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Beware the Finnish

The Norwegian State, the official church and the Laestadian revivalmovement 1870-1940

Dogma and politics

This paper is based on my CEPIN-project¹, in which I am studying how the the Norwegian state through the national church watched over the kvens who participated in the revivalmovement named after the Swedish clergyman Lars Levi Laestadius.

First, I would like to clarify what a kven is, and in short terms present the Laestadian-movement. A kven is a descendent of immigrants from Finland and the northern parts of Sweden. Earlier it was normal to add that a kven was finnishspeaking, but this trait of character is now withdrawn, partly because the finnish language is almost vanished from the northern parts of Norway as a consequence of the Norwegian assimilationpolitics in the 20th century². The Laestadian-movement is rooted in the northern parts of Sweden, Finland and Norway. This revival started in Karesuando where Laestadius lived and worked, and was mainly spread with the Lapps movements and the migration flows in the Nordic circumpolare areas. A lot of this migration was caused by the kvens moving to the Norwegian coastline. As a traditional revival, the Laestadian movement set focus on conversion. Futhermore the movement preached total abstinence, mostly in Finnsh or Lappish. The revival started in the middle of the 19th century and spread fast over the northern parts of Norway, Sweden and Finland. My project is an examination of how the Norwegian state through the official church watched over the kvens in the period 1870-1940.

In 1981 the historian Hårvard Dahl Bratrein published an article in the periodical *Ottar* about documents recently found at Tromsø Museum³. These documents are a secret part of the archive of Bishop Eivind Berggrav and contains letters and reports connected to his work

¹ CEPIN is a School of Multidisciplinary Research at the Faculty of Social Sciences: CITIZENSHIP, ENCOUNTERS AND PLACE ENACTMENT IN THE NORTH

² Stockfleth, 1860: in "Fortale" (not paginated) and Ryymin, 2004:142

³ Bratrein, 1981:54. The documents is now in "Statsarkivet i Tromsø" filed under: Biskopen i Hålogaland 236: 1928-1937 Finske Fare (Finnish menace)

of investigation on behalf of military authorities and the Ministry of Defence. The purpose was to map the kvens who lived in Norway and to see if they could be considered a national threat. The Norwegian government feared that the kvens, with their culture and language, would feel a stronger connection to Finland than Norway, and in case of a conflict would show disloyalty to Norway and stand up on the Finnish side. The basis for this fear was connected to the expansive thinking in Finland in the inter-war years, where they seemed to want to move their border further north to the coast. In straight words, this could mean an invasion of the counties Troms and Finnmark in the northern parts of Norway. The ecclesiastical part of this investigation was to control the Laestadian assemblies and the preachers who visited them, especially the Finnish clergymen sent by the national church of Finland to serve the Finnish speaking churchgoers. This raises the question of how the Laestadian movement and the national church related to each other, and how both of them related to the state. Furthermore arises the question of the relation between religion and politics in this region. To make my examinations possible, I have decided to limit them both time- and spacewise. The period is set to 1870-1940, and the geographical areas are Lyngen and Vadsø.

My hypothesis is that the Laestadian movement through their biblical understanding and interpretation founded a religious assembly of people who did not feel accepted by the state. In fact, this could be true for both the Kvens and the Lapps, but in I am going to look at the Kvenish side of it because it was the Kvens who was considered a national threat. The Laestadian movement had a conservative interpretation of the Bible and the traditions from the past. This resulted in other values, and a different hierarchy of status than in the rest of society⁴. This assembly within the official church seemed to frighten the Norwegian government who was not sure of which side the Kvens were on. On the Norwegian side this was called “den finske fare”, in English the Finnish Menace. This was rooted in the political situation where the Norwegian state felt threatened by the Finnish expansive thinking. The official church of Norway is originally a fusion of politics and religion in society, and was in this period one of the best developed systems in the state with local representatives all over the country. On this matter it was therefore perfect to use the clergymen to watch over the Kvens, religious as well as political. For me, it will be important to find out exactly how the Kvens understood themselves religiously and how they interacted in society, and compare this with the rest of the citizens. In this way I hope to reveal the regional context: Northern Norway

⁴ Roald E. Kristiansen describes this as a re-coding, where areas as language, clothing, life-style and ways of gathering is given a different value than in the official society. One example here is the ideal of poverty. Kristiansen, 1998:158

1870-1940. This will be the basis to understand the relationship the Laestadian Kvens had with Finland.

Theme and subject of examination

I wish to examine the attitude of the Kvens in the Laestadian assemblies towards the official church, and how this ecclesiastical organisation treated the Laestadian movement generally, and the Kvens in particular. Hopefully this will appear in the comparison between periods and places, it is simultaneously a diachronous and a synchronous comparison. Furthermore I wish to examine the role of the official church between the two “employers”: God and the State. I will examine whether the Laestadians position in society was founded in Laestadian theology or if the theology was a result of their position in the society. Consecutively it is important to discuss all sides of the relationship to Finland, as this was the center of the conflict.

The questions I would like to answer is:

- Why did the Laestadians, despite their critical attitude, stay as members of the official church when there was an absolute possibility to resign and acquire more religious freedom?
- How did the Laestadians and the official church view each other, and how did the Laestadians and the official church view the Norwegian state?
- Did the official Norwegian church experience a conflict of loyalty in their position between God and the state?
- How was the relations to Finland and the national Finnish church? Was the Norwegian state right in their suspicions that the Finnish government used clergymen and preachers in conspiracy among the Kvens in Norway? Did the Laestadian Kvens feel closer related to Finland than Norway?

Limits for my research

As noted I have decided to set two limits for my work. In matter of time, the period is set to 1870-1940. Within this period there are three phases. In the end of the 19th century and in the inter-war years there was a considerable nation-building both in Norway and in Finland. In these phases Norwegian authorities were very suspicious towards Finland, and the Laestadians were seen as a considerable problem for the authorities. The phase from 1900 to the end of the World War I (WW1) was some kind of an interregnum. The first and the third phase is subject for comparison, the interregnum contains the Finnish secession from Russia, the Norwegian secession from Sweden, and WW1. I have chosen to start in 1870 because the

Laestadian movement at this time seems to organise, at the same time as the Kvens joined the movement in great numbers⁵. To end my examination in 1940 is an obvious choice, as the outbreak of World War II changed both the political as well as the religious government in Norway.

The geographical areas I have chosen is Vadsø and Lyngen. I have chosen these two areas, because there were a large amount of immigrants from Finland and the northern parts of Sweden settling here. In both areas the Laestadian movement stood strong and some of the leading Laestadian preachers lived here. We know that the assemblies in these areas had regular contact with assemblies in Finland and Sweden. But there are also some differences between these places; Lyngen is close to Tromsø and the bishop, while Vadsø was many travelling-days away. From this it is possible to assume that the people in Lyngen had a closer contact with the bishop. In Vadsø there were mostly Norwegians and Kvens, while in Lyngen there also were a large amount of Lapps. Furthermore the areas seems good for investigation because there are applicable sources from both the official church and the Laestadian movement. This will hopefully uncover differences and similarities in the national church as well as in the revival movement. Both areas were especially interesting for Norwegian authorities of national safety reasons. Because of these similarities and differences, these areas are advantageous for scientific research.

Scientific works on this subject

The scientific works on the Kvens and the Laestadian movement in Norway is considerable⁶. Dagmar Sivertsen has written *Læstadianismen i Norge* (The Laestadians in Norway). Here she describes the assembly in Vadsø with inner theological controversies and how a leading assembly in Sweden sent preachers to arbitrate⁷. When she writes about Lyngen she focuses on the preacher Erik Johnsen, the leader of most of the Laestadians in Northern Troms. Sivertsen says nothing of their relations with Sweden or Finland.

The church historian Øyvind Norderval has written the article “‘Kirken – en oppfostringsanstalt for buken’. Lars Levi Læstadius’ kirke- og prestekritikk”⁸ (“The Church – nice food for the tummy”. Lars Levi Læstadius and his criticism of the church and the clergymen). Here he shows the scattered attitude to the official church, on one hand extremely negative, on the

⁵ Drivenes & Niemi, 2000:171-172

⁶ I choose here to discuss the Norwegian literature. Later on in the project I will also use Swedish and Finnish literature.

⁷ Sivertsen, 1955:189

⁸ Norderval, 2000

other hand loyal. Norderval maintains that this attitude originate from Læstadius, who meant the Laestadians should be representatives for the truth in the official church.

Both Bengt Ove Andreassen and Torjer O. Berglund has written about the Læstadians in Lyngen. Andreassens reasearch shows how the Laestadian identity i Lyngen in the inter-war years was formulated by the preacher Erik Johnsen⁹. This identity was thightly connected to Lutheran theology, but was still different from the official religious identity as we know it from the confessions¹⁰, even though they where Lutheran too. Berglunds research shows that there are two religious frames in the Laestadian movement in Lyngen. The wide is the official church, the narrow is theological questions, confessions and religious experience¹¹.

Knut Einar Eriksen og Einar Niemi has written *Den finske fare. Sikkerhetsproblemer og minoritetspolitikk i nord 1860-1940* (The Finnish Menace. Problems of security and minority policy i the North 1860-1940). Their focus is the Kvens and how the Norwegians treated this group¹². They write about the church and its difficult relation to the State. The Lutherean opinion was that the Word of God should be preached in the listeners mothertongue, was different from the official policy in for instance the school and the milititary where they wanted total Norwegianization. Furthermore Eriksen and Niemi have written an article in the periodical *Heimen*; “Kirka og minoritetspolitikken i nord - lojalitet overfor Gud eller Keiser?”¹³ (The church and the minority policy – loyal to God or the Emperor?). Eriksen and Niemi focuses on how the church had a role in the Norwegianization of the Kvens, but still wanted to be an evangelical church. According to Eriksen and Niemi this relationship can be divided into three epochs where the church ended up on a Norwegianization line, but still they did not want to provoke Finland by beeing to harsh. The historian Einar-Arne Drivenes writes about this in his article; “Kirka og fornorskningspolitikken”¹⁴ (The church and the Norwegianization). This article deals with the ecclesiastical role in norwegian language-policy. Drivenes shows how the bishops changed their attitude several times in the period 1870-1940.

Teemu Ryymin has written for his doctorate *De nordligste finner. Fremstillingen av kvenene i den finske litterære offentlighet 1800-1939* (The northernmost Finns. How the Kvens was presented in the finnish literary public 1800-1939). Ryymin describes the Diaspora work the national finnish church had in Norway¹⁵. Futrhermore he shows how the nationalistic ideology and the

⁹ Andreassen, 2002:35

¹⁰ Brunvoll, 1984

¹¹ Berglund, 2002:57

¹² Eriksen & Niemi, 1981

¹³ Eriksen & Niemi, 1982

¹⁴ Drivenes, 2004

¹⁵ Ryymin, 2004:321

Lutheran theology fused during the inter-war years. This leads to the article “Sogneprest Martin Tveter i Vadsø” (The vicar Martin Tveter in Vadsø) by Einar Niemi. He draws a picture of a clergyman who functioned as a “listening post” for the bishop. Tveter was an active member of “prestekretsen” (clergymens circle) in “Nasjonal Samling” (a Nazi group). This group united the notions God and Fatherland¹⁶. These notions seem to be important in the justification of the ecclesiastical intelligence. When “Nasjonal Samling” turned in a racist direction, Tveter resigned because he thought that it was incompatible with his Christian belief.

As we notice in the scientific literature the Laestadians have been loyal to the official church, but they have had their own inner frames to tell what true Christianity is. The discussion of these frames has caused inner conflicts in the movement. We have also seen how the church's role between God and the state has been clarified, and how the church has been a spokesman for the fusion of nationalism and religion. What I cannot see has been done, is a comparison of the theological interpretations both in the official church and in the Laestadian assemblies. Neither can I see that there has been done any regional quantitative case-studies that enlighten this research-field.

Theory

Roald Kristiansen writes that the Laestadian-movement historically always has been influenced by the context itself is a part of. This means that the group has developed different strategies for behaviour towards the nation and the local society¹⁷. Einar-Arne Drivenes shows how the Christian message can appear in different shapes, depending on where and to whom it is presented¹⁸. If this is true, the examination of Laestadian theology will show us the identity/self understanding of this group. Concerning the Laestadians, I think the deprivation-theory of Charles Y. Glock will be suitable. This theory claims that a religious group in the large society can seek together because they have a common feeling of inferiority. This feeling of inferiority can be economic, social, organic, ethical or psychic, but they do not necessarily need to be inferior de facto¹⁹. Glock claims that this feeling creates a collective. This is feeling bishop Berggrav refers to in his letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The Kvens complained that the church was difficult to visit in Norway because of the distance and

¹⁶ Niemi, 1995

¹⁷ Kristiansen, 2004:48

¹⁸ Drivenes, 2004:35

¹⁹ Glock & Stark, 1965:246ff

the language, and that they had better conditions in Sweden and Finland²⁰. This seems to fit Norbert Elias theory of “insiders” and “outsiders”. Frank Meyer has made the following model as a generalisation of the theory²¹:

INSIDERS	OUTSIDERS
resource strong	resource weak
social strong	social weak
integrated group	segregated group
feeling of superiority	feeling of inferiority

In my work the official church is representative for the insiders, while the Laestadians are the outsiders. The reasons to use the official church to investigate the Laestadians seems flagrant. Firstly the church had local representatives all over the country, including the northern parts of Norway. Secondly the church represented the same confession as the Laestadians, and had proxy to crack down on wrong theology in all groups inside the official church. This could only happen as long as the Laestadians stood as members of the official church, and even if they criticised the church frequently, they still were members of it. An example of how the clergymen acted when they found what they meant to be wrong, can be the case against Ananias Brune. He was withdrawn from his work as a teacher in the 1880s by the vicar Gjølme i Vadsø. The reason for the withdrawal was that Brune had interpreted Lutheran texts wrong in the Laestadian assembly²². Another example from 1930 is the instructions from bishop Berggrav that clergymen should visit the Laestadian assemblies and report the content of the sermons²³. This did not end in any withdrawals, but paints a picture of how the official church acted towards the Laestadians and of the importance of the interpretations of the Bible. According to the Science of Religion studies the Bible is seen as a myth. Ingvild Sælid Gilhus and Lisbeth Mikaelsson describes the myth as something that entitles the social life and gives existential depth to human phenomena²⁴. Both the Laestadians and the official Church used the same mythical material as basis for their preaching. In my work I will examine which parts of the mythical material these groups used, and if they were interpreted differently. Did

²⁰ Statsarkivet i Tromsø: Biskopen i Hålogaland 236:1928-1937 Finske Fare. Brev til utenriksministeren. (Letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs)

²¹ Meyer, 2004:37. There is of course a problem when the segregated group in the state is the majority locally. But as long as we see the laestadians as an group in the state, it is segregated.

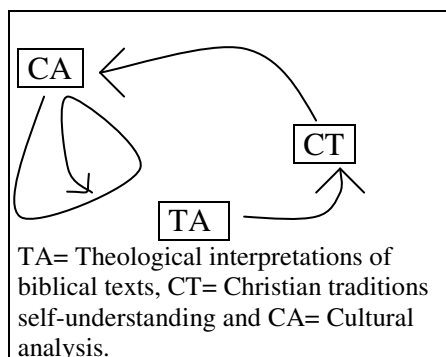
²² Brune, 1934:50ff

²³ Bratrein, 1981:62

²⁴ Gilhus & Mikaelsson, 2001:120

for instance the deprivation-feeling affect the choice of biblical texts? This is clarified in the following model as Roald Kristiansen has drawn it²⁵.

CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY²⁶, ANTHROPOLOGICAL MODEL:



The biblical texts (TA) is interpreted by the official church, political religiosity (CT). This is understood on the basis of the local society and its self-understanding(CA), which again affects the actual understanding of the biblical text. (Therefore the choice of TA will tell us something about CA, in other words the biblical text will give us a picture of the culture it was used in.)

Sources

I will divide the sources in two categories: one Laestadian/Kvenish and one official category which contains both ecclesiastical and political documents. This shows the originator of the source.

Among the Laestadian/Kvenish sources there are various articles. One example is “Læstadianernes tro og lære. En redegjørelse fra læstadianske predikanter i Troms fylke, datert Skibotn i februar 1932”²⁷ (The belief and teachings of the Laestadians. A statement from Laestadian preachers i the county of Troms, dated February 1932). This statment is a summary of Laestadian beliefs and ends with a question to all the bishops if they will join them in the fight against the forces that undermine the lutheran inheritance, the true Christian faith. Furthermore there is collections of sermons like “Taler av Lægpredikant Erik Johnsen og Erik Eriksen – Lyngen” (Sermons by lay-preacher Erik Johnsen and Erik Eriksen – Lyngen) and “Taler av Lægpredikant Erik Johnsen – Lyngen, Nils Larsen med flere”²⁸ (Sermons by lay-preacher Erik Johnsen – Lyngen, Nils Larsen and more). In the latter we can find the sermon of Erik Jonhsen to the consecration of the chapel in Skibotn in 1931, where he describes the church as a world-wide concept, not a national extent²⁹.

There are several collections of letters and other sources. Among these, the collections of letters by Kåre Svebak and Johan Pietiläinen, and Brevboken (The book of letters) are the

²⁵ Kristiansen & Ruus, 1996:22

²⁶ Contextual theology has its basis in a certain cultural context and is applied on an interpreted by biblical texts. Kristiansen & Ruus, 1996:2

²⁷ *Norvegia Sacra* 1934:86

²⁸ Olsen & Skorpa, 1929 and 1931

²⁹ Olsen & Skorpa, 1931:123

most important³⁰. Furthermore Svebak refers to some very interesting collections of sources in his book³¹. These sources are tightly connected to Lyngen and Vadsø. Additionally there is retention material like the earlier mentioned Ananias Brune in Vadsø, who recalls the religious conditions in Vadsø until 1930, which is almost the whole period for my research³². Further Andreas Esbensen has written *Læstadianismen på Nordkalotten*³³ (The Laestadian-movement in the North). These are two pamphlets based on lectures given by Esbensen in Kaldfjord and Skibotn and contains stories about how the Laestadian movement spread across the north, and about the different preachers in the movement. Esbensen tells stories both from Vadsø and Lyngen. Esbensen is still alive and may therefore be an interesting man to interview.

According to the official sources, there are ecclesiastical annual reports from the clergymen to the bishop, who passed them on to the Minister of the Church. Further there are the earlier mentioned documents of “Finske Fare”, the Finnish menace, which are kept in The State Archive in Tromsø³⁴. But it is the private archive of bishop Eivind Berggrav in the National Archive that seems the most interesting, though³⁵. Here we find the correspondancy, notes, sermons, scrap-books and material about World War 2 and the juridical process afterwards. I expect to find reports from the clergymen which can give us a picture of the official ecclesiastical attitude towards the Laestadian-movement and the Kvens, and hopefully sermon-reports that enlightens the Laestadian attitude towards the official society in the inter-war years. In addition there are reports from the bishop in the archive of the Minister of Church and Education. Finally I hope to increase my understanding by studying the liturgical changes in this period. A new translation of the Bible was published in 1930, revisions of the Hymnal in 1920 and 1924 and revisions the Catechism at several occasions, for instance in 1873³⁶. None of these changes were popular among the Laestadians, and some of them were actually seen as ungodly.

³⁰ Pietiläinen 1966, Svebak 1978 and Brevboken 1966

³¹ These sources are: Isak Nilsens collection, Kåre Svebaks collections, Martti E. Miettinen's collections, Olli Koskamos collections, Vadsø old chapel archive / A. Esbensen's collection and Peder Josef Pedersen's collection

³² Brune 1934: Den levende kristendom i Vadsø. Den såkalte læstadianske menighet i Vadsø. (The living Christianity in Vadsø. The so-called Laestadian assembly in Vadsø.)

³³ Esbensen 2000 a and b

³⁴ Statsarkivet i Tromsø: Biskopen i Hålogaland

³⁵ Riksarkivet: Privatarkiver – PA 320 Eivind J. Berggravs arkiv

³⁶ Bibelen 1972, M. B. Landstads Kirkesalmebok 1967 and Horstbøll 2003:224

Method

The method for my research is comparison of the Laestadians over time and their relation to the official church in the two areas I have chosen. At first a diachronous comparison in the stretch 1870-1940, and especially in the two periods of nation-building. Further a synchronous comparison of the two chosen areas, Lyngen and Vadsø³⁷. The sources need to be sorted by origin, both according to producer and the reason why it was produced. The examinations will be textual analyses by qualitative sources like letters, articles in newspapers, sermons and liturgical material. Further it may be possible to interview some of the old clergymen and Laestadians. As seen when I went through the literature, I will mainly use the Norwegian sources which is the most relevant for my inquiry. If necessary I have allied with some Finnish speaking friends to help me read sources in Finnish, since my Finnish is rather lousy. Finally it will be important to focus on one of the central themes for my work – cultural meeting. This means minority versus majority, including versus segregation and cultural tenaciousness will be important. This conditions needs to be examined both in diachronous and synchronous perspectives³⁸.

In relevans to CEPIN

According to the CEPIN research programme my work fits the frames of the Encounters-part. I want to study how the cultural meeting – in broad sense – between the Kvens and the Norwegians took place. This were meetings between the official church and the Laestadian movement, religious and profane society, ethnicity and nationalism, segregation and integration etc. Furthermore I wish to study the relations between Finland and Norway by using the Laestadians as burning-glass. These meetings made the North Norwegian context, and can be seen in the religious framework then and now. My research is both church history looking for the religious dogmas and political history in sense of seeing the dogmas in the broad society. Parts of my work will also fit into the Citizenship-part of CEPIN. This relates to the multivocality in the local society and their own understanding of citizenship, ending in a question: who were the real Norwegians?

This project is a continuation of my master degree and my former work-practice. I have the possibility to use this knowledge of Christian life in the official church as well as the revival movements in the past and present.

³⁷ When it comes to comparison I will use Martin Byrkjeland and Aage Engesæter (eds.): *Kvar i sin dal...? Komparasjon som metode i lokalhistoriske studier*. Trondheim, 1989

³⁸ See Niemi 2004

Litterature and sources

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