

Responding to Secularization

The Deaconess Movement in
Nineteenth-Century Sweden

By

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BRILL

LEIDEN • BOSTON
2011

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CHAPTER ONE

THE SECULARIZATION DEBATE: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEMATIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELIGION AND MODERNITY

Religious historians and sociologists of religion have participated in a vigorous debate since the 1960s over how to explain the apparent decline of religion in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe. I will engage this debate from a historical perspective by studying the social significance of deaconesses in late nineteenth-century Sweden. Swedish deaconesses acquired, maintained, and expanded their influence in important social functions during this period. They did so even though more secular, specialized institutions and professionals were increasingly assuming formal responsibility in Sweden, as in much of Europe, for many of the social functions carried out historically by religious institutions. The influence of deaconesses in the public sphere demonstrates that the adoption of social functions by more specialized institutions and professionals did not necessarily push religious institutions and professionals to the margins of society. Religious organizations and personnel continued in many instances to carry out essential social functions, both in competition and cooperation with other specialized institutions. Swedish deaconesses had to overcome obstacles that their male religious counterparts did not face in carrying out these social functions. For this reason, my study will also address the ways in which gender enabled deaconesses to wield public influence at a time when women were often limited in the work they could perform outside the home. I will argue that the female diaconate succeeded in alleviating some gender-based concerns with its work by extending the domestic sphere and the qualities deemed most suitable for women into the public sphere. The female diaconate gained access to the public sphere by organizing, interpreting, and carrying out its work in accordance with the traditional religious construction of gender that was prevalent in the nineteenth century.

Given the focus of my study, I will devote much of this chapter to a discussion of the secularization debate between and among sociologists and historians, as well as to how my study fits into this debate. I

will subsequently address the relationship between gender and religion in contemporary Swedish historical scholarship and how recent developments in Swedish gender history have aided my study of the female diaconate. My study differs from much of the Anglophone historical scholarship on secularization in modern Europe in that its primary focus is not on the decline of religious beliefs and practices among individuals and particular social groups over the past several centuries.¹ My main concern is secularization at the societal level, in conjunction with what sociologists of religion term “functional differentiation.” Functional differentiation is the process in which social functions historically carried out by religious institutions and personnel are absorbed by more secular, specialized institutions and professionals in the modern era. To take one example, in medieval Europe, poor relief was largely the preserve of parish clergy, religious orders, and confraternities. In the early modern and modern periods, social workers and welfare boards gradually assume formal responsibility for this work.

Prominent sociological defenders of the secularization thesis argue that functional differentiation, as part of the process of modernization, inevitably led to a decline in the “social significance” of religion in the public sphere, that is, in that domain of society in which essential social, political, and economic functions are carried out on society’s behalf.² When social functions such as poor relief or education began to be adopted by more secular, specialized institutions, religious institutions not only experienced general decline in their influence in the public sphere, but they became *marginalized* in the social order, with their influence and activities relegated to a more private realm.

Since many religious historians of modern Europe have emphasized the decline of religious beliefs and practices in their studies on secularization, very little historical work has been done on exploring the socio-

¹ In certain regions of Europe, historians who study secularization do not emphasize the decline in religious beliefs and practices. French historians, for example, typically give little attention to the decline in traditional Christian beliefs or church attendance in their studies of post-Revolutionary France, focusing instead on church-state relations and/or the decline of religion’s influence in the public sphere. On the other hand, historians from the United States who study modern French religious history are much more likely to devote considerable attention to the beliefs and practices of individuals and social groups. See Thomas Kselman, “Challenging Dechristianization: The Historiography of Religion in Modern France,” *Church History* 75 (2006), 130–139.

² The definition of secularization as a decrease in the “social significance” of religion can be traced to the work of the sociologist Bryan R. Wilson. See Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society: A Sociological Comment* (London: C.A. Watt & Co. Ltd., 1966), xiv.

logical claim that functional differentiation necessarily leads to secularization in the public sphere. I intend to compensate for this gap in the historical research through a study of the deaconess movement, a religious movement that arose in response to increasing functional differentiation in nineteenth-century Sweden. The female diaconate specialized in the areas of education, health care, and poor relief. Many sociologists point to these same three social functions as areas in which religious institutions and personnel became marginalized in the social order once these responsibilities were “taken over” by more specialized institutions and professionals. For this reason, a study of the female diaconate seems quite appropriate.

The challenge with such a study is that the causal link between functional differentiation and secularization appears difficult to refute. One noted sociologist, José Casanova, has even argued that the latter, at least from a theoretical perspective, should be defined primarily in terms of the former.³ And much of the evidence from the past century appears to confirm the causal connection. Particularly in the twentieth century, functional differentiation has taken its toll on European religious institutions through the emergence of modern welfare states. Few would argue that religious institutions possess the same degree of social significance in contemporary Europe as they did two or three centuries ago.

But from a broader historical perspective, functional differentiation's effects on religious institutions cannot be understood only as secularizing, even if secularization has been one outcome. In the context of the nineteenth century, functional differentiation is best understood as the continuation of a process dating from the early modern period that redefined the roles played by religion and religious institutions in society. This redefinition process certainly posed challenges to religion's public influence as churches and church representatives lost their monopolies on social services and were forced to compete or cooperate with more specialized providers, both religious and secular. In plenty of instances, the established churches of Europe simply were not up to the task, and the increasing marginalization of religious institutions was one result.

But where some doors closed, others opened. Functional differentiation also created opportunities for religious communities to wield

³ José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994).

influence in the public sphere that otherwise might not have existed. Deaconesses are a case in point. The female diaconate arose in mid-nineteenth-century Sweden to specialize in those areas subject to significant functional differentiation. The very founding of the female diaconate was a reaction to functional differentiation and its potentially secularizing effects, and the fact that the deaconess movement survived and even expanded its influence in the late nineteenth century reflects its success in responding to modernization and particularly to the increased demand for specialized providers in areas such as nursing and social work. Ironically, functional differentiation gave the female diaconate its *raison d'être*. To focus only on the secularizing outcome of functional differentiation is therefore to overlook the overall success of religious communities such as the female diaconate and to fail to appreciate what Yves Lambert calls the “diverse and contradictory effects” of modernity on religion.⁴

A. *Problems of Definition*

Because the concept of secularization has multiple dimensions, and because different scholars sometimes mean different things when they refer to it, it is necessary to explain how I will use the term.⁵ Before doing so, let me discuss briefly how the term has been commonly understood over the past several centuries. Until around the mid-nineteenth century, secularization typically referred either to the transfer of ecclesiastical property from the church to secular persons or bodies (as was the case during the Reformation or the French Revolution), or to the relinquishing of orders by monks and nuns. A related use of the word in the nineteenth century referred to the transfer of control of a particular public institution, such as a university, away from religious bodies.⁶

⁴ Yves Lambert, “New Christianity, Indifference and Diffused Spirituality,” in *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe 1750–2000*, eds. Hugh McLeod and Werner Ustorf (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 66.

⁵ For a discussion of the problems involved in defining the term “secularization,” see C.J. Sommerville, “Secular Society/Religious Population: Our Tacit Rules for Using the Term ‘Secularization,’” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 37 (1998), 249–253.

⁶ Brief discussions of how the term *secularization* has been used historically can be found in Hugh McLeod, *Secularisation in Western Europe, 1848–1914* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 1–3; Kevin M. Schultz, “Secularization: A Bibliographic Essay,” *The Hedgehog Review* 8 (2006), 171–173.

In recent decades, scholars have attempted to delineate more clearly the different senses in which the term can be used. The sociologist José Casanova argues that secularization has three different connotations: a decline in religious beliefs and practices, a differentiation of secular from religious spheres, and a privatization of religion. The validity of each of these three connotations, he maintains, should be studied independently.⁷ The social historian Hugh McLeod also argues that the term has three different senses that must be studied separately: a decline in religious beliefs and practices, a separation of religious and public institutions, and a weakening in the power of religion to shape the identity of the majority in a given society.⁸

For the purposes of this study, secularization refers to a decline in the influence of religion in a given society. In the context of modern Europe, particularly before the late twentieth century, the religion in question is typically some form(s) of Christianity. Moreover, this decline can be studied on one of two levels. First, the scholar can study the extent to which there has been a decline in the religious beliefs and practices of individuals or social groups (i.e., men, the working class, etc.). The primary indicators of such a decline include church attendance, church membership, church rituals (baptisms, marriages, funerals, etc.), and traditional Christian beliefs. Second, religious decline can be studied in terms of the larger social significance of religion. The scholar in this case attempts to uncover the extent to which religious institutions, organizations, and professionals have lost their influence in the public sphere.⁹

I am focusing on this second aspect of secularization, particularly as viewed in conjunction with the process of functional differentiation. My concern is with whether or not functional differentiation adversely affected the social significance of one particular religious group, the Swedish deaconessate. I do not wish to confuse this second sense of the term with the first. Several historians, including Hugh McLeod, C.J. Sommerville, and Jeffrey Cox, have rightly pointed out that there is no necessary connection between these two levels of secularization.

⁷ Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, 7; “Rethinking Secularization: A Global Comparative Perspective,” *The Hedgehog Review* 8 (2006), 7–8.

⁸ McLeod, *Secularisation in Western Europe*, 13.

⁹ The separation of ecclesiastical and sociopolitical institutions, which can be defined as secularization in a classic use of the word, is not synonymous with secularization as the term is being used here. Secularization in this work will refer to a decline in the *influence* of religion in a given society and not, in its stricter sense, to a process of differentiation.

Religion in a given society can have social significance even when levels of religious beliefs and practices are low, and vice versa.¹⁰ I share their views, and for this reason I will not attempt to ascertain whether a connection exists between levels of religious beliefs and practices on the one hand, and the larger social significance of religious institutions and professionals on the other.¹¹

B. The Secularization Debate in Sociology

The debate between and among sociologists and historians has to do with much more than definitional issues. The secularization debate is first and foremost a debate over what can be termed “the secularization thesis” or “secularization theory.”¹² The secularization thesis, which at its core asserts that modernity and modernizing processes lead to a decline in the influence of religion in contemporary societies, can be traced back to the work of seminal nineteenth- and early twentieth-century sociological thinkers, including Max Weber and Émile Durkheim. Weber suggested that rationalization and the advance of science would increasingly make religious beliefs and behavior more untenable. He insisted that with modernity there would be an increasing “disenchantment of the world.”¹³ Durkheim argued that history was progressing in such a way that religious institutions, which once permeated European society,

¹⁰ Hugh McLeod, “Secular Cities? Berlin, London, and New York in the Later Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries,” in *Religion and Modernization: Sociologists and Historians Debate the Secularization Thesis*, ed. Steve Bruce (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 64; Sommerville, “Secular Society/Religious Population,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 37 (1998), 251; Jeffrey Cox, *The English Churches in a Secular Society: Lambeth, 1870–1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 13–14.

¹¹ The sociologist Steve Bruce believes that in many cases a decline in the social significance of religion leads to a decline in the religious beliefs and practices of individuals and social groups. Consequently, in studying secularization, the scholar must look for the connections between the two. In this assessment, he differs from fellow sociologist and defender of the secularization thesis Bryan Wilson, who makes a greater effort to treat the social significance of religion separately from the issue of whether or not people hold religious beliefs or participate in religious rituals. See Steve Bruce, *God is Dead: Secularization in the West* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

¹² For a fuller exposition of the secularization debate, see Todd Green, “Religious Decline or Religious Change? Making Sense of Secularization in Europe,” *Religion Compass* 4 (2010), 300–311.

¹³ Max Weber, “Science as a Vocation,” in *The Vocation Lectures*, eds. David Owen and Tracy B. Strong (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company), 1–31.

would continue to be pushed to the margins of the social order as more specialized institutions and professionals emerged in the modern process of differentiation.¹⁴

Some of the ideas of these early sociological thinkers were expanded upon and systematized by sociologists in the 1960s, and it is from this point that we can talk about a theory of secularization. The most prominent advocates of this theory in the 1960s were Bryan Wilson and Peter Berger, though many other sociologists followed suit. Their work contributed to giving the secularization thesis “the status of sociological orthodoxy” in the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁵ There were skeptics even in this period, but the number of critics would not become significant until the 1980s and 1990s. The more recent trend within sociology is to criticize or even reject the theory of secularization, but the thesis continues to have its defenders, most notably Steve Bruce.

While defenders of the secularization thesis differ on some points, most of them agree on the essentials. These advocates of the “orthodox model” of secularization contend that “modernization creates problems for religion” in contemporary societies, problems that ultimately undermine the traditional influence of religion both on individual beliefs and practices and on the functioning of society.¹⁶ With modernity, life becomes organized societally instead of locally. Science and technology reduce the occasions for which people have recourse to religion. The greater centrality of reason “demythologizes” the world. Functional differentiation renders the “social services” of religious institutions and professionals unnecessary. Religious pluralism challenges the plausibility of an absolute system of truth and morality that is able to give cohesion to a given society.¹⁷

Defenders of the secularization thesis are not suggesting that modernization will lead to the disappearance of religion from modern societies. But what modernization has done, and will continue to do, is relegate

¹⁴ Émile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, trans. W.D. Halls (New York: The Free Press, 1984).

¹⁵ McLeod, *Secularisation in Western Europe*, 3.

¹⁶ Bruce, *God is Dead*, 2.

¹⁷ For detailed discussions of how modernization contributes to secularization according to defenders of the secularization thesis, see Roy Wallis and Steve Bruce, “Secularization: The Orthodox Model,” *Religion and Modernization*, 8–30; Bruce, *God is Dead*, 1–44; Bryan R. Wilson, *Religion in Sociological Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 148–157; *Religion in Secular Society*, 56–72; and Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1967), 105–171.

religion to a more private realm. To the extent that religion survives, it does so only on the *margins* of the social order and without having much significance for society as a whole.

The most prominent sociological assault on the secularization thesis in recent decades has come from Americans who defend what is variously referred to as rational choice or supply-side theory. Representatives of this position include Rodney Stark, Roger Finke, and Laurence R. Iannaccone. Rational choice theorists believe that most theories of secularization fail because they attribute the cause of secularization to a lack of demand for religion in various modern societies, particularly European ones. But rational choice theorists assume that the demand for religion is relatively constant, and that an inadequate supply of religion best explains the seemingly high levels of secularization in some societies. This is particularly true in many parts of Western Europe where there is a tradition of state churches having a monopoly on religion. State monopolies discourage competition among religious institutions, and if there is no free marketplace of religion, state churches have little incentive to meet the diverse religious demands of a given population. The failure to meet these demands results in many segments of the population distancing themselves from the established religion. Much of Europe suffers from low levels of religious participation because of a tradition of religious monopolies and limited choices in the religious marketplace. Conversely, the United States has witnessed much higher levels of religious participation because historically the American religious marketplace has been more open, with greater competition and choice.¹⁸

Other sociologists have also come out in recent decades against the secularization thesis. In her study of post-World War II Britain, Grace Davie argues that even though there has been a decline in church membership and participation in church rituals, some form of religious beliefs has persisted. For Davie, it is more accurate to describe Britain, and

¹⁸ For an overview of rational choice theory and its criticisms of the secularization thesis, see Roger Finke, "The Illusion of Shifting Demand: Supply-Side Interpretations of American Religious History," in *Retelling U.S. Religious History*, ed. Thomas A. Tweed (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 108–124; Rodney Stark, "Secularization, R.I.P.," *Sociology of Religion* 60 (1999), 249–273; Rodney Stark and Laurence R. Iannaccone, "A Supply-Side Reinterpretation of the 'Secularization' of Europe," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 33 (1994), 230–252. For an application of the supply-side theory to the Swedish context, see Eva Hamberg, "Christendom in Decline: The Swedish Case," in *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe, 1750–2000*, eds. Hugh McLeod and Werner Ustorf (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 47–62.

Western Europe in general, as “unchurched” as opposed to “secular”; that is, Europeans largely “believe without belonging.”¹⁹

Davie has elsewhere described Europe as an “exceptional case” when it comes to religiosity. Religion continues to have a place in modern Europe, but its forms and functions have no clear analogues either in pre-modern Europe or in other parts of the world today. One example of this is the concept of vicarious religion, defined by Davie as “religion performed by an active minority but on behalf of a much larger number, who (implicitly at least) not only understand, but, quite clearly, approve of what the minority is doing.”²⁰ Church leaders and members believe on behalf of others, perform rituals on behalf of others (such as funerals), and so forth. More importantly, churches are expected to do even if most Europeans rarely step foot inside a church, much less adhere to church teachings.²¹

In *Public Religions in the Modern World*, José Casanova observes that, contrary to the secularization thesis, what we are witnessing in recent decades are new historical developments that point to a significant “de-privatization” of religion in many global contexts. Religious traditions throughout the world are refusing to be restricted to the private sphere and are increasingly returning to the public sphere. It is therefore likely that religion will “continue to play important public roles in the ongoing construction of the modern world.”²²

Increasing attention has been given to gender in recent sociological challenges to the secularization thesis. For defenders of the thesis, modern processes such as urbanization, industrialization, and rationalization undermined religious belief and behavior, but Linda Woodhead insists that women did not respond to modernization in the same way as men. She argues that the older theory does nothing more than “explain *male* disaffiliation from religion—for the labourer who leaves the shelter of the sacred canopy is a man not a woman.” Women experienced industrialization “as exclusion from the public world and confinement to the

¹⁹ Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing Without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

²⁰ Grace Davie, “Vicarious Religion: A Methodological Challenge,” in *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives*, ed. Nancy Ammerman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 22.

²¹ For a fuller exposition of Europe’s religious exceptionalism, see Grace Davie, *Europe: The Exceptional Case: Parameters of Faith in the Modern World* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2002).

²² Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, 6.

home and/or low-paid domestic labour and piecework,” resulting in the reinforcement of ties to churches.²³ Only in the 1960s did the connection between churches and women begin to show significant signs of fracturing.

Even Peter Berger, one of the most prominent defenders of the secularization thesis in the 1960s, has reversed some of his earlier assessments. The revised Berger now rejects the claim that modernization necessarily leads to a decline in the influence of religion. Modernization may have secularizing effects, but it can also contribute to potent counter-secularization movements. Berger admits one of the mistakes he made in his earlier work was to conflate secularization with pluralization. Modernity certainly contributes to pluralism, and pluralism leads to a multiplication of choices and worldviews in a given society, but it does not follow that pluralism necessarily leads to secularization. Pluralization can even lead to greater religious participation and to more people embracing religious worldviews.²⁴ Berger’s recent critiques of the secularization thesis are in keeping with other developments in the sociology of religion that challenge the secularization thesis.

C. The Secularization Debate in Modern European Religious History

Historians of religion in modern Europe have followed these sociological debates. They have even attempted to foster greater dialogue with sociologists on the secularization thesis, most notably in the volume edited by Steve Bruce titled *Religion and Modernization: Sociologists and Historians Debate the Secularization Thesis* (1992). Important historical studies in the 1970s appealed to key aspects of the secularization thesis to explain religious decline,²⁵ but since the 1980s historians of religion in

²³ Linda Woodhead, “Gendering Secularization Theory,” *Social Compass* 55 (2008), 190.

²⁴ Peter Berger, “The Desecularization of the World: A Global Overview,” in *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, ed. Peter Berger (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 1–18; Charles T. Mathewes, “An Interview with Peter Berger,” *The Hedgehog Review* 8 (2006), 152–161. See also Peter Berger, Grace Davie, and Effie Fokas, *Religious America, Secular Europe? A Theme and Variations* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2008).

²⁵ For example, see A.D. Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change, 1740–1914* (London: Longman, 1976); Stephen Yeo, *Religion and Voluntary Organisations in Crisis* (London: Croom Helm, 1976).

modern Europe have become as skeptical of the thesis as many of their sociological counterparts. This skepticism, most common among Anglophone historians of European history, largely rests on what is perceived to be the poor historical foundations of the theory. These historians do not reject the contention that secularization is an important part of modern European history. What they reject is the more orthodox theory of secularization that posits an inevitable link between modernization and a decline in religion's influence. The most prominent historians to embrace this position are Thomas Kselman, Jeffrey Cox, Hugh McLeod, and Calum Brown. What follows is a brief treatment of the contributions of each to the secularization debate.

In his study of religious change in France's Third Republic (1870–1914), Thomas Kselman challenges the tendency of historians to embrace the concept of secularization as the central theme of modern European religious history. Pluralism, he argues, and not secularization best describes the types of religious changes taking place in modern Europe, particularly in urban areas. He points out that not only did Catholicism remain far more resilient during France's Third Republic than many French historians have suggested, but other forms of religiosity emerged in the period to meet the various religious needs of the French nation, including socialism, nationalism, and the occult. Many of the “un-churched” constructed religious systems that borrowed elements from both Catholicism and some of these nontraditional religions. Kselman is careful not to deny the reality of secularization in France's Third Republic, but in his emphasis on the importance of emerging religious pluralism and new forms of religiosity, he dismisses the notion that secularization is the central theme of this period.²⁶

Jeffrey Cox agrees that “[i]t is pluralism which most clearly distinguishes the present from the past in matters of religion.”²⁷ He believes that the religious decline that began to occur in late Victorian England is best explained by the competition that arose in a free market of ideas, a

²⁶ Thomas Kselman, “The Varieties of Religious Experience in Urban France,” in *European Religion in the Age of Great Cities 1830–1930*, ed. Hugh McLeod (London: Routledge, 1995), 165–190. Kselman has also studied the changes that have taken place in modern French history in the religious ideas and rituals pertaining to death. He concludes that the Christian religion, even if at times in an inchoate form, continued to inform the attitudes and rituals pertaining to death in France throughout the twentieth century. See Thomas Kselman, *Death and the Afterlife in Modern France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); “The dechristianisation of death in modern France,” *Decline of Christendom*, 145–162.

²⁷ Cox, *English Churches in a Secular Society*, 12.

market that the modern state created after centuries of suppressing religious pluralism and competition. Religious decline in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century England took place largely because religious institutions and thinkers failed to adapt to this situation of increased pluralism and competition.

Cox does not deny that social changes arising out of modernity, such as industrialization and urbanization, also contributed to the decline of the influence of religion in modern English history. The problems that these social changes caused for religion must still be understood in the context of greater pluralism and competition. It is this context that sets the parameters within which religious institutions in the modern period respond to the social changes in question. The themes of pluralism and competition are thus the keys to understanding the degree to which religious beliefs, practices, and institutions lost significance in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century English society.

In *Secularisation in Western Europe, 1848–1914*, Hugh McLeod agrees with Kselman and Cox “that pluralism is the key to the religious situation in later nineteenth-century Europe, and that trends towards secularisation have to be seen in the context of intense religious competition, whether between rival branches of Christianity or between religious and secular views of the world.”²⁸ The effects of this competitive situation for religion varied according to the social role of religion in question and the particular geographical context (England, Germany, or France). Secularization was most prominent in the area of religious beliefs and practices, and this was true for all three of the countries he studied. In terms of the power of religion to convey a sense of identity to a given society, secularization occurred to a much lesser degree in all three contexts. As for the influence of religion on public institutions, the degree of secularization falls somewhere in between the other two areas just mentioned, with secularization being most prominent in France and least prominent in Germany. Secularization, then, is “a question to be put to the [historical] evidence, rather than a preconceived conclusion,” and any explanation of religious decline as an inevitable, coherent “process” arising out of modernity should be questioned, even if the evidence points toward greater or lesser degrees of secularization in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe.²⁹

²⁸ McLeod, *Secularisation in Western Europe*, 28.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 12–13, 28–29.

Callum Brown does not stress the importance of pluralism as do Kselman, Cox, and McLeod, though he shares their criticism of the secularization thesis. In *The Death of Christian Britain*, Brown argues that secularization has not been a long, ongoing process dating back to the Industrial Revolution. It began, rather, quite suddenly through the cultural revolutions of the 1960s. Brown concedes that trends toward a decline in church attendance reach back to the end of the nineteenth century, but many other forms of religiosity, including church membership, church rituals like baptisms and marriages, Sunday School attendance among children, etc., declined significantly only in the 1960s. The 1960s also marked a significant decline in the pervasiveness of a Christian culture in British society. Brown attributes the primary causes of this decline not to social changes stemming from modernity, such as industrialization and urbanization, but to various manifestations of the cultural revolutions of the 1960s, including the rise of a rebellious youth culture and the overturning of traditional models of sexuality and femininity rooted in an evangelical Christian tradition. Brown believes that because the traditional secularization theory and narrative have failed to explain adequately the nature of religious change in modern European history, what is needed is a “postmodern” analysis that questions traditional approaches to the study of secularization, such as the use of statistics to measure the strength/weakness of religion and the tendency to employ definitions of religion that exclude diverse expressions of piety and religiosity.³⁰

When comparing the views of these four historians, several commonalities are noteworthy. First, for three of them, “pluralism” and “competition” are more apt descriptors than “secularization” for the changes taking place in modern European religious history.³¹ Their views are similar to those sociologists who support rational choice theory and its emphasis on the importance of competition (or lack thereof) in describing the religious changes of the past few centuries. Second, all four historians

³⁰ Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain* (London: Routledge, 2001). See also his essay, “The secularisation decade: what the 1960s have done to the study of religious history,” in *Decline of Christendom*, 29–46.

³¹ While technically not a historian, Charles Taylor can also be included in this group. In his philosophical analysis of modern religious history, Taylor maintains that the emergence of pluralism marks the transition from a pre-modern West, in which practically everyone believed in God or the supernatural, to a modern West, in which faith is only one possible means among many to make sense of reality. See Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

accept the reality of secularization in modern European history, though they do not accept the secularization theory that has been used to explain religious decline. As Brown puts it, “[t]he theory of secularisation may be a myth, but *secularisation* is not.”³² Finally, while all four historians acknowledge that secularization was occurring in the nineteenth century, they contend that religious beliefs, practices, and institutions were also far more resilient in the face of modernity than many scholars traditionally have assumed. Significant secularization did not begin to take place until the end of the nineteenth century, and, from Brown’s perspective, the late twentieth century.

D. *The Secularization Debate in Swedish Religious History*

Few Swedish historians have been deeply influenced by the revisionist efforts of historians such as Hugh McLeod or Callum Brown. Most Swedish scholars have relied quite heavily on the secularization theory to make sense of religious decline in Sweden over the past several centuries.

Two kinds of historical scholarship on secularization in Sweden have been prevalent since the 1960s.³³ Representatives of the first approach, mainly church historians in the 1960s and 1970s, have focused primarily on the decline in particular religious beliefs and practices in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Sweden. The second approach, which developed in the late 1980s but became dominant particularly in the 1990s, has been employed by a broader range of historians, including social and economic historians. This school of thought has concentrated on the degree to which a unified religious worldview and culture in the early modern period gave way to an individualized (and thus “secularized”) approach to religion in the modern era.³⁴

³² Brown, “The secularisation decade,” *Decline of Christendom*, 41.

³³ Other studies address the topic of secularization but do not fall into the two categories discussed here. These studies typically define secularization in a more restricted sense, such as a separation of church and state, and are not really engaged with the secularization thesis. See Lennart Tegborg, *Folkskolans sekularisering 1895–1909. Upplösningen av det administrativa sambandet mellan folkskola och kyrka i Sverige* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1969); Bengt Thelin, *Exit eforus. Läroverkens sekularisering och striden om kristendomsundervisning* (Stockholm: Libris, 1981).

³⁴ Olle Larsson also notes that there have been two basic approaches to the study of secularization in Sweden. His categories largely coincide with the ones used in this

The pioneer of modern historical studies of secularization in Sweden, and the most prominent representative of the first approach, is Carl Henrik Martling. In his 1958 study of Eucharistic participation in the Karlstad diocese in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Martling argues that the religious fracturing of the diocese beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century contributed to a Eucharistic crisis by the 1880s. Baptists, Methodists, Swedish Mission Covenanters, and low-church revivalist movements contributed to greater questioning and criticism of the established Lutheran church, the Church of Sweden.³⁵ Their criticisms undermined the doctrinal unity and religious authority that had traditionally existed in Sweden, giving people greater “permission” to question the validity of the Church of Sweden’s teachings and rituals. Martling concedes that social changes such as urbanization and industrialization contributed to a decline in Eucharistic participation, but the importance of these changes is secondary, at least as they apply to church practices in the late nineteenth century.

In a follow-up study of patterns of church participation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Martling arrives at similar conclusions for the dioceses of middle Sweden. Free churches were most prominent in middle-Swedish dioceses in the late nineteenth century. These dioceses also witnessed the largest decline in church attendance and Eucharistic participation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Martling concludes that the greater the religious fracturing and division in a given region, the greater the decline in certain church practices.³⁶

discussion, though I have chosen to characterize the second approach by the definition of secularization employed by its representatives, that is, the transition from a unified religious culture to religion as an individual matter. Larsson describes this second approach primarily by its tendency to view popular and revivalist movements as the culprits in secularization. See Olle Larsson, *Biskopen visiterar. Den kyrkliga överhetens möte med lokalsamhället 1650–1760* (Växjö: Växjö Stiftshistoria Sällskap, 1999), 310–312.

³⁵ The designation “Church of Sweden” (*Svenska kyrkan*) was first used in a legal sense in the 1860 Dissenter Law. For the sake of consistency, I will use the designation “Church of Sweden” throughout, even in discussions pertaining to the period before 1860.

³⁶ Carl Henrik Martling, *Nattvardskrisen i Karlstads stift under 1800-talets senare hälft* (Lund: Gleerups, 1958); *Kyrkosed och sekularisering* (Stockholm: Sveriges Kristliga Studentsrörelses Bokförlag, 1961). In the latter study, Martling notes that the marked decline applies only to church attendance and Eucharistic participation. One-time church rituals, like baptism, confirmation, and marriage, continued to witness a high degree of popular observance up until the time of his study.

Martling's work inspired similar studies in the ensuing decades. Anders Gustavsson's study of churching in Sweden reaches conclusions that parallel Martling's.³⁷ Churching declined the most in those regions of Sweden that witnessed a strong free church presence in the late nineteenth century.³⁸ Kjell Petersson drew similar conclusions concerning baptism. Dioceses that witnessed the largest decline in the frequency of baptism beginning in the late nineteenth century also experienced the highest level of free church activity. This trend held true at least until the mid-twentieth century.³⁹

Since the 1990s, the dominant historical approach has focused not so much on particular church rituals but rather on the separation of religion from culture. This separation is understood as a transition from a once-unified religious culture in which practically everyone belonged to the one true Lutheran faith and interpreted the world around them according to this faith, to a society in which religion becomes a private matter, an individual choice.

The Danish historian Hanne Sanders is perhaps the most influential representative of this approach. In her study of revivalism in early nineteenth-century Denmark and Sweden, Sanders draws on the work of C.J. Sommerville. She argues that secularization refers not so much to a decline in certain doctrines or practices but rather to a loss in religion's significance for a society's worldview. From once providing the background for much of the culture and knowledge in society, religion becomes a matter of individual, existential faith. Sanders believes that while the early nineteenth-century revivalists held a presecularized worldview to the extent that they believed that there was only one true faith, they also contributed to secularization by advocating an individualized interpretation of that faith and of the Bible. This individualized

³⁷ Churching was a purification ritual that reintegrated a mother into the parish community after giving birth. Approximately one month after childbirth, the mother fell on her knees either inside the church door or in front of the altar rails. The priest would then pray for her and give thanks to God for her health. In some cases, churching could take place in the home, and in the nineteenth century it became more common for it to occur in conjunction with baptism. It began to disappear toward the end of the nineteenth century, though in some dioceses, such as Gothenburg and Kalmar, it continued into the early twentieth century. In addition to Gustavsson's work, see Oloph Bexell, *Sveriges kyrkohistoria 7. Folkväckelsens och kyrkoförnyelsens tid* (Stockholm: Verbum, 2003), 18–19.

³⁸ Anders Gustavsson, *Kyrktagningsleden i Sverige* (Lund: Folklivsarkivet, 1972).

³⁹ Kjell Petersson, *Kyrkan, folket och dopet. En studie av barndopet i Svenska kyrkan* (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1977).

approach to religion is thus a necessary precondition for a secularized society, for it is a step toward the differentiation between religion and culture.⁴⁰

Other historians echo Sanders's conclusions, even if there is no consensus on the timing of this process. In his study of eighteenth-century Stockholm, Börje Bergfeldt adopts Sanders's interpretation of secularization, but he pushes the beginning of this process back one century. He notes that in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the religious and profane were still tightly intertwined. Sweden was still a presecularized society. By the late eighteenth century, the evangelical Lutheran religious tradition began to lose its function as the glue holding society together. As evidence for this initial phase of secularization, Bergfeldt points to several eighteenth-century developments, including a decline in the appeal to religious sanctioning when imposing civil punishments, functional differentiation, and the individualization of religious faith that was already surfacing in Pietistic and Moravian-inspired revivals.⁴¹

Olle Larsson dates the beginning of secularization even earlier in his study of bishop visitations in the diocese of Växjö in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. In the mid-seventeenth century, the identification of religion with the culture of Swedish society was still quite strong. One hundred years later, clear signs of the dissolution between the two had manifested themselves. Larsson points in particular to the development of individual Bible reading in this period. In the 1650s, religious instruction in the diocese of Växjö consisted primarily of urging parishioners to learn the catechism. The 1690s onward saw an increasing emphasis on using the Bible in religious instruction. By the mid-eighteenth century, parishioners in the diocese were encouraged to acquire Bibles of their own so that they could study them in their homes. Larsson believes that this development toward more individual study and reading of the Bible led to an individualization of religious faith, and this in turn opened the door to more secularized patterns of thought.

⁴⁰ Hanne Sanders, *Bondevækkelse og sekularisering. En protestantisk folkelig kultur i Danmark og Sverige 1820–1850* (Stockholm: Stockholms universitet, 1995). For earlier studies that emphasize the role played by early revival movements in secularization, see Arne Jarrick, *Den himmelske älskaren. Herrnhutisk väckelse, vantro och sekularisering i 1700-talets Sverige* (Stockholm: Ordfront, 1987); Tom Eriksson and Börje Harnesk, *Präster, predikare och profeter. Läseriet i övre Norrland 1800–1850* (Gideå: Vildros, 1994).

⁴¹ Börje Bergfeldt, *Den teokratiska statens död. Sekularisering och civilisering i 1700-talets Stockholm* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1997).

Ironically, the Church of Sweden encouraged this development and thereby contributed to the conditions from which secularization would arise.⁴²

One noteworthy attempt to nuance this second approach has been made by Stefan Gelfgren. Gelfgren also understands secularization as a process in which religion transitions from being a collective act, carried out under the auspices of one church, to an individual and voluntary commitment. But Gelfgren differs from these other historians in two ways. First, he argues that while secularization is synonymous with the individualization of religion, he does not believe that secularization necessarily involves the privatization of religion. Religion can become individualized and yet continue to be a public matter, such as when religious representatives continue to play an active role in politics. Second, Gelfgren affirms the role that religious pluralism and diversity played in the individualization of religion, but his thoughts on this relationship are much more informed by British scholarship, particularly the work of Hugh McLeod. He agrees with McLeod that late nineteenth-century European history is largely characterized by pluralism, and it is pluralism that leads to a situation of greater competition for religious ideas and institutions. He also agrees with McLeod that significant secularization did not set in until the late nineteenth century. Still, Gelfgren's interpretation of the *effects* of pluralism differs little from that of other historians of secularization in Sweden. The competition that revivalist movements in late nineteenth-century Sweden gave to the Church of Sweden inevitably led to a relativization and subjectification of the traditional religious worldview as religious convictions became subject to personal choice among a plurality of religious and nonreligious ideas.⁴³

This second approach to the study of secularization as articulated by scholars such as Sanders and Gelfgren differs from the first in several important ways. First, these scholars move beyond studies of secularization that focus primarily on popular participation in church rituals. Second, aside from Gelfgren, they typically push the timing of secularization back to an earlier period, anywhere from the late seventeenth century to the early nineteenth century. Finally, they are much more willing to include inner-church revival movements as culprits in the secularization

⁴² Larsson, *Biskopen visiterar. Den kyrkliga överhetens möte med lokalsamhället 1650–1760* (Växjö: Växjö Stiftshistoria Sällskap, 1999).

⁴³ Stefan Gelfgren, *Ett utvalt släkte. Väckelse och sekularisering—Evangeliska Fosterlands-Stiftelsen 1856–1910* (Skellefteå: Artos & Norma, 2003).

process, which is why many of them view the secularization process as beginning in an earlier period.

Whatever the differences in the two approaches, one important commonality should not be overlooked. Martling's interpretation that religious fracturing and dissent led to a decline in religion's influence in Swedish society has continued to hold sway among historians even in more recent decades. For all of the historians mentioned above, religious pluralism is a major factor in the decline of the influence of religion (that is, the traditional evangelical Lutheran religion) in Sweden. The common assumption is that pluralism inevitably undermines the influence of religion by relativizing religious truth and creating the conditions in which religion becomes an individual matter and thus not the glue holding society together. Therefore, while representatives of the two approaches may differ on the timing of secularization or on the extent to which inner-church movements contributed to a decline in religion's influence, they agree that religious pluralism and secularization go hand in hand, an assumption that they share with defenders of the secularization thesis.

E. The Place of the Present Work in Secularization Scholarship

This work falls into the category of Anglo-American scholarship that is skeptical of the secularization thesis. Like Kselman, Cox, and McLeod, and even to some degree like the rational choice theorists, I argue that pluralism, and the competition arising from it, is the key to interpreting the extent to which religion lost and/or maintained influence in European society in the late nineteenth century. To be sure, the theme of pluralism also occupies a central place in Swedish scholarship, but I do not assume that pluralism *necessarily* leads to secularization. Rather, pluralism creates the conditions for increased competition, and it falls upon the religious historian to determine whether religious institutions and professionals responded successfully to these circumstances. My purpose is to study the extent to which one group of religious professionals, the Swedish female diaconate, successfully competed or cooperated with a growing plurality of specialized providers of social services in the late nineteenth century.

Even though I share the views of Anglo-American historians concerning the importance of pluralism and competition for interpreting secularization in late nineteenth-century Europe, the difference here is that the focus will be on exploring the potential connection between

pluralism/competition and secularization on the societal and institutional level as opposed to the level of individual beliefs and practices. The tendency to place primary emphasis on the latter is still dominant among Anglo-American historians. Moreover, few of these historians are willing to test the sociological claim that functional differentiation leads to secularization. One notable exception is Jeffrey Cox. In *English Churches in a Secular Society*, Cox devotes significant attention in his study of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Lambeth to functional differentiation. Cox concedes that functional differentiation often leads to secularization, but the connection between the two is not a necessary one. Functional differentiation can sometimes contribute to an increase in religion's social significance, as was the case in the area of education in mid-nineteenth-century Lambeth.⁴⁴

I follow Cox in maintaining that the connection between functional differentiation and secularization is not as straightforward as some defenders of the secularization thesis insist. The deaconess movement in nineteenth-century Sweden was certainly not a victim of functional differentiation. If anything, the movement survived and expanded in the late nineteenth century largely because it responded so well to this modernizing process.

I will sustain this argument in two ways, both of which relate to demand for the services of deaconesses. First, I will point to a number of situations in which the female diaconate offered essential social services that otherwise might not have been available, or at least not adequately available, to those who needed them. Deaconesses provided health care at hospitals and poorhouses, distributed food and clothing to the urban poor, helped working-class housewives earn extra income, and served as elementary school teachers in rural districts, among other things. There were plenty of cases in which deaconesses provided these services to recipients who needed them but who otherwise would have had few, if any, other opportunities to receive them, perhaps because there was a

⁴⁴ Callum Brown also critiques the assumption that functional differentiation necessarily translates into a decline in the influence of religion in society, though he does not devote as much attention to the topic as Cox. Brown notes, for example, that the apparent government takeover of traditional church functions in Victorian Scotland should not be confused with secularization. Both the withdrawal of poor relief from the Church of Scotland in 1845 and the establishment of the state system of education in 1872 represent successful efforts by religious dissenters to remove these social functions from the absolute control of the Church of Scotland so that evangelicals could have more influence and control over these functions. See Callum Brown, *Religion and Society in Scotland Since 1707* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 142.

shortage of potential providers in a given location, or because some of the recipients could not afford the services in question. Deaconesses thus competed successfully for a place in the public sphere by meeting the demand for essential social services among people and in locations not adequately reached by other institutions or professionals.

I will also support the main argument by reference to the demand for the services of deaconesses among potential employers. Demand for deaconesses consistently outweighed supply throughout the nineteenth century. One obvious reason for this was a supply problem—it was difficult to recruit and train deaconesses at a rate that kept up with demand. But other factors contributed to this demand, including government reforms in social services, the professionalization and medicalization of health care, the shortage of specialized professionals in some contexts, the relatively low cost of employing deaconesses, the general contentment among employing institutions and organizations with deaconess job performance, and the desire to employ specialized professionals who would perform the desired services in an overtly religious manner. Gender also contributed to employer demand, as the work in question was often deemed more appropriate for women to perform.

Demand for deaconesses among potential beneficiaries and employers is particularly relevant because defenders of the secularization thesis argue that the theory at its heart focuses on a decrease in the demand for religion, whether it is a demand for religious rituals and worldviews or a demand for the social services of religious institutions and professionals.⁴⁵ But in the case of deaconesses in late nineteenth-century Sweden, it is clear that their services were very much in demand. As for the inability of the female diaconate to meet this demand due to difficulties with recruitment, it is possible to argue this in itself reflects secularization. Bryan Wilson, for example, argues that the decline in the number of clergy in modern Britain corresponds to a decline in religion's social significance.⁴⁶ Steve Bruce maintains that the number of clergypersons, particularly in a state-supported church such as the Church of England, is an indication of "the social power of religion," and if this number declines considerably in a given period, religion has lost much of its social significance.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ For example, see Bruce, *God is Dead*, 3–5.

⁴⁶ Bryan R. Wilson, "Reflections on a Many Sided Controversy," *Religion and Modernization*, 198.

⁴⁷ Bruce, *God is Dead*, 69.

I do not deny that a connection exists between lower supplies of religious professionals and secularization. When religious professionals are in shorter supply, the range of influence that they have in society is necessarily limited. A small number of religious professionals may also indicate that modern people are not as religious as their pre-modern predecessors, and therefore a religious profession has less appeal and prestige. But small numbers of religious professionals do not *necessarily* indicate that these professionals (or religion in general) lack social significance, or that their services are not in demand, any more than a low supply of police officers or school teachers today amounts to a lack of social significance or low demand for these professionals. The heart of the secularization thesis deals with the *demand* for religion, and that is why my argument for the social significance of deaconesses depends primarily on demand for their services.

The social significance of deaconesses also cannot be explained away by the argument that in carrying out essential social functions, they failed to do so in a particularly religious manner. Bruce argues that even when religious institutions and professionals continue to carry out what may be considered “secular functions” in the modern era, they do so only within a secular framework. While “[s]piritual values may inspire the Church’s involvement in social work . . . there is very little in the expression of that inspiration that distinguishes it from secular provision.”⁴⁸ Perhaps this argument rings truer for the late twentieth century. I will show that in the late nineteenth century, deaconesses performed social functions in an overtly religious manner. Those who came into contact with deaconesses had no doubt that the sisters were engaged in religious work.

Despite my skepticism toward the secularization thesis, I agree with sociological defenders of the theory on a couple of important points. First, I do believe that functional differentiation often led to a decline in the social significance of religious institutions and professionals. In many instances over the past two centuries, religious institutions and professionals did not respond adequately to the more competitive conditions generated by increasing functional differentiation. I am not attempting to refute the connection between functional differentiation and secularization altogether. I am simply arguing that secularization is not the only possible outcome of functional differentiation. After all, the female diaconate of Sweden is a product of this same modernizing process.

⁴⁸ Bruce, *God is Dead*, 8.

Second, Wilson notes that many critics of the secularization thesis are so keen to undermine the theory by recourse to data on church membership, church attendance, and participation in church rituals that they fail adequately to address the issue of the larger social significance of religion. Wilson is right to criticize skeptics of the secularization thesis for placing too much emphasis on individual beliefs and practices.⁴⁹ By focusing primarily on the larger social significance of religion, I am addressing some justifiable concerns of defenders of the secularization thesis.

E. Gender and Religion in Modern Sweden

But how, given their gender, were deaconesses able to wield any influence in the public sphere and to engage in such public work as nursing? It is an important question considering the prevailing gender norms of nineteenth-century Sweden and the expectation that women (and women's work) were to be confined to the domestic, private sphere. I will answer this question by arguing that the female diaconate gained access to and influence in the public sphere by reconciling its work with the traditional Lutheran construction of gender. According to this construction, a woman lived out her calling within the household estate as a mother, daughter, sister, servant, etc. She did this according to the gifts and qualities that God had given particularly to her sex, including meekness, tenderness, obedience, and humility. Female diaconal work was interpreted, organized, and carried out as an extension of the household sphere, with its attendant feminine responsibilities and characteristics. As a result, both deaconesses and the institution's leadership alleviated many gender-based concerns over diaconal work, thereby gaining greater access to and influence in the public sphere.

My argument concerning the importance of the traditional Lutheran construction of gender for justifying diaconal work takes its inspiration from the scholarship of several Swedish historians of gender from the past two decades. In particular, Inger Hammar's work on the importance of the traditional Lutheran understanding of gender for the pioneers of the women's emancipation movement in Sweden has proven

⁴⁹ Wilson, "Reflections on a Many Sided Controversy," *Religion and Modernization*, 195–210.

most fruitful for the gender analysis at work in this study. According to Hammar, these nineteenth-century pioneers justified their demands for greater freedoms not by overturning or ignoring traditional religious understandings of the place of women in society, but by reinterpreting them so that the private (i.e., domestic) sphere to which women were called was extended.

Hammar's work departs significantly from that of Swedish historians of gender since the 1960s. The latter typically depicted the early women's emancipation movement as being driven by economic or psychological motives. To the extent that these scholars addressed religion, they did so one-dimensionally by portraying the Church of Sweden, represented by the clergy, as uniformly hostile to the emancipation movement.⁵⁰ This failure to understand the role played by religious ideology in the movement leads Hammar to deem this research "religion-blind," in the same way that historical scholarship prior to the 1960s was "gender-blind." Hammar contrasts the situation in Swedish gender history with that of Anglo-American scholarship. She notes that in Britain and the United States, considerable work has been done by scholars such as Lyndal Roper and Rosemary Radford Ruether on the implications of the Lutheran (and more generally, the Reformation) construction of gender for the place of women in society in early modern Europe. The reasons why Swedish historians have not followed in the footsteps of Anglo-American gender studies are several, according to Hammar, including the tendency in contemporary secularized Swedish society to view religion as a private matter, and the trend of 1960s historical scholarship toward viewing material needs as the driving force in history.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Hammar points to two influential works as examples of earlier studies that portray religious authorities only as hostile to the women's emancipation movement: Gunnar Qvist, *Kvinnofrågan i Sverige 1809–1846. Studier rörande kvinnans näringsfrihet inom de borgerliga yrkena* (Göteborg: Akademiförlaget-Gumperts, 1960); Eva Åsbrink, *Studier i den svenska kyrkans syn på kvinnans ställning i samhället åren 1809–1866* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1962).

⁵¹ Inger Hammar, *Emancipation och religion. Den svenska kvinnorörelsens pionjärer i debatt om kvinnors kallelse ca 1860–1900* (Stockholm: Carlsson, 1999). For an overview in English of Hammar's conclusions concerning the relationship between religious ideology and the women's emancipation movement, see Inger Hammer, "From Fredrika Bremer to Ellen Key: Calling, Gender and the Emancipation Debate in Sweden, c.1830–1900," in *Gender and Vocation: Women, Religion and Social Change in the Nordic Countries, 1830–1900*, ed. Pirjo Markkola (Helsinki: SKS, 2000), 27–67.

Hammar's work inspired other Nordic gender historians to devote greater attention to religion as a catalyst for women's participation in the public sphere in the nineteenth century.⁵² In her study of the involvement of deaconesses in poor relief in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Finland and Sweden, the Finnish historian Pirjo Markkola comes to a conclusion similar to Hammar's. The apparent public work of the women in question was possible in part because this work could be interpreted as an extension of the household sphere. Markkola also agrees with Hammar that the reason Nordic gender studies have largely ignored religious interpretations of women's participation in the public sphere primarily has to do with the secularized worldviews of contemporary Nordic societies. Deaconesses, on the other hand, provide historians with an excellent example of just how important religion was to inspiring women's involvement in the public sphere in the nineteenth century.⁵³

In her study of rescue work among prostitutes in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Sweden, Anna Jansdotter also accepts Hammar's interpretation that women's philanthropic work was, in effect, an extension of the private sphere. Jansdotter argues that those engaged in rescue work attempted to rehabilitate prostitutes by privatizing these "public" women. Rescue workers sought to do this by attempting to convert prostitutes to an evangelical, revivalist worldview and way of life. Without converting "fallen women" to evangelical Christianity and getting them to conform to a traditional religious construction of gender, there could be no true rehabilitation.⁵⁴

My work is clearly indebted to these Nordic gender historians in its emphasis on the importance of the traditional Lutheran construction of gender for justifying the work of the female diaconate in nineteenth-century Sweden. But one important point of divergence between my

⁵² An important precursor to Hammar's work which has also helped to inspire greater attention in the past decade to the role that religion played in women's social involvement in the nineteenth century is Ingrid Åberg's "Revivalism, Philanthropy and Emancipation. Women's Liberation and Organization in the Early Nineteenth Century," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 13 (1988), 399–420.

⁵³ Pirjo Markkola, "Promoting Faith and Welfare. The Deaconess Movement in Finland and Sweden, 1850–1950," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 25 (2000), 101–118. See also Pirjo Markkola, "The Calling of Women: Gender, Religion and Social Reform in Finland, 1860–1920," *Gender and Vocation*, 113–145.

⁵⁴ Anna Jansdotter, *Ansikte mot ansikte. Räddningsarbete bland prostituerade kvinnor i Sverige 1850–1920* (Stockholm: Brutus Östlings Bokförlag Sympoion, 2004).

study and the studies mentioned above should be addressed. In much of the Nordic scholarship, the dichotomy of private sphere versus public sphere is prominent, even though some of the historians attempt to problematize this dichotomy. I will certainly make plenty of references to this dichotomy, and my definition of the public sphere has much in common with the way the concept is used by these historians. But when these Nordic historians refer to the private sphere, they are typically associating this sphere with the family or household alone, that is, the domain historically assigned to women. When scholars of secularization allude to a private sphere, on the other hand, the concept is not limited to the household, but rather includes any aspect of society, or activity within society, that does not directly affect or influence the social, political, or economic functioning of society at large. Nevertheless, there is obviously a gender component even to this usage of the term, particularly as the term is applied to nineteenth-century European history, given the obstacles that women have had to overcome in order to carry out essential social functions in the public sphere.

In order to avoid confusing the different connotations of the term “private sphere” found in gender history on the one hand, and in many historical and sociological studies of secularization on the other, I have chosen to use the term in accordance with secularization scholarship. The terms “domestic sphere” or “household sphere” will be employed in many of those cases where Hammar and other gender historians would use “private sphere.” The difference lies primarily in semantics. The choice of different terminology should not conceal the fact that I am making an argument similar to Hammar’s concerning how particular groups of women justified their activities in the public sphere.

Finally, it is important to note that the increased scholarly attention to the relationship between gender and religion in nineteenth-century Sweden has also led some historians to give greater consideration to deaconesses in their studies.⁵⁵ While not all of the studies in question

⁵⁵ Until recently, much of the historical work on the deaconess movement was written by “insiders”—people connected directly to the Swedish Deaconess Institution. Historical surveys written by directors, or former directors, of the Swedish Deaconess Institution are prime examples of such work. See Yngve Iverson, *Tro verksam i kärklek. En bok om Ersta* (Stockholm: Verbum, 1988); Ernst Lönegren, *Minneskrift till Svenska Diakonissanstaltens femtioårsjublieum* (Stockholm, 1901); and J. Norrby, *Minnesblad från diakonissanstalten i Stockholm 1851–1926* (Stockholm: Diakonissanstaltens Bokföråd, 1926). Some older studies of the nineteenth-century deaconessate also examined the contributions that deaconesses made in Swedish society through carrying out particular social functions,

focus exclusively on deaconesses, deaconesses do comprise an important strand in the scholarship. Two studies mentioned earlier in this section are examples of this increased interest in the deaconessate. Pirjo Markkola's study of deaconesses involved in social welfare in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Finland and Sweden examines the important contributions that deaconesses made to poor relief in the late nineteenth century, a time in which many people in need of such relief were falling through the cracks of an overextended government-based welfare system. Anna Jansdotter's study of rescue work among prostitutes in the nineteenth century devotes significant attention to the pioneering work of deaconesses in the field. In addition to these two studies, Åsa Andersson's examination of the how the idea of calling shaped the development of the nursing profession in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Sweden devotes considerable attention to deaconesses.⁵⁶ What these three studies share is an interest in highlighting the role that religion played in motivating and even empowering deaconesses to participate in the public sphere.

These recent trends in Swedish gender history have even influenced the most important scholar of the nineteenth-century Swedish deaconessate, Gunnel Elmund. Elmund has written the two most important scholarly studies of the female diaconate. Her first book, published in 1971, focused on the origins of the deaconessate and the first decade of its work. It provided a general introduction to female diaconal work in the mid-nineteenth century, and it pointed to the ways in which continental deaconess institutions, particularly those at Kaiserswerth and Strasbourg, influenced the deaconess institution in Stockholm. What this first book lacked was any detailed gender analysis. Her most recent book, published in 2005, picks up where the first one left off chronologically. It analyzes how the director of the Swedish Deaconess Institution from 1862 to 1898, Johan Christoffer Bring, understood the doctrine of calling in relation to the deaconess vocation. Unlike her first work, this second study devotes plenty of attention to gender analysis, including

such as education or child welfare. See Einar Ekman, *Diakonien och folkskolan. En minnesvärd insats i svensk folkbildningsarbete under förra seklet* (Stockholm: Föreningen för svensk undervisnings historia, 1950); *Diakonala insatser i svensk socialpedagogik åren 1852–1904 i belysning av den allmänna utvecklingen på området* (Stockholm: Föreningen för svensk undervisnings historia, 1960). The first of these will serve as an important resource for chapter three.

⁵⁶ Åsa Andersson, *Ett högt och ädelt kall. Kalltankens betydelse för sjuksköterskeyrkets formering 1850–1933* (Umeå: Umeå institution för historiska studier, 2002).

attention to the Lutheran doctrine of a woman's calling, and has clearly been influenced by the developments in Swedish gender history over the past decade.⁵⁷

G. Sources

The primary sources that I have relied on the most are nineteenth-century deaconess publications and letters. The main deaconess periodical published in this period was the *Olivebladet* (The Olive Leaf). It began as a quarterly publication in 1863, becoming a monthly by the turn of the century. Its contents included sermons, ceremonial addresses, and articles on diaconal work, as well as the deaconess institution's annual reports containing information on the work stations to which deaconesses were assigned, the changes made in work station assignments, and employer requests for deaconesses that had to be rejected.⁵⁸ Toward the end of the century, the *Olivebladet* published excerpts from deaconess letters concerning their work. This periodical offers abundant information concerning the extent of diaconal involvement in the public sphere and the ways that deaconesses and the Swedish Deaconess Institution sought to make this work conform to the traditional Lutheran constructions of gender. Another periodical, *Febe* (Phoebe), was an annual Christmas periodical that began publication in 1887. Because *Febe* began much later in the period under examination here, and because it contained information that on the whole could also be found in the *Olivebladet*, its use in my study is much more limited.

The letters cited in my work come from a variety of sources. Some are from the hands of deaconesses themselves and provide insight into the working conditions that they experienced as well as how their work was received by those who were recipients or beneficiaries of their services. Other letters were written by employers (or prospective employers) and prove most helpful in gauging both the extent to which deaconesses were in demand and how satisfied employers were with the work of deaconesses.

⁵⁷ Gunnel Elmund, *Den kvinnliga diakonin i Sverige 1849–1861. Uppgift och utformning* (Lund: CWK Gleerups, 1973); *Det kvinnliga diakonatet som kall. Johan Christoffer Brings syn på diakonissverksamhetens uppgift och form* (Skellefteå: Artos & Norma, 2005).

⁵⁸ The annual reports before 1864 contain much of the same information and will also be cited frequently, though obviously they were published separately and not included in another publication.

In addition to these two important sources, I have made use of other primary sources in illuminating both the work of deaconesses and the character of the women who undertook this work. Such sources include hiring contracts, diary and journal excerpts, personal faith narratives, and minutes from meetings of the administration board of the Swedish Deaconess Institution.

While the above-mentioned sources have proven most helpful, three problems pertaining to their use should be noted. First, the letters preserved from deaconesses derive mostly from the 1850s and 1860s, when diaconal work was predominantly geared toward education. We have far fewer letters from deaconesses involved in health care or poor relief, though by the 1890s the *Olivebladet* did publish some such letters anonymously. Second, some letters sent to the Swedish Deaconess Institution from employing institutions have signatures that are often illegible. When such a letter is cited, as much identifying information as possible will be provided, including the name of the employing institution sending the letter and where in the deaconess archives the letter can be found. Finally, many of the articles published in the *Olivebladet* are unsigned, though it is likely that most were written by the director of the Swedish Deaconess Institution from 1862 to 1898, J.C. Bring. Nevertheless, citations of these articles contain no information concerning authorship.

Concerning all primary and secondary sources, translations from the original Swedish and German are my own unless otherwise noted.

H. *Outline*

The book is organized thematically. The second chapter will provide an overview of the deaconess movement in late nineteenth-century Sweden. I will discuss the continental and revivalist inspirations behind the movement as well as its organization, composition, and operation. Two themes that will emerge in the discussion are the religious orientation of the female diaconate and the challenges and obstacles that deaconesses faced in their quest to wield influence in the public sphere. As for the first theme, I will argue that the diaconate maintained a strong religious profile in its activities even as it expanded its work in the course of the late nineteenth century. In terms of the obstacles encountered by deaconesses, I will address two in particular—gender and recruitment. I will maintain that by organizing and interpreting its work according to the motherhouse system, the diaconate successfully reinforced its

connection to the household sphere and thereby affirmed its fidelity to the Lutheran construction of gender. As for recruitment, I will point out that while the diaconate could not recruit enough deaconesses to keep up with demand for diaconal services, its social significance far exceeded the number of women in its service.

In each of the three chapters that follow, I will focus on one of three social functions and the extent to which deaconesses exerted influence in the public sphere in carrying out each function. In chapter three, I will address diaconal work in the field of education. Service as teachers for private schools, particularly in rural areas but also in one Stockholm parish, dominated diaconal work in the formative period of the movement. The diaconate's participation in teaching was significant for two reasons. First, because the nurturing and instruction of small children were tasks associated traditionally with mothers in the household sphere, deaconesses were able to reinforce their connection to that sphere in their work as teachers by extending these motherly duties into a public setting. Teaching helped deaconesses gain entry into the public sphere because in carrying out this work, they demonstrated a conformity to the Lutheran construction of gender, something that would have been important to some of the rural religious communities that hired them.

Female diaconal participation in teaching was also significant because it helped to meet a demand for teachers that was created after an 1842 statute that required all parishes to set up an elementary school and hire a teacher. Demand for deaconesses as teachers in some provincial areas was high in the 1850s and 1860s. By the 1870s, the Swedish Deaconess Institution had largely abandoned this work. I will argue that while functional differentiation contributed to the leadership's decision to discontinue teaching, this process did not force the diaconate out of education. A lack of commitment to education on the leadership's part must be taken into account when explaining why the diaconate shifted its focus away from education and toward health care and poor relief from the late 1860s.

In chapter four, I will examine the work of deaconesses as nurses and health care professionals. Evidence for the influence of deaconesses is strong in this sphere of work, particularly once nursing became the primary focus of diaconal work in the late 1860s. The modern nursing profession in Sweden owes its origins to the pioneering efforts of deaconesses. I will argue that deaconesses were very much in demand among employers at health care institutions, such as hospitals or nursing homes, and among poor and working-class patients in Stockholm. This demand

persisted even in the face of significant competition from nurses trained at other institutions by the turn of the century. I will also make the case that deaconesses gained access to the public sphere via health care in part because they embraced the contemporary religious understanding of women as particularly gifted at showing compassion and tenderness to their fellow human beings.

In chapter five, I will study the contributions of deaconesses in the field of poor relief, giving attention to their work in indoor relief (such as in poorhouses) and outdoor relief (as parish deaconesses). Deaconesses devoted more and more attention to poor relief throughout the period and were employed not only by religious organizations, such as parish councils, but also by secular institutions, such as municipal poor relief boards. I will argue that the demand for deaconesses in the field of poor relief, particularly among employers in need of outdoor relief workers, was fairly strong from the early 1870s onward, in spite of the various specialized institutions and professionals that had arisen to carry out this work. I will also maintain that deaconesses used their gender as an asset and reinforced their connection to the domestic sphere by concentrating their poor relief work among women, children, and families.

In chapter six, I will draw on the evidence presented in the previous chapters in order to assess the impact of functional differentiation on the social significance of Swedish deaconesses in the late nineteenth century. I will argue that the high demand for its services in the three areas under examination demonstrates that the female diaconate successfully responded to increasing functional differentiation. This success is all the more remarkable in light of the considerable obstacles deaconesses faced and overcame in their work, particularly with regard to gender. The case of the female diaconate in Sweden clearly shows that religious organizations and personnel were not always victims of modernization; sometimes, they were beneficiaries of it.