

Lutheranism from Above and from Below: “Pastoral Professionals” and Trust within the Nordic State/Society Nexus

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Abstract

The article points to the dispersion, democratization, and feminization of “pastoral” forms of power and authority since the mid-19th century as a key to understanding the exceptionally high degree of social trust in the Nordic countries. Taking Norway as its central case, it argues that the Nordic welfare state has been shaped by an older, distinctively Lutheran–Pietist combination of educational forms of government from above and edifying popular self-organization from below. This trust-producing synthesis has been sustained by such “pastoral” professions as teaching, nursing, and social work, functioning as mediators between public welfare policies and the life world of citizens.

Introduction

According to a classic sociological assumption, the professions play a crucial part in the production and maintenance of social trust throughout the fabric of modern societies. Professionalism has been portrayed as a distinctive social logic, which unlike market transactions or bureaucratic procedures involves an irreducible element of confidence in the epistemic and ethical integrity of the practitioners (Freidson, 2001). We tend to seek professional help in situations where our fundamental interests or values are on the line. Professionals “heal our bodies, measure our profits, save our souls” (Abbott, 1988: 1). For Talcott Parsons (1902–1979), the professions contributed to the normative integration of modern society by exercising forms of social control that were rational–scientific and based on voluntarism rather than coercion (e.g., Parsons, 1939; Parsons 1951).

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What seems to have been largely ignored by later sociologists, however, is how closely Parsons related his sociology of the professions to the sociology of religion. Professions became a centerpiece of his grand sociological theory, argues William Buxton, because they had a special capacity to “bring transcendent values to secular society” (Buxton, 1985: 87). Parsons saw professionalism as an outgrowth of certain deep-seated Protestant value orientations in American culture. Inspired by Weber’s famous thesis that the rise of Western capitalism had been spurred by Calvinism’s “worldly asceticism,” he argued that the vital role of professions in the United States was reflective of a dominant American value pattern: an *instrumental activism* that stimulated social activism from below as well as the growth of free professions that worked to realize God’s Kingdom on earth (Parsons, 1963; Parsons, 1989). Parsons’ sociology of professions was thus cut out to support the United States’ self-understanding as the vanguard of modernity and liberal democracy in the world.

The intersection pointed out by Parsons between the study of professions, religion, and trust has remained largely unexplored by later sociologists. On the other hand, historians and social scientists have since the 1990s paid increasing attention to the possible religious origins of the Nordic welfare states. Much of this scholarship has traced the underlying continuities leading from the secular, state-centered Nordic welfare regimes back to the absolutist Danish and Swedish kingdoms of the 17th and 18th centuries and their subordinated, orthodox Lutheran churches. A seminal and still fairly representative contribution within this school of thought is Danish political scientist Tim Knudsen’s anthology *Nordic Protestantism and the Welfare State* (Knudsen, ed., 2000). Knudsen points to the interpenetration of secular and religious power in the absolutist state. As its largest and most widely dispersed officialdom, Lutheran ministers were key mediators between central power and the local community, transmitting and translating official Lutheran doctrine into the life world of its subjects (Gustafsson, 2000). This interpenetration of state and church greatly empowered the state and bolstered its spiritual authority, which ultimately paved the way for the modern welfare state.

This argument has a certain iconoclastic appeal. The Nordic welfare state, while presenting itself as the culmination of democracy, modernity, and secular rationalism, is in fact an inheritor of absolutism and orthodox Lutheranism! The exceptionally high degree of social trust in the Nordic countries appears in this perspective as a remnant of a distinctively Lutheran culture of conformity, subservience, and social homogeneity (e.g., Stenius, 1997).

This somewhat stereotypical image of the Nordic welfare states strikingly matches Parsons’ portrait of Lutheranism as the “other” in his analysis of the American value pattern. Inspired

by the work of Max Weber and Ernst Troeltsch as well as by his experience of the German catastrophe and World War II, Parsons argued that Lutheranism, with its doctrine of the two kingdoms and demand for absolute obedience to worldly government, promoted a subservient social mentality in line with Prussia's authoritarian power structure and statist form of nationalism. Lutheranism thereby tended to foster a loyal state bureaucracy, rather than professions in the Anglo-American sense (Parsons, 1993).

This stylized contrast between a liberal American professionalism rooted in Reformed Protestantism and a social-democratic Nordic welfare state reflective of a Lutheran subservience to hierarchical authority sets the stage for my analysis. To what extent could the exceptionally high level of generalized social trust that distinguishes the Nordic societies be traced back to their common Lutheran heritage? And if so, does it primarily reflect a special confidence in "parental" state authority rooted in Absolutism and Lutheran orthodoxy, or has it also been fostered by professionals imbued with a (secularized) Protestant ethos, operating across the fabric of the Nordic welfare societies?

In what follows, I will point to the dispersion, democratization, and feminization of "pastoral" forms of power and authority since the mid-19th century as one key to the exceptionally high degree of social trust in Scandinavia. This does not exclude the possibility of certain underlying continuities from Absolutism and Lutheran orthodoxy to the present. However, I argue that the distinctiveness of the Nordic experience lies neither in the Lutheran/absolutist heritage in itself nor in the later process of "spiritual democratization," but rather in the distinctive ways in which Lutheranism from above and from below have interacted in the formation of the modern welfare state. While neither of the two elements is uniquely Nordic, their combined strength and dynamic interrelationship is exceptional.

My argument is based on what one might call an "archaeological" model of history as a cumulative sedimentation of historical layers. Older layers do not simply disappear; they interact with newer layers, conditioning and modifying them. The high-trust syndrome of the Nordic welfare states is most adequately understood in terms of this concurrent coexistence of different layers of religious, cultural, social, and political tradition.

Taking Norway and the preceding Danish-Norwegian kingdom as my central case, I will focus on three historical layers in the formation of the "pastoral state," by which I mean a state that actively *cares* for its subjects' spiritual and/or worldly well-being. The first layer is the dawning educational state (German: *Erziehungsstaat*) of the 18th century, based on a blend

of orthodox Lutheranism and a new influx of State Pietism. The second layer is introduced by the rise and blossoming of a civil society from the mid-19th century, catalyzed and shaped by various forms of lay religious awakening. A new civil society and lay religious movements challenged the established political and clerical order and became gradually incorporated into the political system as well as in the church. A new dynamic developed between state and society as well as between the official church and popular religious movements, triggering a distinctive dialectic between pastoral forms of power from above and from below. The third layer in my scheme is the welfare state that took shape between the 1930s and the 1960s. The welfare state appears here as a synthesis of a strong “educational state,” implementing reforms from above, and a tightly knit organizational life linking the national polity to popular experiences, demands, and practices from below.

Pastoral professions: a preliminary definition

In what follows, I will highlight the historical trajectory leading from the Lutheran/absolutist educational state to the modern welfare state by focusing on the development of a special category of occupations, the pastoral professions.

Inspired by the Judeo-Christian metaphor of the shepherd and his flock, Michel Foucault described pastoral power as a form of power that was concurrently directed at the population at large and at every single person. It constantly and meticulously guided and controlled people's conduct, producing and using in-depth knowledge of humans' interior (Foucault, 2007). This “conduct of conduct” produced self-conscious, self-governing subjects while at the same time subjecting them to penetrating forms of social control (Foucault, 1982).

Parsons and Foucault, while strikingly different social thinkers, both tended to see power as in a radical sense *distributed* across the social fabric. In addition, they both analyzed the relationship between professionals/experts and clients/subjects in terms of power or social control. In Parsons' analysis, all human services professions orient their clients or patients toward certain institutionalized values and social roles (Parsons, 1951). In Foucauldian terms, then, they conduct their clients' conduct in a more-or-less penetrating manner. However, whereas Parsons described professionalism as an action-orientation characterized by universalism, affective neutrality, and specificity (in the sense that it was directed toward those specific aspects of the client's situation that were relevant to therapy), pastoral power typically addresses the client's total life situation, the “whole person.” It orients, socializes, cares for, “shepherds” its subjects, often on behalf of public institutions such as schools,

hospitals, or social security agencies. It is this specific type of occupation, exemplified by teachers, nurses, and social workers, I refer to as pastoral professions.

While theorists of professions have predominantly looked to lawyers and medical doctors as the ideal type against which the professionalism of other occupations can be measured, my focus on pastoral professions draws attention to the ministers as a third ancestor and model. This accentuates the religious sources of modern professionalism, not only in the sense of general Parsonian “action orientations” but even in terms of those norms, values, and world views that professionals police and disseminate in their practice.

Trust in pastoral professionals: a key to the Nordic model?

In what follows, I attempt to reformulate the general idea about the Lutheran origins of the Nordic welfare state in terms of continuities and transformations of pastoral forms of power and authority, transmitted by modern pastoral agencies and professions.

The welfare state has entailed both a contraction and a vast expansion of pastoral forms of authority and power. The transition from selective, paternalistic forms of poor relief to universal, automatically attributed social rights did reduce the “pastoral leverage” of social support, as the labor movement has strongly emphasized (“the common people would no longer stand hat in hand”). However, while mainstream welfare-state research has tended to focus on the expansion of universal social rights and the (re-)distribution of income and other material resources, the welfare state was arguably also very much a pastoral project.

Conceived to prevent society from falling prey to Fascism and later Communism, the welfare state aimed at consolidating democracy by anchoring it in a distinctive culture or way of life. Pastoral discourses and practices, in education, public health, social work, child protection, psychological counseling, etc., were an integral dimension to the project. These discourses and practices were shaped by national traditions as well as by influences from the US-dominated social sciences, particularly after World War II (Thue, 2006).

The Swedish political scientists Staffan Kumlin and Bo Rothstein have argued that the high degree of social trust in the Nordic societies is contingent on their universal, equal, and transparent public welfare services (Kumlin and Rothstein, 2005). Without rejecting the importance of universalism and the rule of law, I would suggest that an equally important key to the Nordic high-trust syndrome must be sought in Scandinavians’ readiness to trust the pastoral authority of welfare professionals and agencies. A necessary precondition of such trust is the confidence that pastoral authority is exerted with a view to our own best interest,

i.e., for benevolent rather than self-serving reasons. Trust in pastoral authority is thus conditional on our belief in the innate “goodness” of certain institutions and occupations.

State Pietism and the emergence of the Nordic “educational state”

From where does this Nordic trust in the pastoral authority of public institutions and professionals come? What is the role of the Lutheran tradition and its historical transformations in this conundrum? To what extent, and how, do the deep religious sources of trust in pastoral authority still have an impact on today’s secularized Nordic welfare states?

My examination of this problem takes its point of departure in the 1730s when the consolidated absolutist kingdom of Denmark–Norway became influenced by the so-called Halle Pietism, a theological school that became at the same time an entrepreneurial educational and industrial movement with close connections to the Prussian court. In Denmark, even more than in Prussia, this branch of the Pietist movement became for a while an official ideology, a “State Pietism” endorsed by King Christian VI and his German wife Sophie Magdalene. By allying itself with the state, Pietism exerted a strong influence on Danish and Norwegian society beyond the strictly clerical and theological sphere. How deep this influence went, and what enduring historical implications it had, is a disputed question. To what extent did it depend on the personal religious views of the king and his closest circle? How did State Pietism compare with what preceded and succeeded it: orthodox Lutheranism and Enlightenment rationalism? (Gilje & Rasmussen, 2002; Bredsdorff, 2003; Kuhn, 2003; Gierl, 2014; van Lieburg, 2016). Without getting too involved in these complicated discussions, I will outline some main points that constitute important premises of my argument.

State Pietism had tangible, lasting effects due to two fundamental reforms: the introduction of compulsory confirmation in 1736 and of a national commoners’ school system in 1739–41. Although it took a long time, especially in Norway, to establish a functioning nationwide school system, these reforms introduced a large-scale literacy and education project. State Pietism also had a long-lasting impact on the school curriculum, especially in Norway, where Bishop Erik Pontoppidan’s explanation of Luther’s Small Catechism, *Truth unto Godliness*, shaped religious education for almost 150 years (Markussen, 1995; Gilje & Rasmussen, 2002).

These reforms were based on a more general understanding of the relationship between the state and its subjects. According to Pietism, the king had a duty to care for the *Glückseligkeit*

of his subjects, a concept that partly connoted welfare in this world while primarily referring to one's eternal bliss. This idea could be seen as the first nucleus of modern notions of a reforming educational state. While orthodox Lutheranism tended to regard this world as a vale of tears, Pietism introduced the belief that the world could be improved through religiously motivated education and reform. *Weltverbesserung durch Menschenverbesserung*, "world improvement through human improvement," was the slogan of August Hermann Francke, the leading theologian, educationalist, and entrepreneur of Pietism in Halle.

State Pietism was in a sense a paradoxical project. It was based on the individual's religious experience and the fellowship of true believers, but focused in practice on religious upbringing and diffusion of knowledge from above, in the King's name. Thus, its distinction from Lutheran orthodoxy became rather blurred (Gilje & Rasmussen 2002: 317–319). An interdisciplinary group at Aarhus University, which studies the social impact of Lutheranism in the Nordic countries, has likewise emphasized the continuity between Orthodoxy and Pietism in the Danish–Norwegian realm (e.g., Holm & Koefoed, eds., 2018). The Norwegian historian Erling Sandmo (2015) has bluntly claimed that Lutheran orthodoxy *engulfed* Pietism.

However, this clear-cut conclusion hardly does justice to the ambiguous character of State Pietism. Steinar Supphellen has studied the enforcement in Denmark and Norway of the so-called *Conventicle Act* (1741–1842) that prohibited godly congregations by lay preachers. He argues that the act was designed and practiced leniently to balance control from above against a desire to stimulate Christian involvement from below. The clergy often disagreed about whether assemblies of lay people should be turned down or stimulated. While some ministers and bishops encouraged parishioners to read and discuss the Bible among themselves, others perceived this as an undermining of the Church's theological authority and the hierarchical social order. This obviously presented a real dilemma, which the authorities tried to solve by allowing a certain degree of religious activity from below while maintaining some boundaries for it to adhere to in order not to threaten the religious and social foundations of the absolutist kingdom (Supphellen, 2012).

Despite its close affinity to Absolutism, State Pietism can thus be seen as the first origin of a distinctly Nordic way of thinking about the relationship between state and society. This is, of course, a far-reaching thesis that raises several tricky questions, not all of which can be answered here. One crucial point is how we should understand the relationship between State Pietism and later Enlightenment rationalism. On the theological level, they were undeniably

perceived as polar opposites. When it comes to their societal views and social impact, however, recent research has pointed at underlying continuities: There is a certain resemblance between Pietist eschatology and the Enlightenment's faith in progress. The prominence in Pietism of the individual relationship with God and the priesthood of all believers anticipated the Enlightenment ideal of the autonomous subject, and the Pietist conventions can be seen as a precursor to the early social forms of the public sphere (e.g., Bredsdorff, 2003; Kuhn, 2003).

Finally, the basic idea that the state should enlighten and educate the population and take responsibility for its welfare or bliss was not lost with Absolutism but can be traced through the modernizing, liberal–elitist Nordic regimes of the 19th century all the way to the postwar, social-democratic welfare state.

Religious and civic awakening: the rise of a civil society

The liberalization of the Nordic societies in the 19th century set off a new dynamism between state and society. The changes in the religious sphere can be seen as symptomatic of a broader picture. The Norwegian historian Jens A. Seip has characterized the vibrant new forms of organized sociability that emerged from the mid-19th century as a kind of “secular congregation life” (Seip, 1983: 133), and Christian goals such as mission and revival can be said to have played a paradigmatic role for other types of organizations as well. The interaction between religious initiative from below and education from above, which State Pietism had hesitantly opened a century earlier, now found much greater opportunities to unfold. New religious movements flourished, linked to mission and popular revivals. In Denmark and particularly in Norway, large parts of the lay religious movements were gradually incorporated into the official church and came to make a lasting impact on them. The foundation of the *Home Mission Association* in Christiania in 1855 and of the *Norwegian Lutheran Home Mission Society* in 1868 are striking examples of how new Christian organizations were created by cooperative efforts between the church and organized laities (Molland, 1972: 32 ff.; Oftestad, 1998: 125 ff.).

The interaction that arose in the mid-19th century between the state church and popular revivalist movements can be seen as an early, virtually paradigmatic expression of the special integration of state and society, which remains a characteristic feature of the “Nordic model.” Some professional groups, such as the ministry, the teachers, and various care occupations,

made particularly important contributions to this integration process and developed a distinctive identity as intermediaries between the state and society.

The new collaboration between the state church and laypeople went hand in hand with a transformation of the minister's vocation from state official to a more community-based profession. Doctors and lawyers were subject to a similar shift; their traditional identity as civil servants was weakened and an increasing share now became self-employed providers of services (Collett, 1997). However, whereas doctors and lawyers maintained and partly strengthened their authority in a democratic society by virtue of being a carefully selected and educated scientific elite, ministers' authority became less determined by their theological competence and more reliant on their ability to touch their parishioners' hearts and awaken them to a life in Christ (Gilje, 2014: 427).

Concurrently the social recruitment of the clergy changed. Even though ministers were the category of academics that grew the least in the 19th century, an ever smaller share of theology students had themselves grown up in a parsonage, while the proportion with peasant and lower-middle-class backgrounds increased significantly (Mannsåker, 1954: 194 ff.). As Nils Gilje has noticed, a large group of ministers "came from the lay movement and returned to the laity as state officials." As "organic intellectuals" of the lay movement, they probably had less professional distance from their parishioners than, for example, doctors from their patients (Gilje, 2014: 423).

The ministers thus legitimized their authority in a modern, increasingly democratic society in quite a different manner from the doctors and lawyers: not by reference to their superior scholarly knowledge, but rather by virtue of their ability to communicate with ordinary people and cooperate with voluntary associations in civil society. In this respect, they represent an alternative occupational strategy, largely ignored by mainstream theories of professions.

The emergence of new pastoral occupations: teaching, nursing, social work

Primary teachers, nurses, social workers, and child welfare workers are examples of occupations that have tended in much of their history to legitimize their authority in such an alternative "pastoral" manner. This is not to say that scientific knowledge is of minor or no relevance to them. However, the relations between theoretical and practical knowledge, and the values guiding professional practice, have generally been more contested here than in the typical science-based professions.

In Norway, these occupations assumed their modern form in the latter half of the 19th century, at approximately the same time as a new civil society arose and the official church became influenced by popular religious movements. Teaching, nursing, and social work were all in various ways shaped by this integration process. The Home Mission and other Christian, philanthropic organizations played an important role in the relief of poverty, in collaboration with municipal institutions and initiatives (Seip, 1984). The Deaconess House in Christiania, founded in 1868, spearheaded the development of modern nursing, and Christian, in part Pietist, values permeated both education and occupation well into the postwar era (Melby, 1990; Moseng, 2014).

The parallel expansion and interweaving of public and private agencies and initiatives within poor relief and social support characterized the Norwegian “social assistance state” (1870–1920), which historian Anne-Lise Seip sees as a direct precursor and precondition of the postwar welfare state. Within this mixed public/private system, a distinctive division of labor developed: While the state and municipalities established the legal and financial, increasingly also the institutional framework of social security, philanthropic organizations like the Norwegian Women’s National Council took the lead in the development and training of new caring occupations such as nurses, nursery nurses, and social workers. Denmark seems to exhibit a strikingly similar pattern. While partly a question of practical initiative and resources, this probably also reflected the widespread belief that the state should not define the ethical foundations of these occupations but leave it to the church and voluntary organizations to teach human benevolence as a vocation (A.-L. Seip, 1983; Seip, 1984: 178–184; Petersen, Petersen & Kolstrup, 2014: 96).

As the social assistance sector and occupations dedicated to the care of vulnerable groups expanded, pastoral power became more widely dispersed in society. Even more striking was the progressive feminization of pastoral functions: Philanthropy, nursing, teaching, and childcare were areas where unmarried women could realize some of their gender-specific Christian calling as wife and mother outside of the home (Koven & Michel, eds., 1993). While Luther had tended to model all authority in society on the authority of the father in the household, women were now developing a form of public authority, modeled on motherhood and the Christian teaching in the home, which had increasingly become a women’s task in 19th-century bourgeois society. Pastoral power assumed a more feminine face, a development that continued into the postwar welfare states.

The Christian roots of bourgeois feminism were not much noticed by the neo-feminists of the 1970s. As Inger Hammar (1998) has argued, religion-blind women's history has thereby overlooked a significant dimension of the project. Women were typically perceived as the morally superior gender and morality as a women's cause. The case of Nico Hambro illustrates the close interaction of feminism, public morality, and the new feminine professionalism: After having founded the Bergen Women's Rights Association and the Bergen Morality Association in the 1880s, she became the leader of the Norwegian Women's National Council 1916–22 and the initiator of its social courses from 1920—the country's first education of social workers. The history of nursing presents a similar and in part even more striking illustration of how Christianity, morality, and notions of femininity were forged into a profession-building ideology. The need of nurses to justify their distinctiveness vis-à-vis physicians has also in recent times contributed to the promotion of markedly feminine—pastoral definitions of nursing, in contrast to the allegedly more instrumental and affectively neutral medical science (Melby, 1990; Moseng, 2014).

By contrast, elementary-school teaching began as a predominantly male undertaking and gradually became a two-gendered occupation as women of bourgeois or middle-class origins came to dominate teaching in the larger cities after 1900. The gradual emergence of a democratic comprehensive school system is one of the clearest examples of the interaction between a reforming state, local self-government, and popular movements in the development of modern Norway and Denmark. Up to the mid-19th century, the elementary school was subordinated to the church; its assignment was to prepare pupils for their confirmation. While some civic education and generally useful knowledge was gradually included, its ecclesiastical connection proved persistent, a point that the dominant national—democratic narrative of Norwegian educational history has tended to underemphasize. Although teachers gradually gained greater independence as a professional group, they were subject to the clergy's supremacy and control well into the 1880s: Teacher-training colleges were almost invariably headed by a theologian, who kept a close watch on the candidates' lives. The local vicar presided over the municipal school boards and supervised the teaching and the children's knowledge (Telhaug & Mediås, 2003: 78).

Historically, there was a mutual affinity between the roles of minister and teacher: Within the Evangelical–Lutheran confession, the minister was primarily perceived and often referred to as a teacher. In the 1790s, the prominent Danish cleric Christian Bastholm even claimed that the label *præst* (priest) was a Catholic remnant that should be replaced by the proper

Protestant term “people’s teacher” (Bastholm, 1794: 9 ff.). The role of the modern teacher developed more-or-less concurrent with that of the democratized minister and showed some interesting structural similarities to it. Many teachers, notably males of rural, socially modest origins, saw themselves as another kind of preacher or emissary: They should *awaken* the children’s Christian and national spirit and *release* their inherent human potential.

Education as redemption: from Pietism to reform pedagogy

Much like the democratized pastoral role and the emerging caring occupations in the social and health sectors, this new teacher identity developed in an interaction between reforms implemented from above and various nongovernmental agents, such as local communities, popular movements, folk high schools, and private teacher-training colleges. Denmark also saw a flourishing of so-called free schools and adult schools from the mid-19th century. These Danish schools were inspired by the minister *cum* philosopher and historian N. F. S. Grundtvig, whose idiosyncratic synthesis of theological, pedagogical, and cultural ideas had a pervasive impact on the Danish *folk* church as well as *folk* school and teacher-training colleges. While less dominant within the Norwegian school system and marginal in the Norwegian church, Grundtvigianism inspired the so-called folk high school movement and certain teacher-training institutions. Religious life in Norway, however, was much more influenced by Pietism, which continued to impact teacher training into the 20th century (Eritsland, 2020).

While the conflict between a Pietism centering on human sin and repentance and the more life-affirming Grundtvigianism is a well-known theme in both Danish and Norwegian educational history, it is important to notice some underlying similarities. Both movements rhetorically contrasted “living preaching” to “dead scholasticism.” Both wanted to awaken and redeem, and both argued that what really counted for a teacher as well as a minister was a spiritual passion rather than scholarly erudition.

However, while Pietism tended to subordinate teaching to preaching and maintain a negative anthropology centering on original sin and the need for repentance and salvation, Grundtvig’s motto “first human, then a Christian” formed the basis of a pedagogy that emphasized national history, didactic storytelling, and popular cultural self-expression. Pietist teachers and teacher educators, largely devoid of an elaborated didactics of their own, tended nonetheless to emulate certain elements of the Grundtvigian pedagogy such as the shift from catechesis to more child-centered teaching styles. Storytelling became widely used as an illustrative and

enlivening teaching method, notably in religious education. The Pietistic emphasis on the subject's direct relationship with God facilitated this convergence; teaching was all about reaching out to the latent religious potential of the child (ibid.: 248 f., 282 ff.).

Along these lines, a historically wide-ranging affinity emerged between Pietist, Grundtvigian, and modern, learner-centered reform pedagogy (e.g., Jarning, 2009: 479 f.). To transform the way children were educated in the Christian faith—to teach religion *vom Kinde aus*—was also a crucial starting point of German reform pedagogy (Baader, 2005: 123 ff.). In the Nordic and particularly Norwegian history of education, the fissures between a Pietist, a Grundtvigian, and a modern, learner-centered pedagogy are thus anything but clear. There was, however, an unmistakable, long-term drift in educational thought from the late 18th to the 20th century from a more pessimistic Lutheran anthropology to a much more optimistic faith in the child's potential for natural self-expression and development. But even this transformation was intricate. While the conflict between evolutionism and creationism ran high at universities and in the public sphere from the 1870s, some Norwegian educationalists tended to see natural evolution as an expression of God's plan or a revelation of holy principle, much like the way physical laws of nature had been understood in the 17th century (Skard, 1972: 111–113).

A striking example of such amalgamation of naturalism and Christian idealism is the pedagogical thought of the academically autodidact teacher-training principal Erling Kristvik (1882–1969), whose textbooks in child psychology and pedagogy were widely used in interwar and early postwar Norwegian teacher education. Kristvik stands out as an interesting transitional character in the history of Norwegian educational thought, whose idiosyncratic theories reflected the Lutheran past while also embracing viewpoints that were seminal to the pedagogy and educational reforms of the postwar welfare state. The central theme of his textbooks (Kristvik, 1937; Kristvik, 1941; Kristvik, 1945) were the principles of child-centered education; the adaptation of methods and substance to the child's level of development. His aim, however, was not to set the child free from the authority of social and cultural traditions. Quite to the contrary, he wanted to socialize them into a particular set of communitarian, home-centered values that he defended as an educational sociologist. A “progressive,” child-centered pedagogy was thus combined with a speculative sociocultural philosophy with anti-modern and partly outright reactionary implications in a synthesis where biological, psychological, sociological, and metaphysical arguments were blended in a more-or-less frictionless manner (Kristvik, 1920; Kristvik, 1954).

The paradigmatic core of Kristvik's ideal community was the relationship between parents and children. Taking the opposition between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* as a template, Kristvik constructed a grandiloquent dichotomy between the "parental" and the "parasitic" principles in social life, which would account for the eternal struggle in the history of humanity between constructive and destructive forces and at the same time engulf a host of other contradictions, such as rural/urban, female/male, and peace/war (Kristvik, 1954).

Two implications of this eccentric scheme are noteworthy: First, it elevated *care* into a premier social and moral principle, thereby giving prominence to teachers and other caring occupations as promoters of the parental principle in modern society. Second, by taking the home and its parental authority as the paradigm of all sound social cooperation and authority, Kristvik placed himself firmly within the Lutheran heritage. His social ideas could in one sense be read as a feminized Lutheranism. Luther's doctrine of the three estates implied that all authority, religious as well as worldly, followed the example of the paternal authority over the household (Koefoed, 2019). For Kristvik, though, all sound social and moral authority was based on the paradigm of maternal care for the offspring. Men could possess true authority to the extent that they were socialized into the role of the caring father; otherwise, they tended to exhibit traits of the parasitic social syndrome such as aggressiveness, possessiveness, and sexual promiscuity. Much like the Evangelical feminists of the late 19th century, Kristvik thus tended to see women as the inherently morally superior sex.

A third quality of Kristvik's scheme should also be mentioned: It was strongly dichotomous and value-laden, giving rise to a characteristic Manichean style of thought. While not a Pietist, this gave him a certain temperamental affinity to the Pietist tradition.

The seemingly idiosyncratic mixture in Kristvik's pedagogy of evolutionism and Christianity, of modern reform pedagogy and backward-looking communitarianism, was in a sense symptomatic of the era in which it was conceived. The period from the 1870s to the interwar years was characterized by "a continuous search for new concepts, new solutions, and new arrangements. (...) This openness had a double foundation: an unfinished social science and an unfinished social situation, where the security of the old order was failing and the new had not yet been established" (Slagstad, 1998: 168). The rise of a vibrant civil society, with increasing social mobility and a dense web of religious, philanthropic, cultural, and political organizations greatly enhanced the vitality and complexity of the national community while also undermining the coherent, elitist-bureaucratic political order of the previous era. While the period saw new forms of cooperation and integration between state and society, notably in

the fields of religion, social assistance, and care, it was also haunted by splintering social, political, and cultural forces. Manichaeism, fanaticism, and intransigence were in the air (Seip, 1994). Thus, a *search for order*, so characteristic of party politics and governance throughout the period, was also a striking feature of its cultural and intellectual situation.

The welfare state as a “virtuous circle” of state and society

When the Labor Party gained political power in Norway in 1935, and more decisively after 1945, it mobilized the state as an instrument of macroeconomic control and far-reaching social reforms from above. J. A. Seip has suggested that history had thereby gone full circle: from the absolutist kingdom via an elitist liberalizing regime to an interregnum with democratic pluralism back to the omnipotent state (Seip, 1963).

Some early critical observers of the welfare state from the church and philanthropic organizations similarly tended to see it as an ominous usurpation by the state of all worldly and spiritual power in society. While articulating a variety of attitudes toward the welfare state, from enthusiastic support to fierce rejection, clerical and other Christian commentators widely shared a concern that it would replace the spiritual realm with a strictly secular philosophy of life. As Paul Holt, principal of Aarhus’ teacher-training college, sharply put it, the welfare state would tend to take “the state as God,” “politics as religion,” and “ideology as a doctrine of salvation” (Petersen & Petersen, 2013: 924). Bishop Eivind Berggrav, leader of the Norwegian Church’s anti-fascist resistance during the war, now returned to the theological centerpiece of that struggle: the Lutheran doctrine of the two kingdoms. Berggrav’s core argument against the German occupants’ claim that this doctrine committed the Church to accept and bless the New Order had been that Christians only had a duty to obey a state that was based on the rule of law and observed its limitations vis-à-vis the spiritual kingdom. Continuing this line of reasoning in an address to the Lutheran World Congress in 1952, Berggrav claimed that a welfare state that assigned itself a superior role, permeated all areas of life, and even sought to shape public opinion and inculcate a so-called “democratic attitude” in coming generations, trespassed upon the spiritual kingdom and thus had the potential to become a new totalitarian power (Tønnessen, 2011; Petersen & Petersen, 2013: 917 ff.).

While formulating his criticism in unusually sharp terms, provoking objections from other clerics, Berggrav put his finger on a widespread concern about the future of Christianity, philanthropy, and sense of personal moral responsibility in a world where the state catered for

its subjects from cradle to grave. In hindsight, there can be little doubt that government did expand and permeated society in depth in the postwar Nordic welfare states. The Norwegian and Swedish labor movements, in particular, were highly suspicious of philanthropic do-goodism, private institutions within education, health, and social welfare, and, above all, of autonomous Christian agencies beyond governmental control. Nonpublic agencies became marginalized or confined within an increasingly government-controlled welfare sector from the 1960s, the very decade when several indices of secularization showed a marked upward trend all over Western Europe (Brown, 2009). From the 1980s, however, public–private cooperation in the welfare sector was again in political demand under new ideological and economic conjunctures.

Berggrav’s dystopia of the welfare state as an all-embracing, totalitarian Leviathan did nonetheless underestimate the complex manner in which state and society had interacted, and continued to interact, in the long-term formation of the welfare state. Comparative studies of civil society and social trust have shown that the Nordic welfare states have been characterized by a vibrant organizational life, high political and social participation, and a high level of trust in institutions and one’s fellow citizens. These findings contradict the so-called “crowding out hypothesis,” which predicts that increasing government involvement in civil society will impair its vitality (Kumlin & Rothstein, 2005; Selle, 2008).

It may be symptomatic that Nordic social democrats have had a strong tendency to conflate state and society in their political rhetoric. This has been particularly striking in Sweden, where the welfare state has been promoted as “the strong society.” In the writings of Swedish economist and social democrat Gunnar Myrdal, the virtuous circle between state and society appeared as a specifically modern conception, where the old faith in natural social harmony had been replaced by the idea that social order had to be *created* by social engineering. As the Finnish historian Pauli Kettunen sees it, however, Myrdal’s alleged break with the past was incomplete. His project was actually based on an older, Protestant, and specifically Nordic image of society (Kettunen, 1997).

Pastoral professions in the welfare state

What role have the pastoral occupations played in this interpenetration of state and society in postwar Scandinavia?

The answer depends on whether, or to what extent, one defines the welfare state as a pastoral project. Historian Lars Trägårdh has characterized the Swedish welfare state as a unique

experiment in “state individualism,” where universal welfare services, defined and distributed as individual rights, have emancipated the individual from constricting dependencies on family, local community, and paternalist forms of social support (Trägårdh, 2008).

While this perspective captures an important dimension of the welfare-state project, it arguably underestimates the extent to which it aimed at educating, adapting, and conditioning the individual to modern society’s functional needs as well as to a set of shared social values. This educational or pastoral project was administered by a wide spectrum of institutions and agencies, such as the school system, health services, social security offices, and child welfare agencies. While such agencies were largely public, their staff was often imbued with an occupational ethos ultimately rooted in Lutheran or Pietist notions of a sacred calling. These occupations, therefore, offer a strategic entry for studying how older layers of tradition were refracted, transformed, and continued in the pastoral practices of the welfare state.

The US-dominated social sciences, which expanded greatly both as academic disciplines and instruments of welfare policies in Scandinavia after World War II, played an important mediating role in this process. Not only did they offer partly new discourses of the individual-in-society and of pastoral means and ends. They also introduced a sociology of professions, reflecting the Anglo–American historical experience, which these occupations could appropriate as a means of increasing their status and defending a critical element of autonomy vis-à-vis other occupations as well as the state.

Nurses were the first caring occupation to adopt the sociological profession concept and its underlying theory to strengthen their position vis-à-vis the doctors as well as their subordinates in the hospital. Professionalism also had a crucial ethical dimension. As a nurse reflected in retrospect in the late 1980s, it served partly as a substitute for the Christian occupational ethos, which had lost some of its currency in an increasingly secularized society. Christian and “professional” nursing met in the ethical imperative to take care of “the whole person,” rather than focus merely on a medical diagnosis: “It was a kind of idealism that appealed to me, and which I felt was a kind of bridge between the old diaconal work and the new secularized nursing” (Melby, 1990: 279 f.).

In social work, however, professionalism was embraced rather as a way of distancing the occupational identity from negative stereotypes of past philanthropic do-goodism. Prewar courses in social work were written off as merely a general education for bourgeois women. Sociological and psychological theories of the dynamic between individuals and their social

environment were appropriated as a progressive alternative to the moral and religious foundations of older social work, rather than as a bridge connecting past and present (Messel, 2013). This occupational strategy was in line with the labor movement's strong disapproval of selective, Christian-philanthropic styles of social support. It is, however, interesting to note that the so-called casework method, which was introduced as *the* distinctive approach of social work that would provide it with a certain professional autonomy, was introduced from the United States, where it originated from the Protestant social gospel movement (Williams & MacLean, 2012). The conflict in Nordic social work between a casework-oriented professional strategy and the social workers' actual role as public officers and gatekeepers of social services has been a source of recurring tension (Terum, 1996: 119 ff.).

Teachers were the largest pastoral occupation of the welfare state, and arguably also the one most deeply rooted in the Lutheran tradition. A defining moment for Norwegian teachers arose during the German occupation when Quisling's collaboration regime attempted to force them into a Fascist teacher corporation and Nazify the curriculum. The teachers formed a close alliance with the parents and the church, and their argumentative strategy largely followed the clergy's example. To resist an illegitimate state, it was crucial to maintain that teaching was based on an ethic and an assignment rooted in civil society and, ultimately, in Christianity. In a statement of April 9, 1942, the teachers declared that their vocation was not only to "give the children knowledge" but also to "teach the children to have faith in, and to earnestly desire that which is true and just."² The form of the protest matched its content: It was formulated as a personal pledge from the teacher to his or her class to remain faithful to his or her calling and conscience. This manifestation of civil courage attracted considerable attention among the Allies and gave Norwegian teachers special credibility in the process of postwar democratic reconstruction in UNESCO and elsewhere.

While the Norwegian teachers' wartime resistance put the vitality of their historical traditions on display, the postwar period saw a thorough overhauling of the national school system that both confirmed and challenged their established occupational identity. School reforms were largely implemented in a top-down manner, driven by government and elaborated by its more-or-less handpicked expertise (Slagstad, 1998: 318 ff.). However, an extended comprehensive school served the elementary-school teachers' interests vis-à-vis their academically trained counterparts in the secondary schools and also matched their democratic

² The official English translation of the Declaration was printed in the booklet *Norway's Teachers Stand Firm*, Washington D.C.: The Royal Norwegian Government's Press Agency 1942.

and pupil-centered occupational ethos. They, therefore, largely became the government's partners in the postwar efforts to develop a unified democratic school system (Hagemann, 1992: 257 ff.; Dahl et al., 2016: 49–54).

At the same time, the teachers upheld a pastoral understanding of their mission firmly rooted in their occupational legacy. This legacy was both contested and accentuated by social-democratic educational policies: While the school curriculum, teacher training, and educational sciences became secularized and “modernized,” the ultimate goal of the social-democratic school system was to socialize the children into a democratic way of life and unleash their potential for learning and human development. Pupil-centered teaching methods were strongly encouraged by educational and teacher-training policies. Teaching thereby became even more of a “caring occupation” (Telhaug & Mediås, 2003: 158–175).

Teachers may thus illustrate some of the continuities as well as the discontinuities in the exertion of pastoral authority within the Nordic state/society nexus: Much like the Lutheran ministers in previous times, they were supposed to redeem the subjectivity of each subject and at the same time represent and police the normative foundations of society. A survey from 1938 indicated that Norwegian student teachers had internalized this dual assignment: On the one hand, they clearly distanced themselves from a strict, authoritarian teacher role, and many expressed attitudes typical of modern reform pedagogy. On the other hand, a solid majority said they wanted to win children and youth for a particular view of life, faith, or cause. And at the top of the list, especially among the female students, was Christianity. The students also tended to agree that the teacher's personality was more important than formal competence (Lange, 1947; Hagemann, 1992: 248).

However, while teaching remained a pastoral occupation, the understanding of the teacher's pastoral duties had undergone profound changes since the 19th century. As the good shepherd, he—and increasingly *she*—should at once attend to the flock and the individual sheep. Shepherding, though, was no longer about saving from sin, but rather about redeeming the child's latent resources. A Lutheran consciousness of sin was now more definitely replaced by belief in the child's natural propensity for self-expression and development.

To facilitate and stimulate human self-realization and to socialize the subject into the social order with its common values and functional demands were not seen as contradictory but rather as two sides of the same coin. On this crucial point, impulses from the postwar, US-dominated social sciences largely converged with lingering trends of domestic religious and

social thought. Social psychology tended to see the dynamic interaction between individuals' psychological growth and their internalization of social norms and roles as a key to the democratic way of life. Two Norwegian educationalists as different as Erling Kristvik and Johannes Sandven, the psychometrically oriented professor who dominated the Oslo department of pedagogy until the late 1960s, both coined the expression "aptitude for life" to express the ultimate aim of primary education. While pedagogy has continuously found itself in a disputed position between being an empirical science and a normative reflection on the goals and means of education (a "theology of teaching," so to speak), a pastoral dimension has proved resilient in the discipline as well as the teaching profession throughout the entire 20th century.

The Nordic dynamic of societal trust

The distinctively Nordic dynamic between educative government from above and edifying popular self-organization from below may help explain why these societies stand out in international comparison with their exceptionally high degree of generalized social trust. This dynamic may be described as a "virtuous circle" whereby a high level of social trust both produces, and is produced by, the progressive integration of state and society: Trust in government and public institutions, and trust in our fellow humans, tends mutually to reinforce each other.

The "pastoral professionals" play an important part in this process in their capacity as mediators between the welfare state and the life world of their clients. While often described as street-level bureaucrats and gatekeepers to social welfare, pastoral professionals also translate general welfare policies into individual treatment and provide such policies with a human face.

A survey undertaken at the Center for the Study of Professions at Oslo Metropolitan University shows that Norwegians, when asked which occupations they believe enjoy the highest prestige in society, place doctors, judges, professors, and lawyers at the top of the list. However, when asked which occupations they trust themselves, and which occupations they think deserve higher recognition than they currently get, less predictable results are obtained. It is striking that professions that are associated with human benevolence and daily unselfish hardships for modest pay, such as nurses and teachers, get very high scores. The respondents thus hold only marginally less trust in nurses than in doctors, a little bit more in nurse assistants than in teachers, who in turn hold a tiny lead on school leaders and secondary-

school teachers (Helland, With, Mausestagen & Alecu, 2016). These results concur with other studies, which indicate that the educated Norwegian middle class supports egalitarian values and tends to hold moral “goodness” in higher esteem than professional and academic merits (Skarpenes & Sakslind, 2010).

Nordic welfare professionals are primarily employed in the public sector and are assigned to represent its interests and values. But apparently, Scandinavians also tend to see them as “fellow humans,” often representing the better part of ourselves. This trust certainly has its limits, especially when professionals are given wide discretionary powers over decisions fateful to clients’ life. Child welfare officers are a striking case in point. And yet, as mediators between public norms and values and people’s life world, welfare professionals are crucial contemporary representatives of a long tradition of state–society integration.

Conclusion

The focal question of this article was whether the exceptionally high level of generalized social trust in the Nordic societies can be traced back to their Lutheran heritage and more specifically, to the pastoral authority of certain religiously rooted caring occupations.

My starting point was the stylized contrast in the work of Talcott Parsons between American-styled Reformed Protestantism, which gave rise to liberal professionalism, and a Lutheran tradition that allegedly fostered subservience to hierarchical authority and thereby an authoritarian political culture. I have attempted to modify this somewhat heavy-handed scheme by focusing on a Lutheran region with strong bureaucratic as well as democratic traditions. One way of summarizing my argument is to see the three historical layers I have briefly accounted for as transformations that progressively reduced the religious and cultural contrast between Nordic Lutheranism and American Reformed Protestantism. State Pietism introduced faith in the possibility and duty to improve the individual and thereby society through *praxis pietatis*. While the Danish–Norwegian state church modified and adapted Pietism to the established Lutheran orthodoxy, thereby curbing some of its individualizing and civic potential, State Pietism did sow the seed of a discourse that would prove tenacious in modern Scandinavia: that of the “educational state” taking responsibility for its subjects’ *Glückseeligkeit* (welfare/eternal bliss).

With the rise of a civil society and of a revivalist laity from the mid-19th century, the Nordic countries became somewhat less different from the liberal British and US societies. Within revivalist movements, there was a lively transnational exchange of religious practices and

world views across the boundaries between various Protestant confessions. Similarly, the formation of such new, religiously inspired female care occupations as nursing and social work seems to have progressed along relatively similar paths in the Lutheran, Anglican, and Reformed parts of the Protestant realm (Koven & Michel, eds., 1993). Even the transformation of the Protestant clergy from officeholders to “pastoral professionals” was in some ways strikingly parallel in Lutheran Norway and Puritan New England (Scott, 1978). Distinctive to Norway (and to some extent Denmark), however, was how lay movements became incorporated into the national church, transforming Norwegian church life into an “assembly and meeting Christianity” (Molland, 1972: 116). This incorporation was in a sense emblematic of a more general interpenetration between state and civil society from the late 19th century, as seen for instance in poor relief, social services, health, and education, mediated by the caring occupations.

The postwar welfare state radicalized this integration while also strengthening the government side of the relationship. The state heightened its pastoral ambitions and increasingly took control of key pastoral agencies. At the same time, it secularized the ultimate aims of such policies. However, older layers of vocational identity were often sedimented in the self-understanding and practice of pastoral professionals. In addition, in their efforts to define the welfare state as a pastoral project, Norwegian academics, professionals, and reformers became inspired by US-dominated social sciences bearing an imprint of Reformed Protestantism and the Social Gospel movement, which was the immediate source of inspiration for Parsons’ theory of the religious sources of American professionalism. The way these sciences became institutionalized and employed as instruments of social reform in Norwegian society, though, reflected a distinctively Nordic tendency to see the state as the problem-defining and problem-solving center of society.

The Nordic interpenetration of state and society, stimulated by the pastoral professionals of the welfare state, may be seen as a self-reinforcing dynamic producing a generalized trust in both public institutions and one’s fellow citizens. Whether, or to what extent, this should be seen as a virtuous circle in a more normative sense is, however, quite another matter. There might certainly be too much generalized trust in a society because the rule of law depends on certain institutionalized forms of skepticism and criticism of power. Finnish historian Henrik Stenius has argued that the Nordic countries have difficulties recognizing the importance of pluralism and of “no-go zones” for the penetrating and normalizing state:

‘Society’, that which is shared, the *Gemeinschaft* that never completely vanished, knows no bounds. All the doors are open – to the living room, to the kitchen, the larder, the nursery, not to mention the bedroom – and they are not just open. Society marches in and intervenes, sometimes brusquely (Stenius, 1997: 171).

While not quite in line with the present analysis, these words might stand as a warning against a one-sidedly celebratory approach to the Nordic high-trust syndrome.

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