Left government in relation to immigration came with an ideological price, which we have not seen the full results of yet. One of the two party leaders of the Greens actually cried on television because of this hardness of heart now being policy. And later she had to resign.^{xiii}

The Green party faced another interconnected crisis as it also became apparent that in its eagerness to counteract islamophobia, it had let into the party persons who perhaps did not share its feminist and pacifist values. That crisis exploded after one of the Green ministers of the government, Mehmet Kaplan, had to resign as he had been seen dining with members of a Sunni Muslim, Turkish, terrorist organization, the Grey Wolves, and as he some years earlier had been caught on video comparing the treatment of Palestinians with that of the Jews in Germany in the 1930s.^{xiv}



Only two days later one of the candidates to the party committee, Yasri Khan, leader for the organization Swedish Muslims for Peace and Justice, said that he did not want to shake hands with women, and was, therefore, forced to withdraw his candidature.^{xv} Interestingly, he argued that how to greet a person was a personal choice, and added, "In a liberal society one should be allowed to choose such things."^{xvi} Thus, either Sweden was not a liberal society, or Khan's idea of a liberal society was faulty.

The incident is only one among many in Sweden signaling that the individual freedom promised by liberalism has reached a dead end. Somehow, substantial values has to be introduced (Our Values) as mandatory, if one is to avoid the opposite of emancipation. Freedom has, then, come into conflict with the principle of non-discrimination. There are handshakers and non-handshakers: only the former can enjoy a political career.

Enforced Emancipation

Looking deeper into the crystal ball, I see a future development where nationalists like the Sweden Democrats and liberals join forces. For liberals the emancipatory project will prove to be more important than the principle of individual freedom. If necessary, force and coercion will be used to ensure "freedom." Otherwise, freedom of religion and freedom of expression will lead to the end of liberalism itself. The main foe of this united front of liberalism and nationalism will be Islam, but also all illiberal forms of Christianity. Laws and regulations will equally apply to both.

One example in Sweden is two recent suggestions by Jan Björklund, the party leader of the liberal party. First, he said that the Sweden Democrats should be allowed to be present when the government invites the opposition parties to discussions across the political divide of left and right. Second, he said that no more religious schools should be allowed to start and those already functioning should not be allowed to expand. Because, he argued, many newly arrived immigrant children come from countries with a totally different view on equality, imbued with patriarchal values according to which men are considered superior to women.^{xvii}

It seems that some conservatives in their fear of Islam will join this camp as well; one hint of this can be found in Roger Scruton's latest book, *How to be a Conservative*, in which he insists on the secularization principle, and, at the same time, on the value of the Christian heritage of the West.^{xviii} This points to the central place of liberal values in his form of conservatism, and he thus has to suffer the liberal "neurosis" as well. You cannot nurture the heritage of Christendom at the level of society and at the same time apply a strict principle of secularization. In the case of Scruton, it leads to a kind of tragic pathos, through which he helplessly sees the old world melt away, symbolized by the Anglican Church. I have great sympathy for his stance, for example, to preserve beauty and further the organic growth of society, but it seems too weak in its principles: doomed to inevitable decline.



Two Dying Civilizations

To the dynamics of liberal self-contradiction, I think we need to add another perspective, namely that of civilizational decline and collapse. Taking my cue from David P. Goldman's book *How Civilizations Die (And why Islam is dying too)*, I see the situation of mass immigration into Europe as the interlocking of two dying civilizations.^{xix} Besides the ideological contradiction at the heart of the secular West, there is also the social disruption caused by extreme low birthrates. Europe is like a giant low-pressure system sucking people into its territory. When as in Italy and Germany the birthrate is around 1.3 births for each woman, the social system is not self-sustainable, and this applies to the whole of Western civilization, in varying degrees.

But the Muslim civilization is going through a similar development, which involves a tension between statehood and the claims of religion, resulting in a number of failed states, but also demographic problems. In countries like Turkey there have been a dramatic drop in birth rate from around 6 children for each woman in 1960 to close to 2 presently, while Syria have gone from over 7 to around 3; and Iran has dropped from 7 to 1.7.^{xx}

The West due to its unsustainable birth rates have to import people, which it still can do due to failing Muslim states and a higher degree of living standard in the West. The result is two civilizations interlocked as dying galaxies where one by its greater mass is sucking the suns and planets from the other.

This interconnection and movement across borders will lead to that the civilizational fault lines will run like cracks in a dried out river bed, crisscrossing national and local borders, creating small islands of communities at best, rather than opposing continents as Huntington imagined them.

The End of Neutrality

To sum up, by using Sweden as a test case, we can see that the internal contradictions between freedom and emancipation within the liberal-socialist consensus is giving birth to a new totalitarian framework in which opposition or critique of emancipation is not tolerated. The new normal in the face of increasing ideological diversity brought about by mass immigration is a harder insistence on Our Values and Our Way of Life and their implementation — according to the principle, “Do not be so tolerant that you tolerate the intolerant,” as it says in my youngest son's school calendar.

At the moment, there is still some hesitation and we can see absurd and wavering reactions, for example, at a recent international book fair in Sweden on the theme of freedom of speech. The organizers first included a right wing publisher, then after critique threw them out, and then allowed them back again.^{xxi} Several persons insisted on that the views of the publisher in question were not to be represented at an event focused on freedom of expression. The contradiction could not have been any clearer. Freedom only applies to



acceptable views. But who decides where the limit of acceptability is to be drawn?

This means that there will eventually be no “neutral” space for traditional religions in which to cultivate their alternative worldviews. In fact that neutrality, and with it the limit between private and public, was an illusion, a mere temporary overlap between the core values of modernity and that of the Christian religion. With increasing de-Christianization and simultaneous radicalization of the ideal of the emancipated individual that overlap is fast disappearing.

Traditional religions face a fundamental choice. Either one embraces the evolving modernist ideal of emancipation and become one of the forces for “freedom,” or, one chooses to put forward another ideal of human fulfilment for the whole of society, for example, a Christian model of sanctity, or a Muslim ideal of religious submission, and face the consequences.

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ⁱ WiN and Gallup International, “End of year 2014, Sweden,” accessed October 11, 2016, www.wingia.com/web/files/richeditor/filemanager/Sweden_Tables_V3_a.pdf. In another poll, part of the World Value Survey, 78 percent of people below 29 years old considered religion as either not at all important (51%) or not very important (27%). Only 6 percent considered religion very important. “F00001433-WV6_Results_Sweden_2011_v_2016_01_01.pdf,” last updated January 1, 2016, www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV6.jsp.

ⁱⁱ International Business Publications, Croatia Country Study Guide, Vol. 1, Strategic Information and Developments (Washington, 2013), 47.

ⁱⁱⁱ World Value Survey, “Cultural Map WVS6, 2015,” accessed October 11, 2016, www.worldvaluessurvey.org/images/Cultural_map_WVS6_2015.jpg.

^{iv} Nämnden för Statligt Stöd till Trossamfund, “Statistik 2012,” accessed October 11, 2016, www.sst.a.se/statistik/statistik2012.4.524fbdf71429b7641b72f86.html.

^v Samuel Teglund, “Färre frikyrkor men stark tillväxt i storstäder” *Världen Idag*, June 17, 2016.

^{vi} “Svenska kyrkans medlemsutveckling år 1972-2014,” Svenska Kyrkan, accessed October 11, 2016, www.svenskakyrkan.se/default.aspx?id=1470789.

^{vii} Jan Strid, “Tro, religion och kyrkobesök i Göteborg,” in *En region för alla? Medborgare, människor och medier i Västsverige*, eds. Annika Bergström & Jonas Ohlsson (Göteborg: Göteborgs Universitet SOM-institutet, 2013), 219.

^{viii} Francis Fukuyama, *The End of history and the Last Man* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1992).

^{ix} His thesis was first published put forward in a 1993 article, which in 1996 was expanded into the book, Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).



^x See, e.g., a recent Swedish Ph.D. thesis in History of Religion, Per Faxneld, *Satanic feminism: Lucifer as the Liberator of Woman in Nineteenth-century Culture*, Diss. University of Stockholm (Stockholm: Molin & Sorgenfrei, 2014).

^{xi} "2014 Val till riksdagen – Röster" Valmyndigheten, accessed October 11, 2016, www.val.se/val/val2014/slutresultat/R/rike/index.html. In recent polls (2016) they have around 17 to 18 percent of the voters. Demoskop, "Ny högstanivå - Centerpartiets högsta sedan 2006," last updated October 10, 2016, www.demoskop.se/publicerat/ny-hogstaniva-centerpartiets-hogsta-sedan-2006/#text.

^{xii} Almost all came from Muslim majority countries. "Det stora antalet asylsökande under 2015 ökade inte flyktinginvandringen nämnvärt," Statistiska Centralbyrån, last updated March 18, 2016, www.scb.se/sv/_/Hitta-statistik/Statistik-efter-amne/Befolkning/Befolkningens-sammansattning/Befolkningsstatistik/25788/25795/Behallare-for-Press/400370. The same year, those born outside of Sweden, or whose both parents were born outside of Sweden, constituted 2.2 million persons of a population of almost ten million. This is a rise with one million since 2000. "Befolkningsstatistik i sammandrag 1960-2015," Statistiska Centralbyrån, last updated August 17, 2016, www.scb.se/sv/_/Hitta-statistik/Statistik-efter-amne/Befolkning/Befolkningens-sammansattning/Befolkningsstatistik/25788/25795/Helarsstatistik---Riket/26040.

^{xiii} Hans Rosén, "Åsa Romson avgår ur regeringen" Dagens Nyheter, last updated May 9, 2016, www.dn.se/nyheter/politik/asa-romson-avgar-ur-regeringen.

^{xiv} Hans Rosén, "Bostadsminister Mehmet Kaplan (MP) avgår, Dagens Nyheter, last updated April 18, 2016, www.dn.se/nyheter/sverige/bostadsminister-mehmet-kaplan-mp-avgar.

^{xv} Lina Lund, "Yasri Khan (MP) ville inte ta kvinnor i hand – tar tillbaka kandidatur," Dagens Nyheter, last updated April 20, 2016, www.dn.se/nyheter/politik/yasri-khan-mp-ville-inte-ta-kvinnor-i-hand-tar-tillbaka-kandidatur.

^{xvi} Ibid.

^{xvii} "Liberalerna vill sätta stopp för religiösa friskolor," last updated September 11, 2016, www.dn.se/nyheter/politik/liberalerna-vill-satta-stopp-for-religiosa-friskolor.

^{xviii} Roger Scruton, *How to be a Conservative* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2014).

^{xix} David P. Goldman, *How Civilizations Die: And why Islam is Dying too* (Washington, D.C.:Regnery Publishing, 2011)

^{xx} "Fertility Rate, total (Births per Woman." The World Bank, accessed October 11, 2016, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN>.

^{xxi} Maria-Elena Zelaya, "Bokmässan ändrar sig – Nya tider får vara med" SVT Nyheter Väst, last updated August 31, 2016.

