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Systematic Theology in the Nordic Countries after 1945

Jan-Olav Henriksen

Christian systematic theologies in the Nordic countries share common traits in terms of their Lutheran heritage and the close relationship between church and state ('folk-church') organizations that have dominated church life and theological reasoning up until the present. Although international exchange and dialogue further afield have increased over recent decades, the influence of Luther, Kierkegaard, and Grundtvig, as well as Løgstrup and Wingren are still prominent. Systematic theology is understood here in a broad sense: comprising dogmatics, ethics, and philosophy of religion. The lines that separate these disciplines are relatively porous in the Nordic context.

This article presents the distinguishing features that characterize contemporary systematic theology in the Nordic countries. Firstly, the theological ideas and work emerging from after 1945 will be explored, mainly focusing on some influential theologians. This sketch is followed by a discussion of two original contributions from Nordic theology: Scandinavian Creation Theology and the Finnish Luther interpretation. The last part gives a brief overview of selected contemporary theologians in the different countries and their fundamental orientations.

Keywords: Christian theology, Systematic theology, Lutheranism, Creation, Ecumenism, Philosophy of religion, Secularization, Confessionalism, Folk-churches, Science and theology

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1 Common traits of systematic theologies in the Nordic countries

All the Nordic countries (Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Iceland) share similarities when it comes to historical, political, and religious elements. All of them have also been shaped by the post-Second World War social-democratic political system, in which welfare states were built to secure the basic needs of all inhabitants. As a consequence, education at the university level has been, and still is, free for students in all Nordic countries. Moreover, Lutheranism has been the majority religion, and it has also, up until recently, been the denomination supported (and some would also say favoured) by the state. Despite the disestablishment of the Lutheran State Church in Sweden and Norway after the turn of the millennium, all countries remain influenced by this majority church, which serves as a reference for religious life and religious education. Most significantly, in Denmark, the Lutheran Church remains a national stronghold for religion. Other denominations and religious traditions must pay heed to these so-called 'folk-churches' (folkekirker), due to their dominance within the religious landscape of the Nordic societies.

In all the Nordic countries, theological studies and research are situated predominantly in state-funded universities. To the extent that such studies and research also exist outside the context of established universities, the institutions in question are nevertheless mainly designed based on the patterns that the central universities represent. For example, the Stockholm School of Theology, MF Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society in Oslo, and VID University College in Stavanger. Smaller institutions, of which some are linked to non-Lutheran denominations, need to meet the government's criteria to receive support from the government. This applies, for example, for some of the schools set up by mission societies in Norway and Denmark.

Against this backdrop, close relationships with the state and the dominant folk-churches provide the context for much of the theological studies and research in the Nordic countries. However, the churches do not influence the content of studies and research in terms of dictating directions or setting standards for curriculum. The institutions in question consider themselves independent and see such independence as a vital requirement for academic freedom. This fact notwithstanding, the theological institutions are nevertheless dependent upon the churches' recognition of their candidates as suitable for church ministry.

Disputes about academic freedom, the confessional character of theological studies and research, and the adherence of theological teachers to a specific denomination (or none)

have nevertheless occasionally emerged within these institutions and in their relation to the wider society, in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden.

Due to its predominantly Lutheran heritage, theological education in the Nordic countries has been chiefly based on the German education system, leading to a comprehensive, six-year period of theological studies (in Sweden and Finland somewhat shorter). After the Bologna Agreement concerning university education in Europe, the differences regarding study design have decreased, making student mobility easier. Whereas previously the link to Germany was very strong and impacted theological research, since the millennium it is possible to detect a change in orientation towards research connections increasingly more oriented towards the UK and the US.

The orientation towards other continents than Europe can be interpreted as a move away from the solid Lutheran features that have dominated Nordic theology for centuries. It points to a situation where confessional pluralism, or even a post-confessional situation, increasingly shapes theological studies and research. This fact does not mean that confessional contexts are left behind or ignored, but they do not restrict students and scholars from seeking insights from other contexts and denominations than their own.

Added to the post-confessional traits of current theological research based on Christianity, is the introduction of Islamic theology into the theological faculties in Copenhagen, Oslo, and Uppsala. This development signals that religious pluralism in Europe impacts institutions that traditionally have been carriers of Christian theology.

The impression that Lutheranism strongly shapes Nordic theology cannot be avoided. However, it is possible to find a more nuanced picture behind this surface: Lutheranism comes in many forms, and the influences of revivalism, mission, immigration, and emigration have also contributed to shaping the Nordic theological scene. So has the presence of other denominations, such as Roman Catholicism, Pentecostalism, Covenant churches, and left wing Reformation churches. Many of these denominations have established their own theological schools. They do not shape the main features of contemporary Nordic theology but have introduced other voices into the theological discourse. The increased international connections have also implied that Nordic scholars in systematic theology have taken up positions in the US, such as Kirsi Stjerna, Linn Tonstad, and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen.

Since the 1970s, increased awareness of contextual conditions for theology has been enhanced by theological training in hermeneutics. The hermeneutical turn in theology cannot be underestimated, and it has meant that many students of theology have become aware of the limitations of their own background and upbringing during their studies, with the concomitant criticism of traditional views. The influence of the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricœur can be traced in a long list of contemporary

systematic theologians in the Nordic countries, among which some are mentioned below. Recent theological developments related to contextual theologies, liberation theology, feminist theologies, and queer theologies can also be found in contemporary theological scholarship, but they do not, so far, dominate, although their influence is growing. Partly, these developments are caused by the increased presence of female scholars and the expanded chances for mobility and communication over the last decades.

Tensions among theological institutions are not uncommon in the Nordic countries – as in many other countries. Today, they are mostly seen as productive, and they imply that the different institutions need to consider their specific specialties and expertise to promote themselves with a specific identity. The only country where this is not the case is Iceland, with only one university faculty of theology. In Finland, the Joensuu, Åbo, and Helsinki universities have developed different theological profiles, as have Uppsala and Lund in Sweden. In Denmark, the establishment of theology at Aarhus University in 1928 meant that theology in Copenhagen found a competitor. In Oslo, a controversy around the Oslo University's theological faculty at the beginning of the twentieth century led to the establishment of what is now called the MF Norwegian School of Theology, Religion, and Society. Most of these institutions' profiles have changed considerably since 1945. Hence, understanding theology in Copenhagen, Uppsala, or MF/Oslo based on their former identities will prove insufficient for a contemporary assessment.

Another tension that should be mentioned, but which to a large extent is covered up by the fact that many theological institutions now have names that merge theology and religion, is exactly the tension between theology and religious studies. To some extent, this tension articulates how systematic theology is articulated and how one develops a more thorough understanding of theology as a scholarly discipline.

2 Shadows from the past

2.1 Fundamental features and orientations

Three names stand forth as important for understanding the intellectual context of Nordic theology after 1945: Martin Luther, Søren Kierkegaard, and Nikolai F. S. Grundtvig. They each provide essential resources and points of orientation for most of the major influential figures in present-day Nordic theology. The work of these three foundational theologians cannot be presented in detail here, but some of their influence can be traced in many theologians that still contribute to Nordic theology.

Martin Luther's theology has been influential in all the Nordic countries. The fact that the established churches have been Lutheran has, of course, contributed to Luther's lasting impact. The elements in Luther that more recent theologians have developed have nevertheless varied considerably: the notion of *theosis* (the deification of the

human being) in Finnish interpretations of Luther are somewhat different from receptions of Luther that emphasize his theology of creation; the strongly German-influenced Luther scholarship in Denmark and Norway; or the uses of Luther to solidify a strong confessionalist position expressing Lutheran orthodoxy in Finland, Norway, and Iceland. Regardless of these differences, references to Luther continue to play an important role in Nordic theology, and often, his normative authority for theological claims goes more or less unquestioned. Nevertheless, Luther scholarship is more rarely found today, with the exception of Denmark and Helsinki, where it still continues to flourish. This may partly be due to the decreasing knowledge of German and Latin among students.

Søren Kierkegaard's influence on Nordic theology started not long after his death in 1855. Kierkegaard's impact is especially strong in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. The establishment of the Søren Kierkegaard Research Center in Copenhagen in 1998 has contributed to the enduring influence and internationalization of Kierkegaard research, thereby continuing his role as a major influence on Protestant theology in the twentieth century. Kierkegaard's criticism of the religious establishment, as well as his profound analyses of human existence, are among the elements of his thought that have proved to be important sources for different religious groups and discourses in the Nordic countries – from the more pietist groups to contemporary discussions in the international context of the philosophy of religion. Unlike Luther, Kierkegaard is not an authority for everyone – but he remains an essential source for the theologians who recognize his contributions and engage in research on his work.

Nikolai F. S. Grundtvig (1783–1872), theologian, educator, politician, and hymn composer, is among the forebears for what will be discussed below under the heading of Scandinavian Creation Theology (see section 3). Grundtvig's dictum, 'Human first – then a Christian', captures his affirmation of ordinary human life as the basis and context for Christian life. Grundtvig served as an important mediator between Luther and modernity because of his appreciation of human capacity, societal development, and nation building. His life-affirming attitude and universal intellect made him open to various Christian denominations as well as people with other beliefs. His theology was based on a trinitarian approach that had an incarnational focus. His affirmation of creation as good and his recognition of humanity made him see divine redemption in the light of God's work in creation. Thus, his theology is a vital alternative to the pietist trends that have dominated Nordic church life, and his positive assessment of culture and broad education has made him an ally for those theologians who could not identify with the pietist or revivalist movements. Like Kierkegaard, Grundtvig is not held as an authority for everyone, but he remains an essential source for the theologians who recognize his contributions. Grundtvig has not had the same international reception as Kierkegaard, but he has been very influential in his home country, far beyond the church context.

If we move from these three influential ancestors of Nordic theology to influences closer to the present time, a nuanced picture emerges: Nordic theology was somewhat impacted by the emergence of dialectical theology in the first half of the twentieth century. Although Rudolf Bultmann did not find a large audience in the Nordic countries, he was widely read and discussed among New Testament scholars and systematic theologians. The direct and indirect influence of Karl Barth can be traced more clearly in systematic theology; in Denmark, Regin Prenter (see [section 2.4](#)) went through a Barthian period, and the professor of dogmatics in Oslo in the 1960s, Reidar Hauge, was also influenced by Barth. Traces of dialectical (or diastatic) thinking that seem structurally similar to traits in Barthian theology can also be identified in the theologically conservative Leiv Aalen and Aksel Valen-Sendstad, both active in the post-war period.

The ‘father’ of the ecumenical orientation in Nordic theology was Nathan Söderblom, whose work proved crucial for the legitimacy of such engagement in all the Nordic countries. Söderblom’s call on Christian leaders to work for peace and justice and church unity was built on the conviction that Christianity can remain a vital influence on modern social life. As leader of the ‘Life and Work’ movement in the 1920s, he was one of the founders of the ecumenical movement. Many followed in his footsteps as ecumenically engaged, such as Per Erik Persson (Lund), Anna Marie Aagaard (Aarhus, also vice-president of the World Council of Churches), Carl-Henric Grenholm (Uppsala), Risto Saarinen (Helsinki), and Torleiv Austad (Oslo), to mention only a few. Moreover, Olav Fykse Tveit, who holds a doctorate in ecumenical theology from MF/Oslo, served as the General Secretary of WCC in the period 2012–2020.

Anders Nygren and Gustaf Aulén both belonged to the Lundensian school of theology (see [section 6.3](#)). They were important theologians in the middle of the twentieth century. Internationally, Aulén’s work is better known than Nygren’s, as Aulén became internationally recognized with the books *Christus Victor* (English, 1931) and *The Faith of the Christian Church* (English, 1948). Nygren’s influence was mainly by his *Agape and Eros* (English, 1932–1939). Few of his books have been translated into English. Nygren’s work is wide-ranging, however, and includes contributions to the philosophy of religion. Aulén and Nygren both served as bishops in the Church of Sweden after their academic careers but continued their theological work nevertheless. They were also involved in ecumenical work.

The so-called Lundensian school had a shared focus on the typological approach to religions, emphasizing the uniqueness of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ, the view of history as God’s continuous revelation, and the rejection of the possibility of metaphysics. Its main method, developed predominantly by Nygren, was searching for enduring motifs

in Christianity. By determining such motifs, the specific character of the religion can be determined. A motif represents

the basic conception, the driving and unifying force of a religion [...] Although these basic conceptions are historically given, the task of determining them is not only a genetic-historical question, but also and primarily a systematic issue of showing the driving and unifying motifs of, in this case, Christianity. (Rasmusson 2007: 134)

The emphasis on determining the specific character of Christianity compared to other religions corresponded with the central role of ecclesiology. Moreover, the Lundensian school was part of the renewal of Luther studies influenced by Ritschl and his followers, due significantly to the fact that in Sweden, Luther's theological authority went unquestioned. Some influence of dialectical theology can also be traced, for example, in Nygren's contrasting of the twin concepts of *eros* and *agape* (self-oriented and unconditional love, respectively). One element in the Lundensian approach to theology is an important backdrop to the development of Swedish theology after the First World War: for both Aulén and Nygren, the object of theology is not God, but the Christian idea of God. It entails a critical stance against idealist metaphysics and focuses instead on the systematic study of the idea of God in Christianity's history.

2.2 Knud E. Løgstrup – a past presence

After the Second World War, one of the most original theologians in the Nordic countries was the Danish theologian and philosopher of religion, Knud E. Løgstrup. Løgstrup has influenced all the traditional branches of systematic theology. However, his impact can be traced especially in ethics and the philosophy of religion. He is usually considered one of the founding fathers of the so-called Scandinavian theology of creation (see [section 3](#)). Løgstrup studied phenomenology in the 1930s and became a professor at the new Aarhus University in 1943. Here he worked until his retirement in 1975. The influence of phenomenology on his thinking can be seen in how he analyses different traits and features in human existence and relates them to what he sees as the fundamental condition of the Christian message. Sometimes the emphasis he put on phenomenological analysis made him appear more secular in tone than other theologians of his times, and these analyses also sometimes led to creative tensions with theology. However, they also helped 'facilitate a broad reception of his ideas both within and outside theology' (Gregersen 2017: 37). A main element in his work is the distinction between the universal and the particular dimensions of the Christian [faith](#), which he developed due to his fundamental phenomenological orientation. Løgstrup has inspired theologians in all the Nordic countries, and his work has, and continues to be, received by philosophers and ethicists as well. Løgstrup inspired Ole Jensen, who wrote the first contributions to [ecotheology](#) in the Nordic countries. Later on, several other Nordic scholars have followed

suit in terms of developing ecological theology (including Sigurd Bergmann, Roald Kristiansen, et al.).

Løgstrup's main theological influences were Grundtvig and Luther, and his theological front was directed against Kant and Kierkegaard. His philosophical debts were to phenomenology philosophers Martin Heidegger and Hans Lipps.

Løgstrup's public breakthrough – something not every theologian experiences – came with the publication of *The Ethical Demand* (1956). The book interprets the religious and ethical teachings of Jesus in 'strictly human terms', based on an analysis of the phenomenon of *trust*. This work was followed up by other works that contributed further to Løgstrup's coining of his ethics as ontological, that is, as grounded in and receiving its content from the fact that humans are embedded in conditions existing prior to themselves, given their coexistence with other humans. Thereby, he criticizes Kant's understanding of practical reason as the source of ethics and freedom, as well as existentialist and teleological versions of ethics. He also levels criticism against Kierkegaard, for whom the ethical situation is constituted 'only by virtue of the human decision to follow the divine command' (Gregersen 2017: 42). Consequently, a person never has anything to do with another person without holding something of the other person's life in his or her hand (cf. Løgstrup 1997: 22). Human flourishing is dependent on our interaction with others, and this dynamic ontological situation is the source of ethical responsibility. Moreover, responsibility cannot be adequately understood unless one considers fundamental phenomena such as vulnerability and power. Accordingly, it is not possible to maintain a sharp distinction between the normative and the descriptive dimension. Løgstrup finds a theological ally in Luther for substantiating his interpretation of the ethical demand. By relying on an interpretation of Luther as an advocate of the natural law, he argues that the divine law is not based on conscience only but also on the inter-human situation in which humans find themselves.

Løgstrup's views on ethics stirred opposition from conservative theologians who held firmly that the main source of ethics was the Bible. Although their criticism on this point appears misguided in light of Løgstrup's arguments, it testifies to how Løgstrup's thinking represented an alternative to dialectic theology's negative view of human existence, which could also be found in biblicist and revival-based conservative theology in the Nordic countries. Løgstrup's more positive understanding of the human condition sees it as not determined exclusively by human sinfulness. His work in the 1960s followed the initial phenomenological approach in *The Ethical Demand*, and he coined the expression 'sovereign life-expressions' to describe phenomena that manifests life and impacts humans prior to their reflection and agency. Examples of such life expressions are trust, the openness of speech, and mercy. These appear prior to any reflection or decision, and provide the actual content of the ethical demand. Løgstrup sees these as a result of God's

continuous creation that breaks through and counters the innate human tendencies to selfishness and sin. The moral dimension of sin is linked to how humans ignore the innate call in these life expressions.

An indication of how phenomenological analysis and theological interpretation work together in Løgstrup's thought is found in his mature formulation of the ethical demand. Here, he develops the complex intertwinement of theological notions about God's work in creation and sin with the phenomenological analysis of the sovereign life expressions:

The demand is unfillable, the sovereign expression of life is not produced by the will's exerting itself to obey the demand. The sovereign expression of life is indeed realized, but spontaneously, without being demanded. The demand makes itself felt when the sovereign expression of life fails, but without endangering the latter; the demand demands that it be itself superfluous. The demand is the correlate of sin; the sovereign expression of life is that of freedom. (Løgstrup 2007: 69)

Løgstrup's analysis of the sovereign life expressions allows him to argue that they suggest a religious interpretation. This move makes visible that Løgstrup's line of reasoning goes from analysis of shared or universal phenomena contained in human existence (utilizing phenomenology) via an argument for their inherent openness to a religious interpretation, and ending in a specific interpretation developed by employing resources in the Christian tradition, especially as these are accessible in Luther and Grundtvig. The phenomena on which the religious interpretation relies and to which they are related do not depend upon this interpretation for their existence and they do not disappear if the interpretation is rejected.

Løgstrup's active use of Luther and other theological thinkers makes it hard to substantiate a criticism of his work as mere natural theology: instead, it is giving the contents of Christian faith a more comprehensive grounding than one has when it is only based on faith in the proclamation of the gospel. Perhaps the main contribution of Løgstrup is that he makes it possible to realize that Christianity is a fundamental interpretation of the conditions for human existence and experience.

Løgstrup's influence on Nordic theology in the twentieth century onwards cannot be underestimated. His influence is due to the creativity and originality of his work, which entails a vital rejection of a mere secularist understanding of human existence. But his impact has also restricted the appropriation of other positions that have been dominant in contemporary theology. Only recently are there traces that show how his work corresponds with, or can be related to, the international discourse.

2.3 Gustaf Wingren – the alternative to the Lundensian school

Gustaf Wingren (1910–2000, professor in Lund 1951–1977) followed Anders Nygren as professor of systematic theology. His theology draws on different sources, including biblical texts, Luther's theology, and the work of Irenaeus of Lyon. In his work, Wingren does not occupy himself with philosophical questions but is concerned with how the Christian message can be given a contemporary and relevant interpretation. Like Løgstrup, he was often involved in theological controversies. His work is marked by existential rigour, and he did not have much positive to say about mere historical work. Accordingly, he also departed from the Lundensian school of theology by basing theology on contextual, dynamic, and changeable elements that stood in sharp contrast to the historical descriptions in Lundensian motif research, which Nygren had hoped could determine the unchangeable and pure nature of Christianity (cf. Uggla 2017a: 50).

It has been argued that Wingren's work can be divided into two main periods, with his thinking undergoing a significant change from the 1970s onward. His first period of work was primarily undertaken in the academic sphere. However, he later developed theology that more explicitly entailed a critique of the given social context. Against the backdrop of this change, his later works can be interpreted as 'creative revisitations and recontextualizations of the theological system he had actually completed already by 1960' (Uggla 2017a: 28). Wingren was a prolific writer, producing historical studies, systematic theology, considerations on methods and hermeneutics, and more. His theology also contains polemics against Lutheran orthodoxy, Sweden's high-church movement, and resistance to the ordination of women, as well as revivalist movements and Pietism.

Wingren became increasingly critical of his teacher, Nygren. The reasons for his criticism had to do with Nygren's method (stated as late as 1972 in *Meaning and Method: Prolegomena to a Scientific Philosophy of Religion and Scientific Theology*), as well as the consequences his theology had by focusing on the distinctiveness of the Christian faith (see Wingren's *Theology in Conflict: Nygren, Barth, Bultmann*, 1958). Nygren's focus separated this faith from the conditions shared by all. In Wingren's view, this meant a reduction and a deformation of the Christian faith. His alternative, which also shows why he can be considered another father of the Scandinavian Creation theology, aims at overcoming an exclusively christocentric and ecclesiocentric theology, of which he sees Nygren's agape theology as an exponent.

The basis for Wingren's theology is his understanding of the universal presence of God's life and love, creation and law, as they can be experienced in ordinary human conditions. He finds in Luther and Irenaeus sources that help him articulate these fundamental theological concerns. Against this backdrop, he develops his theological alternative, in which the universal presence of God's love is manifested in various human relationships, and not exclusively in the agapeic love Jesus represents. 'Christ is, according to Wingren,

not recognized as the beginning of God's relationship with the world, but the continuation of this love affair. The human life which is restored in Christ, is the same human life which Adam lost' (Uggla 2017b: 92).

Wingren's theological project articulates Christian faith in a way that includes 'that which unites the Christian view of life with basic realities shared by all human beings' (Uggla 2017b: 99). Accordingly, a central element in his project became the need to develop a theological anthropology that interprets how God is at work under the conditions of human existence. This cannot be done if one only points to the original or unique in the Christian message (as Nygren did). But it does not entail that one ignores the darker sides of human existence, either. Wingren's anthropology confronts both the anthropocentrism and what he saw as self-glorification of liberal theology, and Barth's 'anthropoclasm and rejection of human achievement' (Uggla 2017b: 97). In a summary of Wingren's theology, Bengt Kristensson Uggla writes:

There are of course unique elements within the Christian faith, but a prerequisite for embracing these elements is that the universally human be articulated and taken seriously first. The relation of the Christian faith to God's creation is not a matter of an external relationship that must be established outwardly to something outside this faith, but rather of an integral part of Christian faith itself. Against this background, Wingren claimed that any attempt to identify opposite pairs of human versus Christian, anthropology versus Christology, creation versus salvation, the world versus the church, will obscure, if not outright eliminate and destroy, a Christian view of faith and life. (Uggla 2017b: 99)

Wingren's dissertation on the topic of vocation in Luther's theology interprets everyday work and tribulations as an expression of the activity of God. God acts anonymously behind creaturely masks. By identifying everyday work as being acts of God, mundane tasks can be interpreted as associated with *nomos* (law) and *eros* (self-oriented love), and not exclusively with *agape* (unconditional love). This interpretation entails an alternative to seeing Luther as a representative of the isolated *agape* love, which was the centre of Nygren's Luther interpretation. The anti-pietistic strain present in Wingren's presentation of Luther points to 'Luther's theological delight in everyday labor, dance, beer, sexual intercourse, and children, based on the conviction that the given, ordinary human community in creation, together with nature as well as work, are portions of God's world' (Uggla 2017a: 91). Accordingly, a theological understanding of vocation is not tied specifically to spiritual tasks.

In *Creation and Law* (2003) and *Gospel and Church* (published in English in 1964), Wingren presents the main elements of his dogmatics. These works present an exposition of the Christian faith as based in the concrete and experienced reality of humans. Wingren underscores that God acts through material bodies and how God is present in the encounters with the ethical demands of the other in everyday life. The titles of these

two main works reveal the four organizing concepts that structure Wingren's systematic theology: creation, law, gospel, and church. In addition to these, the Irenean concept of *recapitulation* plays a vital role in his systematic thinking.

Wingren's ethics follows the pattern described above: his ethical work is anchored in concrete human life and avoids theoretization. Ugglå states that according to Wingren,

ethics is in general not something that can be retrieved from the Bible but is instead based on the anonymous 'letter of demand' containing the concrete needs of the other. Ethics is thus not a matter of some abstract basic motif, but is instead written in the concrete face we encounter in each meeting with the other. (Ugglå 2017a: 149)

Moreover,

God's hidden work in creation is, so to speak, the source of the law – the law is not an effect of ecclesiastic proclamation. Not taking the law seriously, as something already at work before the gospel enters the scene, has devastating consequences: 'For where it is denied that the world is God's world, the attempt is soon made to regulate it by some other "religious" standard.' (Ugglå 2017a: 150)

For Wingren, the notion of creation constitutes the necessary horizon for understanding the Christian message. Hence, it is misguided to determine the identity of the Christian faith by concentrating on its uniqueness. This point is strongly articulated in one of his most polemic books, *Theology in Conflict. Nygren, Barth, Bultmann* (1958). Here, Wingren expands the criticism against Nygren further, claiming that Nygren's focus on historical description ignores the gospel's relationship to the issue of guilt, and thereby, the question about redemption. He also argues against Nygren's interpretation of Marcion and of the Christian faith as timeless and unchanging. Barth and Bultmann are subjected to similar criticism. In Barth, the separation between God and humanity appears problematic and leads to a conception in which God is at war with humanity. Moreover, Barth also turns the question about revelation into a question about knowledge. Wingren's criticism of Bultmann targets his dependence on Heidegger. This dependence makes Bultmann unable to define death theologically as an enemy foreign to created human nature. All these theologians lack a sufficient understanding of the law and represent a moralistic understanding of the Bible, according to Wingren.

2.4 Regin Prenter – incarnational and sacramental ecumenism

Regin Prenter (1907–1990, professor in Aarhus 1945–1972) was a complex theological figure and perhaps the most influential dogmatics professor in the Nordic countries after the Second World War. He was inspired by Luther, Grundtvig, and Barth (which is a rather complex combination in itself) and engaged in international ecumenical

work. Unlike Løgstrup and Wingren, he did not support the participation of women in church ministry and had high-church sympathies. His main dogmatic work, *Creation and Redemption* (*Skabelse og Genløsning*; 1998 [first published 1967]) was published in several editions and has served as a textbook in many universities and seminars in the Nordic countries, and was translated into English, German, French, and Japanese. His theology is ecclesiocentric, oriented from liturgy, and thereby sacramental in shape. From a dogmatic point of view, all three articles of faith play a vital role in his theology. However, it was 'not soteriological particularism but created, experienced life revolving around worship, represents the vital centre of Prenter's thought' (Væрге-Pöder 2017: 86–87). In sacramental worship, God and humans are reunited, and the self-isolated creature is reconciled with its creator. Christine Svinth Væрге-Pöder summarizes Prenter's position well in this quote about the believer's appropriation of the reconciling work of Christ:

this reconciliation in sacrament and worship means participating in the reunification of the whole creation and the created life with the creator. And, this is how Prenter can speak of the sacramentality of the physical world. This is no triumphalistic glorification of the world overlooking its vulnerability, but means, to the contrary, integrating and acknowledging the vulnerability of the creaturely. (Væрге-Pöder 2017: 87)

Accordingly, Prenter was able to develop an interpretation of how creation in its actual mode is related to the cross of Christ. What makes him related to the Scandinavian creation theology (see [section 3](#)) is his emphasis on sacramental realism – a move that affirms the created world as included in and object of God's work for redemption.

3 Scandinavian Creation Theology (SCT)

Scandinavian Creation Theology (SCT) is the name for a group of theologians that share some common concerns (see Gregersen, Uggla, and Wyller 2017). They can be identified in two generations. First, the post-war generation, of which three important figures have already been explored (Løgstrup, Wingren, Prenter). Second, their pupils and followers; in Denmark, Svend Andersen, who held the chair for ethics and philosophy of religion in Aarhus for almost thirty years (1989–2018), and Theodor Jørgensen (Copenhagen); in Oslo, Svein Aage Christoffersen (1982–2017); and more recently Niels Henrik Gregersen and Jakob Wolf in Copenhagen, Bengt Kristensson Uggla in Åbo and Jan-Olav Henriksen, MF/Oslo. This list of Nordic theologians inspired by the concerns expressed in this movement could be expanded.

Although it can be claimed that these theologians, all of whom are Lutherans, take their point of departure in the doctrine of creation, they also root their theology in an analysis of fundamental features of human existence that are open to an interpretation informed and shaped by this doctrine. Thus, the doctrine of creation becomes a fundamental condition for understanding what Christian faith entails for understanding actual human existence.

The message about salvation and new life becomes intelligible against the backdrop that the doctrine of creation constitutes. However, SCT is not a theological system with a specific and clearly shaped programme, but represents shared concerns developed within different theological disciplines; it has made an impact on dogmatics, ethics and the philosophy of religion. Moreover, it has a firm root in a re-reading of Luther's theology, and in the creative work of Grundtvig.

With Luther and Grundtvig as allies, the front against which SCT articulated itself were especially existentialism and postliberal and dialectic theology. Because humans are already deeply embedded in God's continuous work with creation, an existentialist understanding of humans as able to shape their own lives by their own decisions is considered a misleading description of the already given conditions for human existence. They were also in agreement with the criticism against the idealist picture of Jesus in liberal theology. Accepting God's presence and action in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, they were nevertheless critical against dialectical theology's emphasis on Christology as a basis for theology because it ignored the basis in the given conditions in creation for Jesus' ministry. Thus, SCT represents a theological movement that is an alternative to both liberalism and anti-liberalism (cf. Uggla 2020: 131). It directs criticism against the anthropocentrism of liberal theology and transcendental idealism of neo-Kantianism. Wingren points to how dialectical theology, in his view, had similarities with Marcion in the attempt to identify the distinctively Christian by eliminating all that is linked to creation, including the anthropological preconditions for understanding the gospel. He found traces of these similarities in both Nygren and Barth. Especially in Løgstrup, but also for his student, Ole Jensen, a transcendental approach risks detaching the self and culture from the world and from nature.

Løgstrup, Prenter, and Wingren all shared an interest in Luther and used him as an important source, despite the fact that they also recognized his position as pre-modern. Typical is Løgstrup's statement that 'Darwin lies between Luther and us' (1995: 336). They found a key to a modern interpretation of Luther in Grundtvig's work. Nevertheless, their interests in using Luther as a source went in different directions; Prenter and Wingren were both interested in developing a viable account of Christian doctrine that focused on both ecclesiology and Christology. Their philosophical interests were not shaping their work as much as they shaped Løgstrup's. The latter, on the other hand, had less interest in ecclesiology. Uggla summarized their differences thus:

If Løgstrup can be said to be the one who offered the original inspiration for Scandinavian creation theology in general, which served as an impulse for both Prenter and Wingren, and if Prenter's journey, from an originally Barthian position via a 'Lutheran turn' to a well-grounded Grundtvigian position, discloses some of the most important sources for Scandinavian creation theology, Wingren was the one who provided the most extensive and consistent version of Scandinavian creation theology, incorporating not only biblical

and historical theology as well as systematic and practical theological perspectives, but also an embryonic political theology. (Uggla 2020: 131)

From an interpretation of the human experiences of God in the world, SCT develops a theology that aims at facing the challenges of modern 'irreligiosity' and tries to develop an interpretation of this life that shows not only how it is open to, but also most adequately interpreted by, Christian theology. The advantage of this approach is double: it does not assume from the outset some idea about revelation or faith in God, and it allows us to see the Christian faith as rooted in concrete historical experiences that are relevant to everyone and open for them to see. The outcome is, in turn, that this approach opens up to an understanding of God as manifested in the experiential realm of human life. Linking this position to one of the main claims in modern trinitarian thought, we can realize how the human experience of the phenomena visible as historical manifestations of the economic Trinity provide a basis for further considerations about the relations between the three persons in the Trinity. God has a history. Thus, SCT allows for a specific way of reading 'Rahner's rule', which says that the Economic Trinity is the Immanent Trinity and vice versa.

Seen at some distance, one can say that there is a specific and common theological concern behind many of the elements found in Wingren, Prenter, and Løgstrup, which they also share with theologians of the early church: that there is a close, internal connection and interrelatedness between God as Creator and the Kingdom revealed with and in Christ. There can be no dichotomy between God as Creator and as a redeemer. Hence, every attempt to separate experiences as reflected in philosophy from faith based in the advent of the kingdom must be rejected. The struggle between Irenaeus and Marcion plays out again in SCT's affirmation of the created world as an unavoidable and necessary part of the Christian message. This concern is clearly expressed even in the work of the most Barthian-influenced among them, Prenter. In his dogmatics, when he writes about the gospel contained in creation, it reads:

The faith in the Gospel of Creation implies that no one can deny the goods of life (blive livsfornægter). The faith in the Gospel of Creation allows the human to enjoy life. Thus, in Jesus Christ she is empowered to give herself to God and to her neighbor and not to rebel against them; to laugh and cry, to be awake and sleep, in short: *to take life as it presents itself*. (Prenter 1998: 219; present author's translation, original emphasis)

This trusting attitude towards life is perhaps one of the primary phenomena in human life that SCT related to. Although Prenter was influenced by Barth, his deep understanding of Luther's and Grundtvig's theologies also allowed him to be keenly aware of how Christian faith in God's work as both creator and redeemer opens up to a specific way of relating to and experience reality. Faith thus adds a gift. What it adds is nevertheless not entirely alien

to creation. Trinitarian faith cannot be articulated in isolation from our experience of the world or separated from the shared or universal conditions of human life.

A fundamental point in SCT is the profound human experience of being *decentred*. This decentredness articulates itself in the gifts of creation, in trust, and in the demands from the other. But it is also apparent in the gospel, which does not originate from human thought or action, but in God. The *extra nos* (God's works outside us) of Lutheran theology is thus given a horizon or basis in phenomena and experiences given fundamental to the human condition.

To live means to receive life from outside oneself. As soon as we are cut off from these external sources, life is extinguished. The resurrection life is the receiving of life from an external source, from which even now in faith [hu]man draws his sustenance. But the same thing holds good even now of the bodily life, and not just that of believers, but of all bodily life. (Wingren 2003: 18)

When the Bible speaks about God, it does not speak about a reality which [hu]man encounters in a specifically religious act and of which he has some knowledge [...] God is creator, and God's relation to [hu]man is given in the simple fact that [hu]man lives. (Wingren 2003: 179)

The proclamation of God's universal presence is not as an asset associated with information but an interpretation of life as something that God gives and we receive. This also implies that there can be no competition between God's activity and human capabilities – these are perceived as the same reality seen from two different angles. In SCT, creation does not entail any conception of fixed orders of political authority, hierarchical relations of superiority and subordination, or anything previously identified with the German *Ordnungstheologie* (theology of social orders). In Nordic theology, the doctrine of creation means dynamics, change, transformation, and becoming. God's law requires a flexible response, and the gospel is a message that addresses specific people in a specific context. Moreover, 'the church is a movement towards the restoration of creation far from an already fixed and determined order, and so on. This dynamic understanding of creation focuses on life, not information; change, not status quo' (Uggla 2020: 134).

SCT articulates the conviction that the world is fundamentally meaningful, despite elements of tragedy and meaninglessness. The message about God's work in creation and redemption presupposes this meaning. Niels Gregersen points to how Løgstrup's phenomenology represents an alternative to the existentialist view that only bases the meaning of life on human decisions. Instead of being compelled to choose between a nihilistic philosophy (where meaning in life is absent) and a faith decision that clings to the content of the *kerygma*, SCT opens

roads for seeking a common understanding of central features of human existence, including its ethical aspects (the dimension of law) and the aspects of grace in human existence (the dimension of the gospel). Theologically speaking, God the creator is already present in the shared world of creation. God continues to address human beings in and through the networks of creation, even if that is in an ambiguous manner. Similarly, a social phenomenology, based on a broad variety of human experiences, shows how human beings are not just producers of meaning but ceaselessly encounter meaning in the co-dependent relationships of human life –together. (Gregersen 2017: 45)

The distinctiveness of SCT is thereby also an important contribution to international theology that builds on peoples' experiences in different contexts and can be seen as a foundation for different versions of contextual theology.

4 The Finnish interpretation of Luther as an ecumenical contribution

Luther studies have been strong in Finland since the 1920s, and especially in the theological faculty at the University of Helsinki. However, they took a new turn with Professor Tuomo Mannermaa (1937–2015), who was among the most internationally recognized Luther scholars. He and his students were the main contributors to the development of the so-called Finnish Interpretation of Luther's theology.

Due to the presence of Eastern Orthodoxy in Finland, the Finnish ecumenical scene appears somewhat different from other Nordic countries. The dialogues between Lutheran and Orthodox theologians shaped a renewed attention to features in Luther's work that Mannermaa and his students could align with the Orthodox doctrine of salvation through *theosis* (divinization). In the 1980s, it led Mannermaa to introduce a hermeneutical paradigm shift in the reading of Luther's doctrine of justification. He emphasized the effective righteousness in Luther's theology of salvation instead of the more forensic view focussed on by contemporary German theology. The Finnish interpretation thus focused on the real-ontic indwelling of Christ in faith and the essential connection between love and faith.

This re-reading of Luther's work proved fruitful for the ecumenical dialogue insofar as it made it possible to establish connections between Luther's ideas of Christ present in faith and the patristic notion of divinization. Although initiated by the then archbishop of Finland, the fruits of this dialogue had repercussions in systematic theology based on Luther for the decades after. Mannermaa summarizes the position in the following way:

According to Luther, Christ (in both his person and his work) is present in faith and is through this presence identical with the righteousness of faith. Thus, the notion that Christ is present in the Christian occupies a much more central place in the theology of Luther

than in the Lutheranism subsequent to him. The idea of a divine life in Christ who is really present in faith lies at the very center of the Reformer. (Mannermaa 1998: 2)

Against the backdrop of this initial insight, several of Mannermaa's students conducted a thorough project examining Luther's thought. This was not a mere historical study but also an investigation into the epistemological and ontological presuppositions behind traditional Luther research and its understanding of Christ's presence in faith. Several studies analysed different aspects of this topic (see Braathen and Jenson 1998): Risto Saarinen analysed the philosophical assumptions behind traditional Luther research, showing that the transcendental interpretation of the presence motif made it impossible to articulate Luther's doctrine of justification as real participation or divinization. Following up this analysis of philosophical presuppositions, Simo Peura presented a study in which the motif of *theosis* in Luther's own thought was analysed. Peura demonstrated how participation in God is an inherent but hitherto neglected motif in Luther's theology. Finally, Antti Raunio's study of the golden rule explicates Luther's theology as a theology of love, combining ethics and dogmatics. Because the golden rule thereby appears as the *summa* of Christian faith and life, this approach allows for a more profound understanding of God's work in the individual Christian.

The central element in the Finnish approach runs counter to established German interpretations of Luther, from Hermann Lotze, Albrecht Ritschl, and Wilhelm Herrmann all the way to the 'Luther Renaissance'. All of these interpretations see the presence of Christ as an effect of the will of God: God's will influences the will of the human. Hence, God is external to us, and God and humans remain ontologically separated. This makes it difficult to speak about any real participation in God. This position is easily aligned with an exclusively forensic interpretation of justification. However, by contrasting this position with passages in Luther that focus on the ontological presence of Christ in the believer, the Finnish scholars can emphasize another element that allows them to argue for how the concept of real participation in God is fundamental for Luther's theology. Luther writes:

Thus, the righteousness of Christ becomes our righteousness through faith in Christ, and everything that is his, even he himself, becomes ours [...] and he who believes in Christ clings to the Christ and is one with Christ and has the same righteousness with him. (Luther 1957 [first published in 1518])

The question, then, is how this understanding of participation is related to the Orthodox notion of *theosis*? The line of reasoning that supports a connection can be formulated in several different ways, but the main one is as follows: in order to receive God (i.e. participate in God), God must first destroy the believer's efforts to justify themselves before him. Then God can bestow upon them the properties that God wants to give and which belong to Godself: Word, justice, truth, wisdom, love, goodness, and eternal life.

As a result, nothing separates humans from God. In a text which summarizes the young Luther's position on *theosis*, Mannermaa points to how divinization 'is understood by the help of the formulations of Athanasius and Irenaeus as a union (*unio*) of Logos and flesh, of Word and man' (Mannermaa 1998: 11). However, this union does not entail a change in substance; God remains God, and the human a human.

It should be noted that the young Luther, influenced by mystical theology, provides the basis for this interpretation. In contrast to the understanding of the relationship between God and humans developed during the Luther Renaissance and dialectical theology, this view allows for articulation of a real, ontological community of being.

One important consequence of the Finnish approach is that it also represents an alternative to the Nygren separation of *agape* and *eros* as two distinct and separate modes of love. The presence of Christ in Luther's theology and his union with humans allows for seeing human love as shaped or formed by the love of Christ; and this love, active in faith, is present in the sinful human. God's love becomes human love, and human love expresses God's love.

The difference between German and Finnish interpretations of Luther is due to different philosophical presuppositions. Saarinen (1998) shows how there is an ontology at work in Luther that makes it possible to think of God's union with the human in ways that go beyond what is possible within the neo-Kantian framework, which had shaped so much of the earlier Luther studies. This ontology allows for recognizing the reality of God's work. Hence, in a broad sense, there is one common element in the Finnish Lutheran and SCT presented above: the insistence on God's presence in the created world – ontologically and not only in faith or in the influence of the will of the believer and their decisions. The real presence of Christ in the believer and the real presence of God in creation *and* the sacrament, represents a radically different position than one who sees God's presence as only constituted by the believer's faith. Hence, one could perhaps say that both these contributions from Nordic theology represent different versions of ontological Lutheranism. Nevertheless, there are also differences between them that should not be downplayed; for the Finnish Luther reading, the union with Christ is the basis for Christian life and for doing good works is emphasized, whereas SCT points to how humans may do God's work in and for creation irrespective of their individual faith.

5 Science and theology

One notable element in contemporary theology in the Nordic countries is the interest in the relationship between religion and science. This interest has been developed in different directions, resulting in several international contributions. The relationship between theology and the natural sciences found a stronghold in Aarhus, in the Forum for Theology and the Natural Sciences, with participants from different disciplines within the

university. Here, Niels Henrik Gregersen was among the leading figures. Together with Mikael Stenmark in Uppsala and Sigurd Bergmann (Trondheim), they remain the most prolific senior scholars in the field. Among others who have contributed to this field in an international context are Aku Visala (Helsinki), Olli-Pekki Vainio (Helsinki), Anne Runehov (Uppsala), and Knut-Willy Sæther (Volda). Some of the work in this field has focused on elements in natural science that are relevant for understanding religion; other work has focused on methodological issues that arise for relating science and theology or science and religion. Recently, several scholars have also presented work related to the cognitive science of religion (Aku Visala, LeRon Shults). Most of the work mentioned by the scholars above is related to the philosophy of religion. The work in this field also testifies to the international orientation of Nordic theology, insofar as much of it entails engagement with the work of scholars abroad, and especially in the United States.

The relationship with empirical sciences is presently not restricted to the natural sciences. The so-called empirical turn in theology can be detected also in Nordic theology, and especially in practical theology. Here, sociological studies contribute to another understanding of the role of theology than one predominantly focusing on the transmission of doctrinal content. The empirical turn in theology is also connected to the interest in pragmatism that is apparent in different strands of Nordic theology (see sections 6.4 and 7; for more on this topic in a broader context see The History of Science and Theology).

6 The contemporary situation

Since the early 1960s, and especially after 1968, all the Nordic countries have experienced significant societal changes that have impacted churches and theology. Increasing religious pluralism and growing secularization are two of the most significant among these changes. Whereas theology and piety previously were much shaped by Lutheran revival organizations and mission societies that also influenced church life to a significant degree, the waning of such influences has been very clear over the last few decades, and these organizations no longer play any large role in church life. Some have even distanced themselves to varying degrees from the folk-churches, due to what they see as a liberalization in the churches that accept female clergy and same-sex marriage. On the other hand, there has been a growing number of other confessional groups and churches. These have contributed to the fragmentation of church life on the conservative side of the spectrum. This fragmentation has nevertheless not influenced the work in theology very much, apart from the occasional need for established theology to criticize the most extreme expressions of such movements, such as, for example, the preaching of the prosperity gospel.

As an example of the development towards a more open and less confessionally shaped influence of theology in the public sphere, one can see how where formerly the

conservative Lutheran theologian Bo Giertz in Sweden was widely read, this widespread attention has shifted towards public figures such as the present Archbishop Antje Jacklén. Moreover, new theological insights were conveyed in Norway by the New Testament scholar Jakob Jervell; and, more recently, by the theologian of religions Notto Thelle, a former missionary with much knowledge about Buddhism. Thelle has also contributed to a more open attitude towards Eastern-inspired forms of spirituality.

Spiritual life in the Nordic countries today is less influenced by pietism, and more oriented towards the aesthetic and experiential. More emphasis on cultural openness and the close relationship with society and culture in general has meant the replacement of 'church against culture' with 'church *in* culture'. To a varying degree, the churches also express themselves on political matters, such as immigration or climate change – particularly in Sweden and Norway.

Public interest in religion and theology may nevertheless be described as ambiguous. On the one hand, academic theology represents an alternative to much of popular and lay movement-based theology and this fits well with the media's interest in depicting religious conflict. On the other hand, much present-day interest in religion is not shaped by an interest in theology at all but by an interest in either the sensational, obscure, or strange expressions of some religious lives, or by the negative traits that some see in religion, especially Islam. The consequence is the marginalization of interest in academic theology and a more hermeneutically based reasoning about religion.

6.1 Denmark

Contemporary Danish theology shows a rich and varied picture. Although the influence of Løgstrup is still detectable, other traits are visible as well. In Aarhus, Svend Andersen, who succeeded Løgstrup as professor of ethics and the philosophy of religion 1989–2019, expanded Løgstrup's ethical insights by relating them to both Luther and John Rawls. Andersen also worked on the relationship between theology and the natural sciences and was active in public debates in Denmark on various ethical topics. In 2021, Andersen was followed by Claudia Welz, whose work is based mainly on continental phenomenology, including Jewish scholars.

Another expansion of topics can be found in the work of Anders-Christian Jacobsen, the present professor of dogmatics in Aarhus. Jacobsen's work is based on patristics, but he also addresses contemporary issues. Compared to his previous and contemporary colleagues, Jacobsen seems to have chosen another path. Others seem to continue the paths of Løgstrup and Grundtvig (David Bugge) or Luther studies (Bo Kristian Holm), and some orient themselves towards a more global and ecumenical scene (as formerly Anna Marie Aagaard and presently Else Marie Wiberg Pedersen, who has done extensive work on both Luther and Bernhard de Clairvaux).

The Faculty of Theology at Copenhagen has traditionally been much oriented towards dogmatic theology – as seen, for example, in the work of the late professor of dogmatics, Theodor Jørgensen, who was influenced heavily by Schleiermacher and Grundtvig, and in that of the present professor, Niels Henrik Gregersen. Gregersen's work is extensive and covers different topics, and he is also firmly located within the context of SCT. Wolfhart Pannenberg's theology influenced his early work; and Gregersen's interdisciplinary orientation makes him one of the most internationally sought-after Nordic theologians, especially in the field of theology and science (cf. [section 5](#)).

Copenhagen has had a strong tradition of Luther scholars up until the present. Among those who influenced systematic theology considerably was church historian Leif Grane (1928–2000). The profile in Copenhagen theology has also been heavily influenced by the fact that the centres for Kierkegaard Studies and Grundtvig studies are located there. A driving force in Kierkegaard studies was Arne Grøn, professor of ethics and the philosophy of religion 1997–2017. Grøn was very active in international fora and he was an internationally renowned Kierkegaard scholar, although his research interests were by no means restricted to different aspects of Kierkegaard's work. Other scholars who oriented themselves from continental philosophy of religion include Peter Kemp, Carsten Pallesen (whose work focuses on Ricœur), and Iben Damgaard (who works on hermeneutics as well as theology and literature).

6.2 Sweden

Understanding the landscape of systematic theology in Sweden is difficult without the backdrop provided by philosopher Ingemar Hedenius (1908–1982). Hedenius' book *Tro och vetande* (*Belief and Knowledge*, 1949) sparked a vibrant public debate about the truth of Christian teaching and the established role of the Church of Sweden. Hedenius' atheist position was based on analytic philosophy and claimed that rational debate about religion is impossible. For him, theology did not convey knowledge, and religious belief is based on metaphysical assumptions that one can neither verify nor falsify. He claimed that religious language is not meaningful for non-believers, and theology is in opposition to knowledge established by the sciences. Consequently, Hedenius argued that theology did not belong in the university and that the study of religions as an academic discipline should be separated from theology.

Hedenius raised the issue of theology's legitimate place within the university. Much work in the following years, especially in fundamental theology and the philosophy of religion, has centred around his challenges – directly or indirectly. Thus, Hedenius' work impacted the understanding and development of theology as a university subject. An eminent example of how theology responded to the challenges can be found in Anders Jeffner's (born 1934) work. He was active as a lecturer and professor in Uppsala from 1966–2000. Instead of

accepting that theology should be reduced to a historical and more or less descriptive discipline – a strategy suggested by others to maintain the scholarly status of theology in the university after Hedenius' attacks – Jeffner entered into concrete discussions about the different topics in question. Among them, the character of religious language and the criteria for assessing Christian doctrine. Jeffner's thorough philosophical schooling allowed him to expand the notion of knowledge on which Hedenius operated by including mystical, personal, and interpersonal experiences as relevant for the understanding of religion. These experiences must be included in a broader context that covers scientific knowledge.

Jeffner contributed to a position in which Uppsala distinguished itself from main elements in the Lundensian school. He was critical of Nygren's philosophy and the Lundensian attempt to isolate and purify religion and Christianity. He was concerned about integrating Christianity with science and culture in general. Thus, he was also more favourable towards elements in the Enlightenment and modern versions of theology than the Lundensian position.

During Jeffner's tenure, the name of his chair changed from 'Dogmatics' to what is presently the official English name, 'Studies in Faith and Ideologies', to avoid awarding a privileged place to Christianity within a secular university. This made it possible to study other ideologies and worldviews, both in their relationship with Christianity and on their own. Jeffner's successor, Carl-Reinhold Bråkenhielm, kept this title for the chair, whereas the present professor, Mattias Martinson, renamed it to 'Systematic Theology'. Nevertheless, the changes initiated by Jeffner have implied that theological studies in Uppsala are presently open to empirical sciences, for example, by having a chair in the sociology of religion, now held by Mia Løvheim. The present chair of Philosophy of Religion, Mikael Stenmark, has taken up other challenges raised by Hedenius, including the role of religion in relation to science, and contemporary issues about religious pluralism that has empirical dimensions (see Stenmark 1995; 2004; 2012).

At Lund University, the situation was not strongly related to the Hedenius challenge – probably much due to Wingren's strong presence. The professor of dogmatics, Per Erik Persson (1923–2019, professor 1962–1989), carried out his doctoral work on Thomas Aquinas, and hence moved away from the exclusively Lutheran orientation that dominated in Lund until the 1970s. Persson was ecumenically engaged and a strong spokesperson for women in ministry.

Persson was followed by Per Frostin (1943–1992), the first professor in Scandinavia with a strong liberation theology profile. Frostin died after just a few years in his position, but his appointment signalled new international orientations in Nordic theology in general. Frostin was followed by the German Catholic theologian Werner Jeanrond (born 1955). Jeanrond's Catholic background and his training in hermeneutics (with Paul Ricœur and

David Tracy) meant another expansion of systematic theology in Lund, and a further move away from the heritage of the Lundensian school. He was one of several Catholic systematians who have taken up positions in Lund over the last decades (others include Catharina Stenqvist, Manfred Hoffman and Gösta Hallonsten). Jeanrond was professor in Lund from 1995–2007, when he moved to the University of Glasgow, later to the universities of Oxford and Oslo. Presently, two of his former doctoral students are active in the Swedish public sphere: Ola Sigurdsson, who is a professor at Gothenburg University; and Jayne Svennungsson, who holds the chair for systematic theology in Lund. Both have published on theology and postmodernism – which signals further changes in orientation for Swedish theology (see, e.g. Sigurdsson 2016; Svennungsson 2016).

Gothenburg has no theological faculty but is nevertheless a hub for theology, with several scholars working in systematics. Among them is Arne Rasmusson, who comes from a non-Lutheran background. He introduced Stanley Hauerwas' work to the Nordic scene in another attempt to overcome the hegemonic position of the Lutheran theologies. His position represents to some degree a criticism of the modern presuppositions on which most university theology in the Nordic countries is based.

6.3 Norway

In Norway, the theological camps have been situated since the early 1900s at the theological faculty at Oslo University (called TF), and the institution presently named MF Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society, also located in Oslo. In addition, the School of Mission and Theology in Stavanger (recently merged into the multi-campus university college, VID) educate clergy. The tensions in Norwegian church life became institutionalized with the establishment of MF in 1907. Although TF and MF both offered education at the university level, their profiles were for a long time somewhat different; TF offered a theology open to culture and society, inspired by both liberal theology and by Grundtvigian traits, whereas MF initially represented a more low-church, pietist style of theology.

However, after the Second World War and the emergence of dialectical theology, significant changes took place at MF. In dogmatics, Lutheran confessionalism dominated, much due to the influence of Leiv Aalen, and a more culturally open approach to ethics and philosophy of religion was provided by John Nome. The alliance with the lay movements nevertheless remained until the turn of the century. In TF, dogmatics were in the 1960s taught by the Barth-influenced Reidar Hauge. The most significant scholars shaping the profile at TF over the last fifty years were nevertheless New Testament scholar Jacob Jervell and systematician Inge Lønning. Lønning did Luther studies largely based on German scholarship. Both Jervell and Lønning were active in the Norwegian public, and although they were based in an institution with a relatively small number of students,

they had a significant impact on these and the theological scene in Norway in general. An important voice in theological ethics in the late 1960s onwards was the ethicist Tor Aukrust, whose work *Mennesket i samfunnet* (*The human in society*, 1967) provided the theological basis for more active engagement by theologians on issues in politics and society. Aukrust's social ethics inspired students and teachers in MF and TF alike.

To a large extent, the tensions between MF and TF were based on church politics and alliances with different groups in Norwegian church life. Their alliances with these groups have contributed to perpetuating conflict. After the turn of the century, more ecumenically orientated and pluralist influences have led to changes in MF, and to some extent in TF, as well. In TF, interreligious studies were established; studies of Luther, Kierkegaard, and Løgstrup were continued, presently by Marius T. Mjaaland and Svein Aage Christoffersen. In MF, more interdisciplinary and empirically-based work in theology has increased. This move was initially stimulated by Ivar Asheim (1927–2021, professor 1970–1994), later by Harald Hegstad, currently professor of dogmatics, and Geir Afdal, who holds a chair in pedagogy. The interdisciplinary orientation can also be found in the works of Jan-Olav Henriksen at the intersection of theology, philosophy, psychology, and sociology. MF's expansion of its faculty to include pedagogy, social sciences, and religious studies makes it the most significant research environment for theology and religious studies in Norway today.

Presently, awareness of the need for contextual theology and active contact with international scholarship characterizes theological work in Norway, irrespective of institutions. This fact is reflected in, for example, the hiring of Marion Grau in 2015 at MF, and of Werner Jeanrond at TF (2018–2022). It is also observable in the German-Swedish theologian Sigurd Bergmann, who held a chair in theology at the University of Trondheim for many years. The increasing pluralization of theology seems to weaken both the former impact of a Lutheran hegemony and the orientation towards Danish and German theology.

6.4 Finland

Some traits in Finnish systematic theology have been presented above. Typical for much of the work is the historical grounding of systematic studies. Systematic theology in Finland has traditionally been fairly conservative due to the influences of Pietism and biblicism. Dialectical theology played almost no role in Finnish theology after the Second World War. Osmo Tiilikä (1904–1972, professor of dogmatics 1942–1966) represented the Pietist tradition. His scholarship was dominated by Luther studies. His conservatism led him to terminate his membership in the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church, protesting the church's liberalization.

Seppo A. Teinonen (1924–1995), observer at Vatican II, introduced a more ecumenically oriented systematic theology to Finland. He represented a postliberal theology that

took up the challenges of modernity, as well as studies of the history of dogma. Tuomo Mannermaa (discussed above) was among his students, as was Eero Huovinen. Both of the latter have written on central themes in Luther's theology, being ecumenically active. In the philosophy of religion, Simo Knuuttila's research on scholasticism was a main element.

Risto Saarinen has held the chair of systematic theology in Helsinki since 2001. Saarinen is an active international scholar, and has led several significant research projects; he has also held a professorial position at the Ecumenical Institute in Strasbourg. His work focuses on historical and contemporary studies from philosophical and systematic perspectives, and is a globally renowned Luther scholar.

In the philosophy of religion, Sami Pihlström holds the chair in Helsinki. Pihlström's work is based on extensive studies of pragmatism and Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein has also been a main source for the work of the presently retired philosopher of religion in Åbo, Tage Kurtén. Kurtén's successor, Bjørn Wikstrøm, is influenced by Paul Ricœur.

The combination of historical studies and thorough philosophical training characterizes much of contemporary Finnish theology. Other scholars, such as Aku Visala and Olli-Pekka Vainio, also testify to the increasingly international and interdisciplinary orientation of current constructive theological work.

6.5 Iceland

Due to its small size, the faculty of theology at the University of Iceland has sent its teachers to other places for qualifications – to the US, UK, Sweden, Denmark, and Norway. Thus, they are the Nordic internationalists. In research, the influence from Sweden is especially apparent. The former professor of dogmatics, Einar Sigurbjörnson (1944–2019, professor 1978–2014), had close ties to the church and studied with Per Erik Persson in Lund. He represented traditional classical Lutheranism. The present professor in dogmatics, Arnfríður Guðmundsdóttir, studied in the US, with George Forell in Iowa, and in Chicago with Carl Braaten. Guðmundsdóttir addresses traditional dogmatic topics from a feminist and contextual perspective. Like many in Iceland, she is also interested in issues related to ecology and climate change. She was a member of the Constitutional Council that rewrote the Icelandic constitution in 2011.

Björn Björnsson (1937–2008, professor 1969–2002) studied in Edinburgh, and was a professor of theological ethics for over thirty years. His focus was on social issues, with an emphasis on marriage and family, but also on bioethics and environmental ethics. The current professor of theological ethics is Sólveig Anna Bóasdóttir, who studied with Carl-Henric Grenholm in Uppsala. She focuses on issues related to theology and the environment, domestic violence, and sexuality.

Theological work in Iceland is closely connected to church life, irrespective of the independence of teaching and research at the university. Like other Nordic countries, Iceland debated the ethical and theological questions related to homosexuality, with a clear outcome in terms of support for a new law on marriage (between two individuals, and not limited to a woman and a man) in 2010. At this point, the church decided to start officiating weddings for homosexual couples, and a majority of pastors supported that decision. Icelandic theology is culturally open, and the influences from different countries and continents create a unique mix which is typically Icelandic.

7 Conclusion

All the Nordic countries demonstrate how Nordic theology is rooted in the Lutheran past. Although more ecumenically open these days, the appropriation of the tradition can be seen in the two main contributions, SCT and the Finnish Lutheran approach. However, as indicated, tendencies point toward orientation in other confessional traditions than Lutheranism. Catholic theology is today among the contributions to Nordic theology in a way that was unthinkable fifty years ago. Moreover, post-confessional features seem to emerge in Nordic systematic theology, paying more attention to contextual and contemporary issues than upholding doctrinal concerns of the past.

Whereas studies of historical figures dominate theological scholarship, Nordic theology is also influenced by different philosophical positions. The empirical turn in theology has made it more interdisciplinary by relating to sociology, ethnography, and psychology of religion, in addition to the links to the natural sciences as seen especially in Denmark and Uppsala. The increased empirical orientation opens up alliances with philosophical pragmatism and the social sciences. Accepting the modernist approach and modern criteria for scholarly work means that there is not much room for a theological discourse isolated from what goes on in the rest of the university.

All the Nordic countries have had theological controversies over women's ordination and same-sex marriage. However, all the main churches presently accept women in ministry and same-sex marriages. The theological discourse on these matters has been instrumental for this acceptance. In other denominations less influenced by academic theology, these debates continue, as in the Roman Catholic church.

Attributions

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