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Anders Wiberg

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- 97 Unpublished letters in Northern Baptist Archives. Parker's letter of resignation was dated 15th December 1897 and the response 23rd December.
- 98 *The Freeman*, 4th March 1898, pp.104-5.
- 99 Rignal, *op.cit.*, p.146.
- 100 Unpublished Minutes House Committee, 19th April, 20th June 1899. James Charles was a Yorkshire artist whose works had often hung in the Academy.

WILLIAM ALLEN POE, *Professor of History, Northwestern State University, Louisiana, U.S.A.*

ANDERS WIBERG

SWEDISH REVIVALIST AND BAPTIST LEADER

[This year Swedish Baptists commemorate the life of Anders Wiberg who was the undisputed leader at the beginning of this movement and who died on 5th November 1887. Celebrations will culminate with a symposium held at Betelseminariet, the Swedish Baptist Theological Seminary, in Bromma-Stockholm on 4-5th November. Leading Swedish Baptist scholars will deliver most of the addresses, but there will hopefully also be representatives from Finland, Norway and the United States. The opening lecture will be given by Professor Harry Lenhammar of Uppsala University.]

Anders Wiberg, 1816-1887, an important figure on the Swedish religious scene during the middle and second half of the nineteenth century, came from a peasant family. Trained for the ministry of the Lutheran Church of Sweden at the university of Uppsala, Wiberg made the acquaintance of several leading figures in the popular religious revival of the time. He worked with them in this and involved himself in the temperance and mission work, especially championing the cause of religious liberty. Increasingly critical of the state church, he decided to leave his pastorate, and after a short period as 'priest of the Separatists', he converted to the Baptists and became their foremost leader for more than three decades. The organizer and theologian *par excellence* of the early Swedish Baptist movement, Wiberg organized the first general assemblies of Swedish Baptists and was instrumental in the founding of many of its institutions, such as the Seminary. He worked tirelessly until his death in 1887.

The only complete biography of Wiberg, hagiographical in character, written by his son-in-law, Jonas Stadling, is largely a collection of essential sections of Wiberg's diaries, interspersed with filial commentary. Other Swedish Baptist historians have, however, given considerable attention to Wiberg in their works: he is the central figure in Nils Johan Nordstroem's two-volume work on the history of the Swedish Baptists, whilst Gunnar Westin has treated Wiberg in several works and has also published some of his correspondence.

Wiberg also appears as a secondary figure in several academic works on nineteenth-century Swedish church history. The only recent work on Wiberg, however, is the author's Th.M. thesis.(1) Whilst the first part of this article will focus on Anders Wiberg's early development, the second part will attempt to outline briefly the significant role of Wiberg in the organization of the early Swedish Baptist movement.(2)

Born on 17th July 1816, Wiberg enjoyed a devout upbringing.(3) Already at an early age he had had some kind of religious experiences which were to stay with him for the rest of his life. In Sweden at that time (as also in Norway and Denmark) a latitudinarian Lutheranism had given rise to the emergence of a pietistic/revivalist movement which developed its own separate informal organization within the parochial structure of the state church. Thus informal meetings for prayer, Bible study and the reading of devotional literature (called 'conventicles') began to be organized and those who were awakened to a new religious seriousness and who attended these meetings were called 'readers'.(4) Wiberg early had experiences of this movement which led him to choose theology as the area for his further studies. Early demonstrating a talent for studies, he quickly moved from the *gymnasium* to the university, though his studies at Uppsala were interrupted because of financial difficulties. Accordingly he took tutorial jobs and finally ended up in Stockholm. In the capital he became acquainted with several leading figures in the revival movement. For example, he worked with the English Methodist, George Scott.(5) Wiberg also established a relationship at this time with C. O. Rosenius which developed into deep friendship. He also met the champion of religious liberty, L. V. Henschen, with whom he later came to work very closely. Through the influence of G. Scott, Wiberg began to think about the nature of state and free churches. Returning to finish his studies at Uppsala eight years after he had begun them, he there finally had a liberating conversion experience. Whilst reading Arndt, he at last came to discover salvation by grace alone.(6)

Wiberg took up his first position as priest in the state-church with an enthusiasm often found in the recently converted. However, what he experienced made him disappointed. He grew critical of his fellow clergy and increasingly supported the Readers. Wiberg now secured the reputation of being a converted pastor, whilst Readers from other parishes than his own frequently came to listen to him. In 1846 Wiberg returned to Uppsala to complete his next degree, when he came under the influence of L. V. Henschen, and in particular his critique of the state church system, and his ideas concerning religious liberty. For his examination, Wiberg defended eight Latin theses critical of the witness of the clergy of the time.

Wiberg then returned to the province of Haelsingland to continue his work: indeed, his diaries from this period still paint the picture of an eager priest. However, he became increasingly critical of the established church and repeatedly came into conflict with his colleagues over matters of doctrine, church government, and his support of the Readers' movement. Wiberg had more and more alienated himself from the church he was serving. A decisive incident happened in June 1849:

As my conscience did not allow me any longer to administer the Lord's Supper indiscriminately to all persons in the state church, I sent to the Consistory of Uppsala an application to be relieved for six months from the function as a minister of the state church, with a view of finally resigning my office. (7)

This conflict led Wiberg to chart alternate courses for his future: either to become a missionary or to emigrate to the United States. However, neither of these plans were to be realized, for Anders Wiberg was to be led on a different path.

An intensive period spent in fellowship among Readers with separatist leanings followed Wiberg's leave of absence. He participated in group meetings and eventually transgressed the Swedish religious laws when he began to administer the Lord's Supper in private meetings. Moreover, Wiberg now began to represent the Readers, some of whom had by now separated, in front of the authorities.

Asked by the Consistory of Uppsala to resume his office in 1850, he answered by setting up certain conditions for returning to his priesthood. As the conditions were contrary to Swedish law they could not be accepted: not only did the Consistory lack the authority to make exceptions from the ecclesiastical laws, but the consequences of such a decision would have been a challenge to the discipline of the church. Simultaneously, Wiberg had been reported for dereliction of duty because of his administration of communion privately. The Consistory finally sentenced Wiberg to three months suspension. In fact, he was never to return to his priestly office. Of great significance was also the memorial which Wiberg wrote to the magistrate's court on behalf of the Separatists in Hudiksvall. (8) An important shift in Wiberg's ecclesiology is apparent in this writing. Wiberg affirmed the right of the local church to call its own pastors. '... it is therefore necessary that the church keeps its right to call, elect, and ordain its priests'. He also validated lay involvement, '... that we among ourselves have elected one to proffer us the already prepared gifts, the Word and the sacraments...'. (9) This was a logical consequence of Wiberg's development, and a big step from his priestly oath of allegiance. Wiberg had not yet formally left the state church, but he had now moved so far away that returning to his office was practically impossible. He had voiced to his superiors his opposition concerning some of the practices of the church he had served. Wiberg had also publicly defended the Separatists and their cause, had argued for religious liberty, and put himself fully on the side of those who opposed the Swedish state church system.

At a time when Wiberg still held a Lutheran position concerning baptism, the issue of believer's baptism became increasingly important among the Readers in Stockholm. In May 1851 David Forssell, a furrier, invited Wiberg to accompany him as interpreter on a business trip to Hamburg, with the intention of making him familiar with the Baptists in Hamburg. Wiberg left Hamburg impressed with the spiritual life of the Baptists, though rejecting their teaching on baptism. On his journey back to Stockholm, Wiberg began to read the literature given to him by the Baptists in Hamburg; through this '... and by reading Dr J. L. Dagg's exposition of I Cor. 7.14, I was led to doubt the

scriptural authority of infant baptism'.(10) Finding it necessary to investigate the question thoroughly, he began to study literature for and against infant baptism. After a short but intensive study of the issue, Wiberg accepted the Baptist position. Still a Lutheran, he set out to write a book to defend his new beliefs. This book became a theological sensation, being the first book of that kind to appear in Swedish.(11) Its reception, however, was limited because of its price and the hesitation of many to read it.

Wiberg left Stockholm for the United States on his 36th birthday, 17th July 1852. After leaving Sweden, he made a stop in Copenhagen, and, although he had planned to be baptized in America, he records, 'I thought it my duty to embrace the earliest opportunity to be baptized and resolved to apply to bro. Nilsson for baptism'.(12) On the evening of the following day, 23rd July 1852, he was baptized by Nilsson in the sea outside Copenhagen. Thereafter he continued his journey to the United States, where he arrived on 18th September 1852. After a few months in New York Wiberg, the former Lutheran priest, was ordained as a Baptist minister in the Baptist Mariner's Church.

A few weeks after his arrival in America Wiberg became employed by the American Baptist Publication Society. From then until his death he was supported by the American Baptists, either through their Publication Society (ABPS) or their Missionary Union (ABMU). Wiberg had hoped to find support to become a missionary to Sweden already before his journey to America. He had planned to stay only one year in the U.S.A. In the spring of 1853 his friends in Sweden urged him to hurry back home to defend the Baptist cause, but the Publication Society wanted Wiberg to translate some tracts into Swedish before returning home. Accordingly he went to Philadelphia where he stayed for more than two years, translating and writing. It was here he wrote his second major work on the topic of believer's baptism, a work published in both Swedish and English.(13)

Wiberg's friends continued to ask him to come home:

Your work here is of great importance. ... Your book on Baptism, recently published in America, is mentioned in the papers, and people are warned not to read it. ... As soon as you return, I hope, that you will publish a paper in which you can refute our opponents with the words of truth... (14)

Wiberg was in demand because of his reputation among the Readers and separatists, his genuine theological training, and his eloquence in speech as well as writing. Thus it was that he returned to Sweden in the fall of 1855, equipped with tracts and his new book on baptism.

On his return to Sweden Wiberg found that a lot had changed. When he left three years earlier the Baptist movement had been very small. In 1854 something of an explosion had taken place, much due to the work of P. F. Hejdenberg, who had been baptized and ordained in Hamburg and had travelled around in several provinces and baptized converts. Eleven persons had been baptized in Stockholm in August 1854, but no formal congregation had yet been organized. Three days

after Wiberg's return, on 10th October 1855, the first Baptist church in Stockholm was organized with Anders Wiberg as its leader. Then Wiberg wrote the first Swedish Baptist confession of faith which was adopted by the church in Stockholm and later by the majority of Baptist churches in Sweden.

The Baptists in Stockholm were challenged to attend a disputation concerning baptism. The defenders of paedobaptism were led by Dr Thomander, and the Baptist delegation was headed by Wiberg. They met for the first public disputation on 23rd October, and then again a few weeks later. On the latter occasion Wiberg criticized the spiritual state among the clergy and the lack of church-discipline within the state church. Some in the audience reacted violently to these accusations and Wiberg had to be let out through a back door.

In 1856 Wiberg began publishing a bi-weekly magazine named *Evangelisten*. This publication became an important instrument for the Baptist movement, not only in Sweden but also in Norway and Finland where it had many subscribers. Wiberg continued his literary work, writing and translating. He wanted to found a Tract Society in Stockholm but this project was never realized. However, a Mission Society was founded in 1856. Wiberg had the commission of the ABPS to select and send out colporteurs, and so at the beginning of 1856 four men were sent out with the support of the ABPS. These workers wrote monthly reports to Wiberg, who edited and translated them and sent them to the board of the ABPS. Realizing the importance of giving the colporteurs and evangelists some education, a course, with only four students and Wiberg as the main tutor, was begun in October the same year. This was the small beginning of the Swedish Baptists' education of ministers and missionaries: it would be another ten years before the seminary opened.

On the initiative of Wiberg the first general conference of Swedish Baptists took place in Stockholm in June 1857. He had a two-fold purpose for this conference: to strengthen the sense of unity between the congregations and to create a much needed organization for the development of the work. Wiberg was the chairperson of the conference, as well as its most fertile intelligence, with most of the suggestions that were approved coming from his mind. The minutes clearly show how Wiberg worked from the pattern he had come to know during his stay in America. The most important decision by the conference was to send a circular letter, composed by Wiberg, to all congregations, outlining a structure for a nation-wide Baptist organization. The theme of the letter can be summarized with the words: 'Through unity and co-operation' and 'Uniting gives strength'. (15)

The second conference, held a year later, was of equal importance. Again Wiberg was the chairperson. Many questions of both organization and of a theological nature were discussed. Highly significant was the participation of four foreign guests, the pastors J. G. Oncken and J. Koebner from Germany, and Dr Edward Steane and J. H. Hinton from England. The visit of these four guests was a great encouragement for the struggling Swedish Baptists. Steane and Hinton used their visit to try to secure a fuller measure of religious

liberty for their co-religionists. During their stay they had the opportunity to meet with the Attorney General, the President of the Board of Education, the Foreign Minister and the Archbishop, raising the question of liberty for Baptists and other dissenters with these people of authority. (16)

Wiberg continued his extensive work in spite of ill health and weakness, problems he struggled with all his life. He travelled widely in Sweden, preaching, supporting Baptist groups, giving legal advice, and helping to organize new congregations. He likewise continued with his literary work. In 1860 he travelled to England, by way of Germany where he preached in Hamburg, to collect money for a larger church in Stockholm and to find support for the Swedish mission. He was well received in England and the most significant outcome of his visit was not the financial result but the impressions he gathered and the personal contacts he established with English Baptist leaders. C. H. Spurgeon was among those who heartily welcomed Wiberg and made a lasting impression on him.

At the third general conference of the Swedish Baptists in 1861, a major issue was the founding of a seminary. This question had already been raised in the two preceding conferences, but with no result. Wiberg was once again the leading force behind this project. The conference decided to 'make arrangements for a higher educational institution in Stockholm, and to call a teacher from abroad'. (17) To implement this decision was no easy task: there were no financial means available for either a building or the employment of a president-teacher. However, Wiberg set his mind on bringing the project to fruition, and so decided to make another journey to the United States. He arrived in New York in the fall of 1863, in the middle of the civil war. Due to the hardships of the civil war the task of collecting money for an enterprise in a far distant and little-known corner of the world proved very difficult. In 1866 the responsibility for the Swedish mission was transferred from ABPS to ABMU. The ABMU appointed Colonel K. O. Broady and J. A. Edgren as missionaries to Sweden in addition to Wiberg. Both Broady and Edgren had been in the northern army in the civil war, and both of them had studied at the theological seminary in Hamilton.

Wiberg returned to Sweden in the summer of 1866 in company with Broady and Edgren. The central role which was attached to Wiberg can be deduced from the fact that the fourth general conference had been delayed for more than two years awaiting his return. Following the report of Wiberg the conference decided to: accept the support of the ABMU, start the seminary (named *Betelseminariet*), elect Broady as president of this seminary, and elect Wiberg, Edgren, A. Drake and G. Palmqvist as its teachers. *Betelseminariet*'s first semester began on 1st October 1866 with nine students. It is thus the oldest Baptist seminary on mainland Europe. One major reason for Anders Wiberg's remarkable success was his ability to find and inspire competent co-workers: Broady, Edgren and Drake can all serve as examples. The editorial staff of *Evangelisten* announced the plans of publishing a smaller newspaper concentrating on political and church issues. This paper was published under the name *Nyhetsbladet* for one year. In December 1868 the paper changed its name to *Wecko-Posten* and was edited by Adolf Drake. (18)

Anders Wiberg went on several 'mission journeys' in Sweden, but also to Norway, Denmark and Germany. He was very influential throughout Scandinavia, though less so in Denmark which had closer ties to Germany. Wiberg was consulted when the question of baptism became of immediate interest in Norway in 1856. The relationship with Wiberg and Stockholm grew stronger and on several occasions the help of Wiberg and his friends was requested. Wiberg's confession was also used by the Baptist churches in Norway. From the Finnish island of Åland people came to Stockholm to be baptized in 1856. The first Baptists on the Finnish mainland (the Swedish-speaking part) were also baptized by Wiberg or his co-workers: a Finnish-speaking priest in the Lutheran church had changed his view concerning baptism through reading *Evangelisten*, and he and his daughter were baptized during the 1872 general conference in Stockholm. Anders Wiberg had thus played an important role, directly or indirectly, in the beginnings of the Baptist movements in Norway, and the Finnish and Swedish speaking parts of Finland.

Wiberg took much interest in the church he was serving as pastor and continued to lead its work in spite of frequent travelling and all his work with the central organization. Voices were being raised in the congregation, however, to find a younger and more vigorous co-worker to Wiberg, whom some members thought old-fashioned. In October 1869 W. Lindblom was accordingly elected co-pastor with Wiberg. Wiberg was beginning to feel more and more superfluous and wanted to begin work in the southern district of Stockholm, on the island of Soedermalm. In 1872 he began working on Soedermalm and looked to England to find financial support for the work there. The Salem church (the oldest still standing Baptist church in Stockholm) was built on Soedermalm in the years 1877-79 and in 1878 Wiberg, together with 51 others, organized a new congregation there.

In 1874-76 Wiberg travelled to England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. His diaries describe many inspiring moments during his stay on the British Isles. The highlight was probably when he had the opportunity to meet Moody and Sankey. Long since convinced of the necessity of total abstinence, Wiberg had been involved in the temperance movement since the early 1840s. In England he met Eli Johnson whom he invited to Sweden. They travelled together to several places in Sweden and hundreds of people promised total abstinence and the first teetotaller associations in Sweden were founded.

In England Wiberg also managed to find support for the Sunday School work in Sweden. The Sunday School Association in London started to support Sunday School missionaries in Sweden in 1876. During his stay in England Wiberg had also learnt about the English peace associations and their work. Inspired by these associations he started the first Swedish peace association in 1878. Though hampered by increasing age and decreasing strength, Wiberg still took an active part in Swedish Baptist life. He chaired the committee which published the first *Swedish Baptist Hymnal* in 1880, and in 1883 he founded the Evangelical Tract Society.

Wiberg's last years were not easy for him. He experienced serious dissension in his church. Wiberg's seventieth birthday though was a day of great joy as friends from far and near came to honour him.

Anders Wiberg died on 5th November 1887: Wiberg's legacy is still alive among Swedish Baptists. It is not an exaggeration when N. J. Nordstroem characterises the first years after Wiberg's return from America in 1855 thus: 'Wiberg was ... the leading and dominating person in all areas of work ... What was lacking in organization and forms was compensated by Wiberg's person'. (19)

NOTES

- 1 J. Stadling, *Anders Wibergs lif och verksamhet*, 2nd ed., Tryckningskommittens foerlagsexpedition, Stockholm, 1916. N. J. Nordstroem, *Svenska baptistsamfundets historia I*, BMB, Stockholm, 1923; - , *Svenska baptistsamfundets historia II*, BMB, Stockholm, 1928. G. Westin, *Ur den svenska folkvaeckelsens historia och tankevaerld, III/1*, BMB, Stockholm, 1933; - , *Ur den svenska folkvaeckelsens historia och tankevaerld, III/2*, BMB, Stockholm, 1934. M. Lindvall, *From Lutheran Priest to Baptist Minister. A Study in Anders Wiberg's Early Development, 1816-1853*, Unpublished Th.M. thesis, Ruschlikon, 1986.
- 2 This short treatment of the life and leadership of Anders Wiberg is built on the author's research. An introduction of this kind must by necessity be superficial and the use of notes has been very restricted.
- 3 The major sources for the life of Wiberg are his diaries and a couple of autobiographical sketches which are kept in the archives of Betelseminariet, Bromma-Stockholm. The most important work in English pertaining to Wiberg is G. W. Scroeder's *History of the Swedish Baptists*, The Evangelical Publishing Co., New York, 1898, and, with respect to Wiberg's early development, the author's Th.M. thesis.
- 4 The Swedish term *laesare* (Reader) refers to the revivalists' practice of reading pious works in family prayers and fellowship meetings of like-minded persons.
- 5 George Scott had come to Sweden to work among English workers in Swedish industry.
- 6 Johann Arndt, *True Christianity*. Cf. Wiberg's diary, pp.23-4.
- 7 *Diary 6/7*, 1849.
- 8 A. Wiberg, *Foerklaring afgifwen infoer Hudiksvalls Raadstufwuraett*, Wahlstroem & Co., Uppsala, 1851a; - , *Christian Baptism Set Forth in the Words of the Bible*, n.d., Philadelphia, ABPS.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 18.
- 10 *Diary 25/5*, 1851. Cf. A. Wiberg, *Hvilka boer doepas? och Hvaruti bestaar dopet?* Wahlstroem & Co., Uppsala, 1852, p.I.
- 11 A. Wiberg, *Hvilka boer doepas? och Hvaruti bestaar dopet?*, 1852. The work was finished on 27th July 1852, but not published until later in the fall.
- 12 *Diary 22/7*, 1852.
- 13 A. Wiberg, *Det kristliga dopet framstaellldt i bibelns egna ord*, ABPS, Philadelphia, 1854.
- 14 D. Forsell to A. Wiberg 6/1, 1855.
- 15 *Handlingar vid de Swenska Baptistfoersamlingarnas foersta aarskonferens*, 1858, pp.27-8 (Proceedings of the first general conference).
- 16 E. Steane and J. H. Hinton, *Notes of a Tour in Sweden*, James Nisbet & Co., London, 1859.
- 17 *Handlingar vid de Swenska Baptistfoersamlingarnas tredje allmaenna*

konferens, 1861, p.54.

- 18 *Veckoposten* (modern spelling) is still the official organ of the Swedish Baptist Union.
- 19 N. J. Nordstroem, *Svenska baptistsamfundets historia I*, 2nd ed., BMS, Stockholm, 1936, p.289.

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NOTE

The Antiquaries Journal, Volume LXVI, Part 2, 1986, contains a handsomely illustrated description of the history and restoration of the old Baptist chapel, Goodshaw Chapel, by Victoria Brandon and Stephen Johnson (pp.330-357 with 11 drawings and 10 illustrations).