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**Faculty of Education and Business Studies  
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# DECOUPLING CHURCH-STATE RELATION IN SWEDEN:

## A Brief Post-Mortem

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Field Studies in Religious Studies D  
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## **ABSTRACT**

Five decades' process of breaking more than four centuries of Church-State ties saw a major break-through at the stroke of the new millennium (the year 2000), with the implementation of legislative reforms aimed at giving the Church of Sweden a greater degree of liberty, while extending greater freedom to other religious communities in Sweden. Almost a decade after this historic legislation most stakeholders claim the impact of the reform has been significant. Indeed the decision to sever Church-State ties for whatever purpose or reason, after such a long standing relation between the two, will by all means have implications for the Church that is separated, the State and the so called free churches and other religions in Sweden. Thus, this field study seeks to investigate the resultant impact of delimiting governmental power in the religious domain on the now autonomous church and the implications the separation has had for other "non-state churches" as well as the secularized state government in Sweden almost ten years after the reforms.

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Fredrick Acheampong

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## **PREFACE**

### *Personal Profile*

I entered University of Ghana in 2002, having completed my Senior Secondary Education at St. Peter's Secondary, Nkwatia (1999-2001). I graduated from the University of Ghana in 2006(B.A. Study of Religions with Information Studies) with First Class Honours and stayed on at the Department for the Study of Religions for my National Service. Here, I thought as a Teaching Assistant for a year. Some of the courses I tutored in include, *Introduction to the Study of Religion and History of West African Religions*.

In 2006, I applied and gained admission to pursue my Master of Philosophy in the Study of Religions at the same Department. Am through with my course work and currently working on my thesis titled- *Religion and Politics in Ghana's 4<sup>th</sup> Republican Elections (1992-2008)*. It was during this period that the opportunity to undertake a field study in Sweden came. My supervisor, Rev. Prof. Elom Dovlo, asked me to put in a proposal, which was subsequently approved.

### *Field Study Topic*

My interest in this study was inspired by my thesis topic that broadly makes a study of the interactions between Religion and Politics in Ghana. I was thus anxious to know about similar encounters between religion and Politics elsewhere. My expectations were met when I came across a news paper article from the Adventist Church, which reported on the decoupling of Church-State Relations in Sweden almost in 2000. After weeks of online research I decided to do a brief post –mortem of the separation, basically focusing on the impact of the separation.

### *A Comparison of Church-State Relations in Ghana and Sweden*

Ghana is a secular state. Generally the current Constitution of the country and structure of governance does not allow any link between Religion and Politics. The Church is however a respected Institution in Ghana because of it heavy investments in education, health and agriculture. The churches contribution towards Independence and her resolve to maintain that multiparty democracy is entrenched in the country has earned her a reputation as *the conscious of society*. The church is thus deemed as a partner and stakeholder in development. My take on the Ghanaian situation makes the Swedish one (a



decade ago) different from that of Ghana. I must be quick to add however that before the coming of Europeans to this part of the African continent and the subsequent adoption of Western System of governance, African Indigenous Religion (AIR) permeated all suspects of the African society including Religion and the legitimacy of a political leader (Chief) had its basis and essence in Religion. Most chiefs were deemed as sacred and their decisions and powers were deemed as divinely bestowed. Today all religions, including Christianity do not have any direct say in state governance and vice versa.

## **SECTION ONE**

### **1.0.0 Introduction**

In ancient times there was no separation between Religion (faith) and the State. As original custodians of their constituents, the influence of monarchs or kings (as they are normally referred to in the Western world) could not be overemphasized. The institution (monarch) was closely linked with the very life of the people. Kings constituted the focal point for the exercise of executive, legislative, judicial and religious powers in their territories; haven ascended the throne either through inheritance, conquest or both. The governed in most countries and territories willingly or unwillingly became members of the state religion. In those days the power of the king was claimed or seen as one that was divinely bestowed, thus making him a religious persona and the first among equals. The respect and the powers that were given to the king were recognized by his people because they believed his rule was divine. Some kings were and are still regarded as semi divine and living ancestors, whose powers are deemed absolute and their reign divine. The institution and its head were deemed as intermediaries between the living and the yet to be born on one hand and the dead and metaphysical world on the other hand.

In the West, the coming of Christianity (in the form of one universal church - the Roman Catholic Church) changed the situation somewhat. Countries either adapted Christianity (whiles abandoning their old religion, mostly paganism) or made it their State or “established religions”. Still others also chose to stick to their old religions and persecuted adherence of Christianity and other faiths that the State did not recognize.

## **1.1.0 The Milieu of Church and State Relations in Sweden**

### *1.1.1 The Christianization of Sweden*

As far as the historical record of Sweden goes, Christianity reached Sweden by the 9<sup>th</sup> century (829), but it was not until the 13<sup>th</sup> century, that it was recognized by the State, with the selection of Uppsala as the seat of the Archbishop by 1164 and the crowning of Erik Knutsson by a Bishop as King of Sweden in 1210. Before this historic breakthrough for Christian missionaries, the Swedish Monarch was pagan and the king an important celebrant of sacrifices made at Uppsala three times in a year.

The 16<sup>th</sup> century reformation which rocked the Catholic Church and brought in its wake Lutheranism, led to the Swedish Monarch, (which was worried about the increasing power of the papacy both at home and in the world), taking advantage of the reforms to sever ties with the Vatican. In its stead, Sweden created a State Church, the Church of Sweden (here after CoS), thus beginning what was to become a long standing relation, that it had to take four centuries to break. The severing of ties with the Roman Catholic Church and the establishment of new relations with the Lutheran faith during the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Protestant Reformation thus necessitated this marriage. Indeed this same reformation led to the emergence of similar Church-State relations in other states like Denmark, England, Germany, Norway, Finland and other European countries, as most of these countries took charge of the administration of the churches within their sovereign boundaries.

For the purposes of this research, the period of the Reformation is a matter of real importance. It is therefore necessary to deal with the origins of the Swedish Reformation which have an evident bearing on the eventual fusion of the Church and State.<sup>1</sup> Thus, before any further discussions on the establishment of Church-State ties, it will be imperative for me to discuss briefly the process and nature of the Swedish reformation, which eventually gave birth to Church-State connection in Sweden, though internal factors like political expediency, is also cause.

### *1.1.2 The Swedish Reformation*

The Lutheran Reformation reached Sweden in 1527, with actual implementation kick starting in 1531. In reality however, the process was concluded in 1593 (Charles IX Church Order). Unlike in other regions, the process of Reformation in Sweden was imposed from above by the rulers instead of a grassroots protest from below<sup>2</sup> as was the case elsewhere.

The influence of the pontiff had increased worldwide, but this was undermined by her involvement in political, economic and other secular matters, like the Great Western Schism.<sup>3</sup> In Sweden, the Catholic Church had gained considerable power and had influence to the extent that, the then Archbishop was an advisor to the King of Sweden,

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<sup>1</sup>“The Church” and “the State” as will be used in this work represents or is the Church of Sweden (CoS) and the government or political authority in Sweden respectively.

<sup>2</sup> Reid, T. R. “Church of Sweden Is Thriving on Its Own.” *The Washington Post*, 29 December 2000, T1.

<sup>3</sup> Stegeby, Kenneth E. “An Analysis of the Impending Disestablishment of the Church of Sweden.” *Brigham Young University Law Review* 1999, no.2 (1999): 703.

but then again, the Catholic Church in Sweden was also implicated in what has come to be known in Swedish historical circles as the “Bloods Bath of Stockholm”<sup>4</sup>

Externally the reform influence in Sweden, like elsewhere, came from Germany. These influences came from returning students, German merchants and evangelical preachers in Scandinavian towns.<sup>5</sup> The strength of these protestant ideas in towns were not the same in the countryside. These ideas however served as a justification for bringing the Catholic Church under the control of the crown of Sweden. The church was stripped of most of its lands and other wealth. A typical example was the assent given by the Swedish Parliament for the transfer of “surplus estate” of the Church to the State. Like elsewhere, the reformers made use of printing machines and the vernacular language to press home their message for change.<sup>6</sup> Personality wise the one who led this reform crusade was Gustav Vasa, who having successfully thwarted attempts at rejuvenating the Kalmar Union<sup>7</sup> in the early 16th century and securing the independence of Sweden, also broke with the Catholic Church in 1523 and initiated the Swedish Reformation. This gives credence to the argument that the Reformation was embraced for political reasons and not something that the masses necessarily yearned or called for. This argument does not however, take away the role of some commoners who have been identified as agents of the reformation earlier. Chancellor E. R. Bernard recognizes this role and notes:

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>“The Reformation in German and Scandinavia”, Carrie (European University Institute), accessed 28 June 2010, [http://vlib.iue.it/carrie/texts/carrie\\_books/gilbert/12.html](http://vlib.iue.it/carrie/texts/carrie_books/gilbert/12.html)

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>A dynastic union which united the kingdoms of Denmark, Norway and Sweden during the late 14<sup>th</sup> century.

Though it cannot be said that there was any national movement of dissatisfaction with the old faith and the old ritual, yet the Reformation was native in its origin.<sup>8</sup>

With his election as king in 1523, Gustav Vasa gave attention to the reformation that was already in force. He gave protection to many reformers, including Olaus and Laurentius Petri who had earlier returned from Wittenberg in 1519 and started sharing the Reformed faith. Under Gustav Vasa, Olaus Petri translated the New Testament into the Swedish language in 1526, with the first complete Bible in Swedish language published in 1541. Gustav Vasa was himself elected head of the Church in 1527,<sup>9</sup> with the Riksdag in Vasteras adopting Lutheranism in Sweden the same year. However it was not until 1544 that the Riksdag proclaimed Sweden as an Evangelical Kingdom. King Gustav sought means of reducing the power of the Catholic Church and found it in Lutheranism, which teaches, that "... both the secular and spiritual systems were instituted by and served the interests of God"<sup>10</sup> Thus by adopting Lutheranism the Church's administration fell to the control of the state.

With this adoption, the position of the monarch was bound tightly to that of the Church, with the king as the Church's most prominent member, and Christianity in its Lutheran form became the state religion during this period. The Swedish reformers were however careful, not to change much of the old order of the church, unless those they deemed superstitious or that which amounted to false belief in their judgment. A statement by the

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<sup>8</sup>This is a quote from Project Canterbury, which is a report of the Commission appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury on the Church of England and the Church of Sweden in Pursuance of Resolution 74 of the Lambeth Conference of 1908 on the Relation of the Anglican Communion to the Church of Sweden.

<sup>9</sup>"The Reformation in German and Scandinavia", Carrie (European University Institute), accessed 28 June 2010; available from [http://vlib.iue.it/carrie/texts/carrie\\_books/gilbert/12.html](http://vlib.iue.it/carrie/texts/carrie_books/gilbert/12.html)

<sup>10</sup> Stegeby, Kenneth E. "An Analysis of the Impending Disestablishment of the Church of Sweden." *Brigham Young University Law Review* 1999, no.2 (1999): 710.

great Swedish Archbishop and ecumenist, Nathan Söderblom (1866-1931), about the reformed church in the light of its new identity is instructive here:

The Reformation did not mean a transfer from one church to another. We have not had two churches in Sweden, one Roman Catholic and one Evangelical. We belong to the same universal church, which, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit according to different ways of living at different times, has been, and still is, in need of renewal, reformation, and spiritual awakening.<sup>11</sup>

This effectively ended the Swedish Reformation and commenced a new era where power was transferred or seeded from a divine to a secular leadership. From a historical point of view it can be said that the independence of Sweden gave rise or re-enforced the Reformation movement and strengthened Church-State ties. This is because if the restoration of the Kalmar Union was successful, Sweden may not have been autonomous enough politically to even or let alone break their ties with Rome.

### *1.1.3 The Establishment*

By this establishment, Lutheranism became the State Religion, and the Church was united with the State. This has had a great impact on the socio-political culture of Sweden. The marriage between the Church and State was so strong that it took an Act of parliament to even change the Prayer Book. “For more than four centuries, to be Swedish was to be Lutheran. Every newborn here was automatically registered as a member of the CoS, the official Lutheran denomination.”<sup>12</sup> Sweden thus became a monolithic religious state, allowing only the State recognized Evangelical Faith.

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<sup>11</sup> Church of Sweden, “Identity of the Church.” *Church of Sweden Secretariat for Theology and Ecumenical Affairs*, accessed 28 June 2010,

<http://www.svenskakyrkan.se/default.aspx?di=295680&ptid=0>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

The appointment of George Norman as Superintendent of Sweden's Lutheran church in 1540 by King Gustav Vasa and approval of the Church Ordinance (written by Laurentius Petri) in 1571 by King Johan and its subsequent adoption by the Synod of Uppsala in 1572, were some of the first steps towards sealing the State authority over the Church and aimed at preparing the foundation of the establishment. Though death of Gustav Vasa saw the losing of some State's grip on the Church, relations were however rejuvenated or normalised with the adaptation of the Augsburg Confession by the Swedish Church during the Uppsala meeting in 1593 convened by Karl IX. On this day the Swedish Evangelical-Lutheran Church was born. It was the only Church to be permitted in Sweden and anyone who opposed its new teachings or professed any other religion was to face the law. From this time forward, the Swedish Church became closely interwoven with the political set up of the country. Relations with other countries with "established churches," especially the Church of England were strengthened during this era.

The first Church Law passed after breaking with Rome in 1686, defined the state as an Evangelical one and required all citizenry to profess this faith, thus, reaffirming the Augsburg Confession. Frank Cranmer makes note of this law, when he observed that "the church-state relationship was embodied in the Church Code (Kyrkolagen) 1869."<sup>13</sup>

#### *1.1.3.1 The powers of the crown*

The crown's powers were extended to the Church and the king was to ensure that God's

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<sup>13</sup> Cranmer, Frank. "The Church of Sweden and the Unravelling of Establishment." *Ecclesiastical Law Journal* 5, no. 1 (2000): 419.



Law applied on the land.<sup>14</sup> Even though this law saw many amendments it remained as a legal resource until the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>15</sup> Appointments of dignitaries were effected by the crown on the advice of the secular government.<sup>16</sup> For instance if a seat of a bishopric becomes vacant, though representatives of the Diocesan Council (*Stiftsfullmäktige*) and that of the Parish Council (*Kyrkoråd*) have a right to constitute an electoral college, they cannot however elect a bishopric out right.<sup>17</sup> They can only present three leading names for the position to the crown. The crown in consultation with the day to day administrators of the country (government) will make an appointment. They can also reject all three names submitted and request that the whole process starts once again.<sup>18</sup> It is worth noting that “this system of crowned appointments extended even to the parishes, where every third vacancy in every benefice was in the gift of the crown.”<sup>19</sup>

The Swedish constitution also mandates the crown to call a General Assembly meeting of the Church, which will discuss an agenda presented by the King. The outcomes of this meeting are not final. They are presented as either petitions or suggestions pending the approval by the crown and parliament.<sup>20</sup>

### *1.1.3.2 The Mandate of the Church*

The Church Law of 1686 gave a mandate to the Church to keep all official Church records on every citizen. These official Church records included births, baptism,

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<sup>14</sup> Church of Sweden, “Identity of the Church.” *Church of Sweden Secretariat for Theology and Ecumenical Affairs*, accessed 28 June 2010,

<http://www.svenskakyrkan.se/default.aspx?di=295680&ptid=0>

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> The Church of Sweden, 1998.

<sup>17</sup> Cranmer, Frank. “The Church of Sweden and the Unravelling of Establishment.” *Ecclesiastical Law Journal* 5, no. 1 (2000): 418.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

marriages and deaths. The King, who was the Head of the Church, used the Church records to track all the citizenry. The Church was to solely spearhead the religious education of the people. According to Searle Bates, under this law, the General Assembly of the Church also had power to veto Religious Bills that had had parliamentary consideration.<sup>21</sup> The State could not also impose its will on the Church in fundamental matters, likewise “the Church is also not expected to make any significant changes that are not considered and approved by the nation acting through the political system of the whole community.”<sup>22</sup>

During this period priests and bishops were also very influential as they headed two offices of religious ministers and members of parliament for one of the four houses of the Riksdag.<sup>23</sup> It was not until parliamentary reforms in 1866, which reduced the estates to a two chamber parliament (in conformity with emerging standards on the continent), did the church lose this power.<sup>24</sup> It seems the leadership of the Church had no express power, but had only responsibilities and mandates to execute. They just implemented what was given them. Though they made inputs, the final decision did not lie in their power. With their appointment by the crown, almost all the Church hierarchies served at the mercy of the king and thus promoted his or her interests, rather than that of the Church. In effect the Church had no power, under this establishment, as all was seeded to the crown.

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<sup>21</sup> Bates, Searle M. *Religious Liberty: An Enquiry*. New York: International Missionary Council, 1945: 108.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> The then Riksdag was made up of representatives from the four estates: "clerics, nobility, townsmen" and "peasants," until 1866 when Sweden became a Constitutional monarchy with a bicameral parliament.

<sup>24</sup> Lena Berggren, “Completing the Lutheran Reformation: Ultra-nationalism, Christianity and the Possibility of ‘Clerical Fascism’ in Interwar Sweden,” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 8, no.2: 2007 accessed 28 June 2010,

<http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:15846/FULLTEXT01>

### 1.2.0 The Era of Force and Enforced Relations

The era of changing relations was prompted by several factors but mainly by revival movements within and outside the Church (theological reasons), economic and immigration reasons.

In the early 1700s the economic boom, which led to the influx of skilled labour in its territory, forced the Swedish government to soften its stance on religious freedom. This saw the granting of permits to immigrants who belonged to some Christian traditions to set up denominations of such churches in 1721. Swedish indigenes were however only given the same freedom after the enactments of the Freedom of Conscience Law in 1809.<sup>25</sup> Before this law in 1721, foreigners with investments in the realm who wanted to practice another form of Christianity, or another faith, were at liberty to do so, but in privacy behind closed doors. This opened doors and saw the re-emergence of already existing churches, especially the Catholic Church, which the state served ties with during the Swedish Reformation. In 1784 a public Roman Catholic mass was allowed in the Swedish capital, Stockholm for the first time since the Reformation.<sup>26</sup> This freedom was however short lived as revival movements forced the Swedish authorities to ban private religious gathering.

The Swedish theocracy was itself characterized by several evangelical revival movements during the last decade of the 18th century. Theological disputes led to unending tensions

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<sup>25</sup> Stegeby, Kenneth E. "An Analysis of the Impending Disestablishment of the Church of Sweden." *Brigham Young University Law Review* 1999, no.2 (1999): 710.

<sup>26</sup> Church of Sweden, "Church History." *Church of Sweden Secretariat for Theology and Ecumenical Affairs*, accessed 28 June 2010; available from <http://www.svenskakyrkan.se/default.aspx?di=295680&ptid=0>

between the church leadership and internal revival movements within the established Church. This led to secessions, despite several laws prohibiting secession.<sup>27</sup>

The religious monopoly was also externally threatened by pietistic influences from Germany<sup>28</sup> and later, internally by ‘Swedenborgianism,’<sup>29</sup> forcing the government and the Church leaders of the day, to react with the introduction of a law that prohibited people to congregate in the homes and have religious meetings.<sup>30</sup> This 1726 Conventicle Edict (*Konventikelplakatet*) was aimed at effectively enforcing religious orthodoxy and banning other religious sects. Though, the law “... was in part repealed by Royal Decree in 1858 but, even then, only a very limited freedom of assembly was allowed to other denominations.”<sup>31</sup> The 19th century Baptist movements, that baptized its new members, also compelled the Church to make baptism an obligatory rite.<sup>32</sup> Until about 1860, when

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<sup>27</sup> These groups included, from northern Sweden, Laestadianism in the Torne Valley (inspired by L.L. Laestadius, 1800-1868) and Rosenianism in Västerbotten (C.O. Rosenius, 1816-1868), and, on the west coast, Schartauanism (H. Schartau, 1757-1825).

<sup>28</sup> Pietism is a reform movement in the German Lutheran Church during the 17th and 18th centuries, which strove to renew the devotional ideal in the Protestant religion. See Ritschl, *Geschichte des Pietismus*; F E Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism, German Pietism During the Eighteenth Century*, and (ed.) *Continental Pietism and Early American Christianity*; D W Brown, *Understanding Pietism*; R Lovelace, *The Dynamics of Spiritual Life*.

<sup>29</sup> Swedenborgianism is the belief system developed from the writings of the Swedish theologian Emanuel Swedenborg (1688 – 1772). It is also believed that Swedenborg witnessed the Last Judgment in the spiritual world, along with the inauguration of the New Church. Some Swedenborgian organizations teach that the writings of Swedenborg (often called *The Writings* or *The Third Testament*) are a third part of the Bible and have the same authority as the Old and New Testaments. Other names for the movement are also used, especially by adherents; include Swedenborgism, New Christians, Neo-Christians, The New Church, and Church of the New Jerusalem. (See “Swedenborgianism” by Jane Williams-Hogan in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, accessed 28 June 2010,

[http://go.galegroup.com.webproxy.student.hig.se:2048/ps/retrieve.do?sgHitCountType=None&sort=RELEVANCE&inPS=true&prodId=GURL&userGroupName=hgs&tabID=T003&searchId=R1&resultListType=RESULT\\_LIST&contentSegment=&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm&currentPosition=1&contentSet=GALE%7CCX3424503014&&docId=GALE|CX3424503014&docType=GALE&role=](http://go.galegroup.com/webproxy.student.hig.se:2048/ps/retrieve.do?sgHitCountType=None&sort=RELEVANCE&inPS=true&prodId=GURL&userGroupName=hgs&tabID=T003&searchId=R1&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&contentSegment=&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm&currentPosition=1&contentSet=GALE%7CCX3424503014&&docId=GALE|CX3424503014&docType=GALE&role=)

<sup>30</sup> See Andersson, Carl Ingvar and Hannay Carolyn. *A History of Sweden*. New York: Praeger, 1956: 257.

<sup>31</sup> Cranmer, Frank. “The Church of Sweden and the Unravelling of Establishment.” *Ecclesiastical Law Journal* 5, no. 1 (2000): 419.

<sup>32</sup> Church of Sweden, “Church History.” *Church of Sweden Secretariat for Theology and Ecumenical Affairs*, accessed 28 June 2010,

<http://www.svenskakyrkan.se/default.aspx?di=295680&ptid=0>

this law came into effect, though citizens were baptized under the auspices of the Church of Sweden, this was not mandatory.<sup>33</sup>

According to Frank Cranmer, a new law on Religious Observance, the Alien Creeds Act (*Lag om främmande trosbekännare*) replaced the 1860 Church Code. This new law made it possible for Swedish citizens to withdraw from the church for the first time, in the Church's history.<sup>34</sup> But once again this law came with its own restrictions, since "denominations had to be approved by the state after very careful scrutiny, and one could only leave the established church for an approved denomination."<sup>35</sup>

In the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century the fight for freedom of religion, led mainly by the movement of Free-Churches (*Frikyrkorörelsen*)<sup>36</sup> and the prohibition of alcohol movement, became an essential element in the later fight for greater freedom in Sweden.<sup>37</sup> The state made some more reforms but still maintained its ties with the CoS, prompting many to question the idea of a State Religion or faith. Agitations from several quarters of the religious divide and internally from the Church clearly left the government of the day and successive governments that followed in the next century no option, than to initiate moves to end the union with the Church. The change was thus to come, no matter the states' resolve not to break the long standing ties.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Cranmer, Frank. "The Church of Sweden and the Unravelling of Establishment." *Ecclesiastical Law Journal* 5, no. 1 (2000): 419.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> In Sweden the term free churches refer to Christian denomination that intrinsically separated from Church of Sweden (as people who did not support the idea of theocracy, or an "established" or state church) The free churches belong to other Protestant denominations like the Baptists, Methodists, Reformed, Pentecostal Churches.

<sup>37</sup> Stegeby, Kenneth E. "An Analysis of the Impending Disestablishment of the Church of Sweden." *Brigham Young University Law Review* 1999, no.2 (1999): 711.

### 1.3.0 The Prevailing Religious Demography

With a population of 9.1 million in 2008, an estimated 75 percent of the Swedish citizens were members of the CoS.<sup>38</sup> With 4.4 percent (400,000 persons) of the population representing other Protestant groups. Approximately 5 percent (450,000-500,000) of residents are Muslims (although the officially sanctioned Muslim Council of Sweden, for Swedish government funding purposes, only reported 100,000 active participants.)<sup>39</sup> The United State *International Religious Freedom* report on *Sweden* indicate among other things that membership in the CoS had seen a steadily decline since it separated from the state in 2000.

The report also indicates that, “communities representing less than 5 percent of the population include the Pentecostal movement and the Missionary (or Missions) Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons).”<sup>40</sup> The number of Jews are estimated at 18,500 to 20,000. There are also other minority religious groups including Methodists, Buddhists, Sikhs, the Church of Scientology, Zoroastrians, Hare Krishna, Word of Faith, and the Unification Church.<sup>41</sup>

It is worthy to note that these religious demographic figures as provided are not from official sources, since “the Government does not register the religion of citizens – [but]

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<sup>38</sup> United States Department of State, *2008 Report on International Religious Freedom*, “Sweden”, accessed 28 June 2010,

<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2008/108474.htm>

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

relies on statistics submitted by religious organizations when [they] apply for state funds.”<sup>42</sup>

#### **1.4.0 Closing Remarks**

In the next chapter I will preoccupy myself with the process of what I describe as ‘real change’ from the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century (effectively 1951-2000) and the agents who consciously or unconsciously made it happen, until the 2000 Church Ordinance, which official sources deemed as the final leg towards a total disunion between the Church and the State.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

## **SECTION TWO**

### **2.0.0 The Changing Process**

Having accepted in principle that one religious community can no longer be regarded as a unifying bond for the now multicultural state; steps were taken from the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century to disassociate the CoS from the State. Having decided as a matter of principle that the new relations comes off at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the State made its proposals public and left the rest of the issues “... to be investigated, debated and resolved before completing the reforms between it and the Church”<sup>43</sup> thus making the separation decisions one of the most open and transparent. Before I walk through the chronology of the changing relation from 1951-2000, I will like to discuss some of the factors that accounted for or necessitated the change in relations. Indeed, change was to come, as far as the Church-State relation was concerned, no matter how long it took. However, as will be realized, these factors as they will be identified, severed as catalyst in hastening or speeding up the changing process.

### **2.1.0 Factors that Necessitated Change in Relations**

Several reasons can be attributed to the change in relations between the Church and State in Sweden. Some are external while others are internal in nature.

#### *2.1.1 Precedent in other Countries*

Externally most countries had long since separated from the Church and the same for Sweden was nothing new. As T.R. Reid noted, “... by delaying the change until 2000,

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<sup>43</sup> Stegeby, Kenneth E. “An Analysis of the Impending Disestablishment of the Church of Sweden.” *Brigham Young University Law Review* 1999, no.2 (1999): 703.



Sweden was one of the last countries in Western Europe to sever the connection between the state and an officially sanctioned church.”<sup>44</sup>

Most of the Nordic countries, like Denmark which started the establishment traditions during the reformation days, have long separated from the church. It was thus a matter of time for the Church and the State to recognize this trend across its sub-region to accept the changing circumstances and also take steps to discontinue relations. Again the success stories in the sub-region and other jurisdictions in Europe presented a better justification for change in relations. The Church of Ireland was disestablished in 1871 and the Church of Wales in 1920 by the United Kingdom (U.K.) government.<sup>45</sup> According to the National Secular Society of the U.K., the Irish story was a successful one, as the “... disestablishment succeeded in removing a grievance, established a solid corporate structure (the Representative Church Body and the General Synod), and a substantial endowment.”<sup>46</sup>

### *2.1.2 Immigration and Secularization*

With the secularization of the Swedish society it was obvious that the secularized government can no longer keep its connections with the Church. Flexible immigration laws; allowed the opening of “floodgates,” leading to the influx of immigrants (most of who come with their religion) not only from Europe but from Africa (Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia), the Middle East (Iran, Iraq Turkey) and from the Far East (China, Japan). It is a known fact in Europe that, until the late 1980s, Sweden had the most liberal

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<sup>44</sup> Reid, “Church of Sweden Is Thriving on Its Own,” T1.

<sup>45</sup> National Secular Society, *Church and State Seminar* (London: University College London Constitution Unit, July 2006)

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

refugee policy in the region. The immigration and naturalization laws allow application for citizenship after five years of residency and the asylum process was considered faster and less bureaucratic than in other European Union countries.<sup>47</sup>

By the end of 2003, 12% of Swedish residents were born in another country,<sup>48</sup> with 22% of these people having foreign background (or were born in another country).<sup>49</sup> According to the Center for the Study of Religion and Society at the University of Uppsala, “this ethnic diversity has been naturally accompanied by a strong religious plurality dominated by Christian denominations but also by a significant group of Muslims.<sup>50</sup> As a multi- cultural society, the State could not have any justifications to keep an “established church,” whose activities do not benefit the whole Swedish society. Thus it was argued that, a secularized government could not claim to adhere to the belief of one teaching, while it governs different religious communities under her sovereignty. Indeed with a slow, but steady drop in membership (an average of 1% a year), it was apparent that the time was ripe for Church and the State to go their separate ways.<sup>51</sup> Indeed many citizens favored the disestablishment, not only to guarantee them freedom, to join other religious communities, but to also make the country secular. The *Christian Science Monitor* quoted Stella Fajerson, a businesswoman (after Parliament passed a Bill

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<sup>47</sup>Bäckström, Anders; Edgardh Ninna and Pettersson Per. *Religious Change in Northern Europe - The Case of Sweden: From State Church to Free Folk Church. Final Report*. Translated by Craig McKay. Stockholm: Verbum, 2004; Stockholm: Verbum, 2004: 70.

<sup>48</sup> Edgardh, Ninna *Welfare and Values in Europe (WaVE). State of the Art. Part B. 1. Sweden: Overview of the National Situation*, Centre for the Study of Religion and Society, University of Uppsala, accessed 28 June 2010,

<http://uu.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:302403/FULLTEXT01>

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Bäckström, Anders; Edgardh Ninna and Pettersson Per. *Religious Change in Northern Europe - The Case of Sweden: From State Church to Free Folk Church. Final Report*. Translated by Craig McKay. Stockholm: Verbum, 2004; Stockholm: Verbum, 2004: 65-6.

with guidelines for the reform) as saying, “I support the decision because it’s recognition that a large part of the Swedish population is no longer Christian, the state should be secular.”<sup>52</sup> Though her submission that the majority of the populations are no more adherents to Christianity may not entirely be true, her take that the State be secularized only represented the view of millions of the Swedish citizens who longed for this day.

### *2.1.3 Technological Advancement*

With the technological age, people started interpreting daily occurrences in scientific terms, leading to a change orientation about God. A number of people I interviewed who are presently atheist, were initially brought up in the Swedish Church, but with science recognized that they could explain and understand things in their environment in a natural way or explain them in human terms. Again some of them asserted that, they do not have any feeling of the presence of God, hence the decision to quit the Church or stay away from religion altogether. For most of these people, religion is a private matter and hence has nothing to do with governance. They argue that government’s interventions in the affairs of the Church were unnecessary and thus welcomed the 2000 reforms.

### *2.1.4 Inner Factors*

A significant number of those I describe as ‘inner voices,’ mostly made up of bishops, the clergy and other active church members have long favoured a separation though some feared the lost of members, if the disestablishment was initiated. An article in the Christian Science Monitor quotes Johan Hasslow, spoke person at the Church

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<sup>52</sup> Sloane Wendy, “Sweden Snaps Strong Ties with Church and State” *Christian Science Monitor*, 10 April 1995.

headquarters in Uppsala (after the Riksdag voted to change Church-State relations in 1995) saying:

This is a good decision. We have been waiting years to decide this question and to decide what is right and wrong. We wanted to change the relationship between the Church and the State.<sup>53</sup>

With the Church's association with the State came too many laws for it to observe. The Church kept on considering new laws, submitted by government almost every sitting of the Synod. In the first place, the passage of these laws faced stiffer opposition from some members of the clergy. This State of affairs normally forces the Church, (which was normally torn between two authorities of sacred and secular) to take a middle line as a parish priest asserted, in an interview, to satisfy both authorities. For instance government's proposal for the ordination of women in 1958 did not get a unanimous support from the Church Synod. In taking a middle line, the Church Synod upheld that, the ordination of women will go ahead, but then, priests who do not accept female ordination have the right not work with them.<sup>54</sup> Many Swedish citizens who were against the routine changes of its traditions and theological stance, (as in gay priest and gay partnership or blessing) left the Church in protest to join other religious communities or become atheist because they lost their faith in the Church. Those who choose to stay behind fought for their separation from the State, which in their estimation will greatly reduce if not totally eliminate the challenges of the Church.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> This position of the Church has since then changed. All priests sign an undertaking stating that they accept women ordination before they themselves can be ordained. (Source: Personal Interview with a Parish Priest in Gavle )

Again the observance of too many laws and “the reminder of our guilt,”<sup>55</sup> as an interviewee put it, keep a number of people out the Church. It is said that priests were too influential and thus feared. This kept them away from the laypeople. It was sometimes difficult to get access to a priest.<sup>56</sup> Thus all these factors contributed to people leaving the Church to join other groups making it obvious that the State can no longer keep connections with the Church. Thus the simple argument had been that if the overwhelming majority of the people are no longer active members of the State- Church, then why keeps the association. Hence, they called for disestablishment.

#### *2.1.5 Advocacy*

Civil and religious advocacy groups also pressured government to disestablish from the Church. They contended that with this association comes discrimination which in itself is unconstitutional, since the laws of Sweden prohibits discrimination of a person due to his or her religious orientation, having passed the Freedom of Religion Bill in 1951. People question the origins of the relation, questioned the suitability of the monarch as head of the church and why secular leaders continued to make ecclesiastical appointments. They argued that the State cannot continue to keep it link with the Church, since it would not only influence it’s judgment, but will also not provide a level playing field for all religious communities. Again the State’s continuous funding for the Church at the expense of improving social services could not be justified.

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<sup>55</sup> Personal Interview with a Swedish Politician in Gavle Central (Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> February, 2009 at 16Hours.)

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

### *2.1.6 Church and School Separation*

The termination of the mandate of the Church to teach Christian studies in the 1970s saw the introduction of religious studies instead of the previous Christian studies, which had been part of the ‘proselytization’ or indoctrination process of the Church in the schools. This change meant that the wider society no longer regarded Christianity, or its teaching, especially that of the CoS, as the “only way.” The school curricula which charges course instructors or teacher to only introduce the student to various religions in the world without necessarily indoctrinating them, has gradually led to a generation of citizens who are atheist or private religious, others diffusing into other religious communities, if their parents are members. Thus with the CoS no more in charge of religious education, “... it no longer seemed fair to give officials favour to one faith or the other, hence disestablishment.”<sup>57</sup>

### *2.1.7 The Larger Citizenry*

A significant proportion of the population had long opposed the idea of an “established church”. They see no reason why the taxes they pay are used to fund the Church. A statement by the then minister for culture Marita Ulvskog quoted in the Washington Post on 29 December 2000 is instructive here:

We were using tax money to support one church and that was fine, when everybody belonged to one church, but in a multicultural society, there was no justification for equal treatment. So we can make a leap.<sup>58</sup>

### *2.1.8 Economic down turn of the 1990s*

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<sup>57</sup> Reid, “Church of Sweden Is Thriving on Its Own,” *The Washington Post*, 29 December 2000, T1.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

The Swedish welfare system in the 20<sup>th</sup> century according to Anders Bäckström et al, over-shadowed the Church and other sectors of society.<sup>59</sup> This reduced the Church's social service drive. The Church lost most of its economic base, as governmental support and other monopolized services it run were reviewed and government was forced under the then prevailing conditions to privatize most state activities including those the Church had invested in. Hence the church was taken further away from the people, in the provision of certain social services and as people assessed similar services elsewhere; the Church became less important to them.

All these reasons as discussed above pushed government to make some changes to meet the changing realities on the ground. The next sub-section of this work attempts a brief chronological discussion of the changes that took place in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **2.2.0 Brief Chronology of Changing Relations (1951-2000)**

The 'real change,' according to Frank Cranmer began in the year 1951, with the passage of the Freedom of Religion Bill (*Religionsfrihetslagen*) into law. This law allowed or "made it possible to exit the CoS without having to opt for a recognized alternative though those who departed were still liable for a so-called 'dissenters' tax' at sixty per cent of the church tax."<sup>60</sup> What was interesting during this same period was the introduction of a law on membership. The theologically recognized way of membership

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<sup>59</sup> Bäckström, Anders; Edgardh Ninna and Pettersson Per. *Religious Change in Northern Europe - The Case of Sweden: From State Church to Free Folk Church. Final Report*. Translated by Craig McKay. Stockholm: Verbum, 2004; Stockholm: Verbum, 2004: 47.

<sup>60</sup> Cranmer, Frank. "The Church of Sweden and the Unravelling of Establishment." *Ecclesiastical Law Journal* 5, no. 1 (2000): 421.

was changed.<sup>61</sup> Baptism which was a sign that one was a member of the Church was waved. Though the *Religionsfrihetslag* came into force in 1951, actual preparatory work towards the disestablishment commenced 44 years after. The Act came into being based on the recommendations of the Committee on Dissenters Laws (*Dissenterlagskommittén*) establish by government to examine the issues surrounding religious freedom.<sup>62</sup> Support for the passage of the law had a collaborative backing of civil society who demanded freedom of religion and equal treatment of denomination and their members,<sup>63</sup>as I have already alluded to. Some important highlights of the Act are as follows:

- It affirmed the principles of religious freedom and association.
- Establish non member's right not to pay all but half of the Church taxes towards burial and funeral rites.
- Suggested a distinction between churches that have formal association with church of Sweden (*Trossammanslutningar*) and those who do not (*Trossamfund*)
- Guaranteed freedom for religious organizations.
- To become legal independent entities, religious organizations were to meet stringent requirements, because of society's important interest in such institutions.
- The king was to determine which religious association could obtain the status of *Trossammanslutningar*.

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

<sup>62</sup>Stegeby, Kenneth E. "An Analysis of the Impending Disestablishment of the Church of Sweden." *Brigham Young University Law Review* 1999, no.2 (1999): 716-17.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.



### 2.2.1 A critique of the 1951 Religionsfrihetslag

From this law it was clear that the State still took interest in the Church. This may lead us to the conclusion that, by liberalizing the religious sphere; the State did not even lose its grip on the CoS, but rather widened it to cover other religious communities within its jurisdiction. In effect, the *Religionsfrihetslag* did not contain everything that was satisfactory to religious committees and other advocacy groups who were hoping for a total freedom and the leveling of the religious domain for all faith based groups. Thus though they welcomed the Act with their left hand, they demanded complete freedom with their right hand. Some of the areas of concern about this Act were:

- The stringent requirement to qualify as a religious community.
- The power given to the crown to determine who can gain the status of *Trossamfund* and the distinction between it and *Trossammanslutningar*.

Kenneth E. Stegeby has argued that, the law contains flaws which necessitated review in 1960 and 1970. It was thus not surprising when the 1997 Investigatory Committee also criticized these provisions in the law; describing it as unwarranted during its review.

Parliament's recommendation to the crown in 1956, to set up a new team of impartial investigators (who commenced work on 1958); to examine the Church-State ties did not yield much result after a decade work (1972).<sup>64</sup> This was basically caused by a lack of political will as the ruling government feared loss of elections. As government played politics with the reforms in the religious sector, the CoS took up its own reform agenda based on an earlier reform put together by Kyrkomötet in 1968. Upon receiving the Church reform position, the state saw the willingness of the Church to disestablish. The

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

non-responsive attitude of the State on the issue of disestablishment meant that, until the Church took its own initiative the State was not ready to disestablish.

In 1983 parliament revoked the legislative power it sometimes delegated to the Church especially on the “organization and internal affairs in specific religious areas.”<sup>65</sup> This move was geared towards the creation of a level playing field among all religious communities in Sweden. The Church was however given some recognition though not constitutionally recognized; to have a say on similar bills before they are passed; a privilege it enjoys to date.

### *2.2.2 Glimpses of Hope*

Some significant changes took place in the 1990s, which led to the 2000 reforms. With reforms in the legal and economic dealing between the two realms (in a bid to make the Church more independent) in 1992, an Investigatory Committee created the same year published its findings in 1994, with proposals to be laid before parliament by government in 1995, seeking reforms in 2000.

Before 2000, various proposals submitted never saw the light of day, as no political compromise was reached. Social Democrats and Liberals kick started the reform in the 1950s, with several proposals for disestablishment on the table by the 1970s. None however achieved political consensus.<sup>66</sup> The Church thus continued its relation with the state. In 1995, “... a committee made up of leading Church officials and influential

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Stegeby, Kenneth E. “An Analysis of the Impending Disestablishment of the Church of Sweden.” *Brigham Young University Law Review* 1999, no.2 (1999): 721-724

politicians sent a report to both legislators and the 251 members of the Church's Synod ...” haven been mandated a year earlier, in 1994. Parliament subsequently passed a proposal in the same year (2005) which created a vehicle for the disestablishment of the CoS by January 1<sup>st</sup> 2000.”<sup>67</sup> The Commission submitted its recommendations to the Government in April 1997. This was after it had “... been referred to a broad range of parishes, dioceses, church organizations, religious communities and other organizations for consideration.”<sup>68</sup>

In November 1997, “the Church Synod accepted the proposed changes in the Constitutional Act and the proposed framework legislation for the Church and other religious communities.”<sup>69</sup> With only 29 members of the Synod voting against the disestablishment, the proposals were thus approved.<sup>70</sup> The Church's accepted proposals were then laid before Parliament and ratified by December, the same year. In August 1998 the Government once again placed new proposals, but this time round before the Church Synod and Parliament. “The most important of these concerned the Burial System and the Preservation of the Ecclesiastical Cultural Heritage.” After the public scrutiny the proposal on a new Church Ordinance (2000) was approved. This “... new *Church Ordinance* replaced the old *Church Code* and other state regulation governing the CoS.”<sup>71</sup> Below is Table (1.1) of the Processes leading to the 2000 Reform.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 724-725.

<sup>68</sup> Ragnar Persenius, “Church and State in Sweden” *Porvoo churches*, accessed 28 June 2010, <http://www.porvoochurches.org/sharedassets/icemedia/Church%20and%20State%20in%20Sweden.doc>

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Sloane Wendy, “Sweden Snaps Strong Ties Between Church and State,” *Christian Science Monitor* 87 (217):1995.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

**Table 1.1**

PERIOD	REFORM ACTIVITY
August 1995	The Church Synod made a statement concerning the future relations between the Church of Sweden and the State, thus responding to proposals for a reform made by the Swedish government;
December 1995	The Parliament passed a Bill with guidelines for the reform;
January 1996	Commissions appointed by either the State or the Church of Sweden began their preparatory work;
April 1997	The public commissions presented proposals to the government for legislation, organization and financing of the burial system, status of Church property and archives, financing of Church buildings with an outstanding cultural heritage of national interest, taxation of and support for churches and other religious communities, and State assistance in collection of membership fees by means of the taxation system;
November 1997	An extra session of the Church Synod took decision on proposals from the government on Church legislation;
March 1998	The ecclesiastical commissions presented proposals to the Church of Sweden Central Board for a new Church Ordinance;
August 1998	Remaining proposals from the Government are put before the Church Synod;
Spring/autumn 1998	The Parliament passes a Bill on changes in the Constitutional Act before and after the 1998 general election;
May-June 1999	The Church Synod adopts the Church Ordinance;
January 2000	The coming into force of the reform.

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<sup>72</sup>Ragnar Persenius, "Church and State in Sweden" *Porvoo churches*, accessed 28 June 2010, <http://www.porvoochurches.org/sharedassets/icemedia/Church%20and%20State%20in%20Sweden.doc>

### **2.3.0 Closing Remarks**

Having examined the reasons that necessitated the change in relations and the process starting in the early 1950s to late 1990s, one fact that has become obvious is that efforts at a total disestablishment between the two was not successful though some landmark decisions aimed at a total separation were made during the periods under review. The 2000 reforms though envisaged as a final step towards disestablishment also contains provisions that calls into question what has been tagged as ‘real separation’. The reform as I will seek to argue out in the next section of this work can best be described as an ‘arrangement’ or ‘agreement,’ between the Church and State, in which the state decided to relief the Church of some of her secular functions, but not necessarily cutting ties.

## **SECTION THREE**

### **3.0.0 The 2000 Reforms**

The 2000 reforms which have roots in the 1951 Freedom of Religion Act were seen as the final step towards a total disestablishment.

- What is in these 2000 reforms then that other reform decisions did not contain?
- What new or different provisions were provided in these legislations whose implementation will guarantee or achieve a total separation?

These questions would be answered as I walk you through the reform discussions, the Church of Sweden Act and the Religious Denominations Act in this section. I will highlight the relevant portions of these laws that clearly indicate that the reform was not aimed at a total divorce. My basic argument in this section will be that, the provisions made in these new Acts has not changed anything between the Church and State, but has rather increased the grip of the State on other faith based organisations within its jurisdiction and created new problems for the CoS, that have both short and long term implications for the folk Church.

### **3.1.0 The Processes**

The legislative instruments which were passed by parliament aim at reforms were the Religious Communities Act (SFS1998:1593) together with a special Church of Sweden Act (SFS 1998:1591). The change in relations in year 2000, often referred to as a divorce, between the State and the Church, does not exist in reality. Some have referred to it as a new relation. Thomas Ekstrand has for instance noted that the reforms accord the Church a reserved status which makes it appropriate to talk of “an agreement about the respective

role of partners in marriage.”<sup>73</sup> The aim of the reforms from a legal point of view to quote Ragnar Persenius was:

- To give constitutional provisions for religious communities to ensure solid and long-term conditions,
- To introduce a special legal entity for religious communities,
- To regulate the transition process so that CoS can be fully independent from the State in year 2000 without changing ecclesiological identity, and
- To regulate more in detail those areas where CoS still have public responsibilities.<sup>74</sup>

Let us now explore the two Acts namely, the Religious Communities Act and the Church of Sweden Act in detail.

### *3.1.1 The Church of Sweden Act (SFS 1998:1591)*

The first section of the Church of Sweden Act states that, “the Church of Sweden is an Evangelical-Lutheran religious community that manifests itself in the form of parishes and dioceses. The Church of Sweden also has a national organization.”<sup>75</sup> The Church is expected among other things:

- To be open to all and be a democratic organization.

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<sup>73</sup> Thomas Ekstrand, 2000: 48.

<sup>74</sup> Ragnar Persenius, “Church and State in Sweden” *Porvoo churches*, accessed 28 June 2010, <http://www.porvoochurches.org/sharedassets/icemedia/Church%20and%20State%20in%20Sweden.doc>

<sup>75</sup> Government of Sweden, Ministry of Culture, *Church of Sweden Act: SFS1998:1571* (Sweden, 1998).

- To levy two levels of fees on its membership, to be collected on its behalf by the State.<sup>76</sup>

The organizational structure and the functions of each parish; dioceses and the general synod are clearly spelt out in sections 4 to 6 of the Act. There are some provisions under these Acts and others, that raises questions, which will be analyzed subsequently in this section. These issues are worth analyzing, since they affect the overall cause of seeing a free Swedish Church, religious leverage and even greater freedom for all religious organizations in Sweden. In the first place if the 2000 reform was aimed at a total disestablishment between the Church and State and the placing of the Church on the same footing with other religions communities, why then should the Church as Anders Bäckström, Ninna Edgardh and Per Pettersson puts it, "... [be] the subject of specific legislation"<sup>77</sup> A parish priest of the CoS in Gävle has also noted that once the laws governing the Church is made by the State, (asking the Church to be democratic, open and have presence all over Sweden) then for him it would not be prudent for one to talk about a 'total separation,' but 'an arrangement,' between the Church and State. A special Act in the name of the CoS, separate from that of the other religious communities in Sweden, defeats the essence of the reforms and does not seem to favour other religious groups in the country. This aside, there are specific concerns within the law itself worth identifying. Section 9 of the CoS Act makes provision for the management of the Church's assets (church property). The law mentions in part, that "the Clergymen's salary

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<sup>76</sup> The same opportunity for levying of membership and the collection of such fees by government has since been extended to other religious communities that want to access it.

<sup>77</sup> Bäckström, Anders; Edgardh Ninna and Pettersson Per. *Religious Change in Northern Europe - The Case of Sweden: From State Church to Free Folk Church. Final Report*. Translated by Craig McKay. Stockholm: Verbum, 2004; Stockholm: Verbum, 2004: 64.



asset shall be managed by the Church of Sweden as independent capital.”<sup>78</sup> The State was to ... “decide how the management of these assets is to be supervised”.<sup>79</sup> This provision and that the Burial Act (SFS 1990:1144) Monuments and Finds (SFS 1998:950) which deals with “... the Church’s responsibility for funerals and ... Church building; which are particularly valuable from a cultural and historical ... to government. These two Acts are important since as Bäckström et al have noted they “still bear the imprint of public law in as much as they are subject to public legislation. The provision in these Acts links the Church to the State and seems to defeat the whole idea of disestablishing the Church from the State. This is because the two Acts as they stand:

- Shows government interference in the affairs of the Church
- Forces and ties up the hands of the Church
- Additional responsibility to the Church

### *3.1.1.2 Government Interferences in the affairs of the Church*

Historically the properties and special investment funds referred to in section 9 of the Act of the CoS was owned and managed by the Catholic Church of Sweden until the reformation period when the Church and the State were merged. It stands to reason that with the 2000 reforms these assets would be returned to their original owners-the CoS, without any conditions attached. As it stands now, though the State had returned these assets to the Church, it reserved the right to “decide how the management of these assets is to be supervised,”<sup>80</sup> and specifies what the investment returns on those assets are to be

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Government of Sweden, Ministry of Culture, *Section Nine of the Church of Sweden Act: SFS1998:1571* (Sweden, 1998), 2

used for.<sup>81</sup> There is political interference once government has a say in the management of the clergyman's salary and assets. If the Church was to be independent, then it should be able to manage its own affairs. What is the interest of government in these assets? What happens in the event, where government investment decisions, runs parallel to that of the Church, due to the latter's view that such proceeds should be invested instead of keeping them in a fund?<sup>82</sup> If government's reason for its interest is meant to safe-guard the interest of ordinary people in the Church, (who are part owners), then it must do the same for all investments of other religious communities within its jurisdiction. Section 9, thus flaws the independence of diocesan boards, (as stipulated in section 6 of the Act). This provision on the Church's organizational structure states that:

The general synod is the highest decision making body of the Church of Sweden. The General Synod may not make decision on individual matters that are up to the parish or diocese to decide.<sup>83</sup>

Thus, the Church is competent to take decisions and manage its own affairs. Hence the state inventions are unwarranted.

Again, government's decision to collect the two levels of the Church fees, both at the local and regional level on behalf of the Church is also another form of interference. Government has no business collecting fees on behalf of the Church and other religious communities that apply. The Churches should be able to collect their own fees from its members. It is a fact that the Church agrees in principle to this provision since it reduces the burden of collecting it by itself. However, if the Church wants to be independent of government interference and be seen as truly disestablished, it may have to pick up that

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<sup>81</sup> According to Rev. Anders Lindberg, Director, Deputy Secretary General at the Secretariat for Theology and Ecumenism at the Central Church Office, proceeds from these investments are by state directive expected to be used in the payment of the salaries of the clergy only and the rest kept in the Diocesan fund.

<sup>82</sup> Rev. Anders Lindberg actually cited an instance where the State threatened to take assets from one Diocese, when that Diocese attempted to invest proceeds from these assets in another venture.

<sup>83</sup>Government of Sweden, Ministry of Culture, *Section Six of the Church of Sweden Act: SFS1998:1571* (Sweden, 1998), 1

responsibility of collecting the taxes itself. After all, most churches and religious organizations, the world over collect fees and dues from their members without any governmental support. The CoS is more than able to do this and I see no reason why it should not pick up such responsibility.

### *3.1.1.2 Forces and Ties up the Hands of the Church.*

The provisions in section 1 and 2 of the Act, which enjoins the Church to be open and democratic to all has created and led to many compromises in the Church stance. In as much as many fully subscribe to a democratic church, where ideas and concerns of all the membership are taken on board in the affairs of the Church as it strives to bring people to the fold of God, the same group has questioned the openness of the Church, which sometimes contradict its own theology. The proposed legislation on ‘same sex marriage’ was one of such laws. In this case, though the Church did not accept government’s proposal entirely, the key issue of recognizing such a union was largely adopted. The only thing was the fact that it was not called marriage, but partnership.<sup>84</sup> This has been a subject of controversy in the Church, with opinions widely divided among priest. It took a vote of 78 against and 147 for the Church synod to allow same-sex partnership in 2007. Presently priests are at liberty to accept to bless such partnerships or call another priest to officiate in their stead, if they do not accept it.

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<sup>84</sup> The Church stop short of calling it marriage, because of the original stance that such union should be between a man and an woman

### 3.1.1.3 Additional Responsibility

By entrusting the responsibility for both existing and future public burial places<sup>85</sup> to the Church, government did not only shed its responsibility, of providing one of the most important social services to the citizenry, but placed additional responsibilities on the Church. Imagine the possible or recurrent conflicts when other Christian denominations or religious communities have to deal with the Church in getting their people buried. It was thus not surprising to discover during this field studies that a number of former members of the CoS and other atheist have asked that they be exempted from paying such burial taxes. They contend they are no longer members or do not belong to the Church and thus see no reason why the Church should be responsible for their burial.<sup>86</sup> The CoS in accepting such responsibility seems to have considered the profit aspect of it at the expense of having more spiritual moments with their congregants. As such, a parish priest I interviewed readily admitted that this function and other related administrative duties, do not allow him enough time to interact with his members, to help them deal with their spiritual problems.<sup>87</sup> Indeed, proceeds and profits made from these burial services provided are used by the Church for her domestic and international relief services. However if the provision of this hinders the Church's mandate to provide spiritual support for its members, then the Church should take a second look at this whole arrangement. In essence, what would the Church gain if it succeeds in getting all these

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<sup>85</sup> Church of Sweden, "Facts about the Church of Sweden" *Church of Sweden Secretariat for Theology and Ecumenical Affairs*, accessed 28 June 2010, <http://www.svenskakyrkan.se/default.aspx?di=37017>

<sup>86</sup> Even though other religious communities are at liberty to acquire lands for such purposes; the cost of such lands may not be met by the budget of some religious communities.

<sup>87</sup> Personal Interview with Rev. Peter Stjerndorff, Parish Priest (*Kyrkoherde*) Staffans Församling, Brynäsgratan in Gävle, Friday 20<sup>th</sup> February, 2009 at 9:23Hours.

profit but fails to satisfy its ultimate task of providing spiritual nourishment and support to its members?

### **3.1.2 The Religious Communities Act**

There are other such provisions in the Religious Communities Act that need critical assessment. These are discussed below.

#### *3.1.2.1 The Religious Communities Act and Freedom of Association and Disassociation*

The provision on association and what can be described as ‘disassociation,’ is clearly a good leap. The Religious Communities Act (SFS 1998:1593) promulgated on November 26, 1998, states clearly in section 3 that: “No one is under any obligation to belong to a religious community and that any agreement or promise contrary to this provision is invalid.”<sup>88</sup> This provision thus permits everyone to join a religious group of his or her own choice unlike that of 1951 that did not allow people to join religious communities of their choice unless they are State approved Churches. It also presents an opportunity for all religious communities that operated as foundation and organizations to be registered to bear the actual names of the religious communities they represent. This law for instance allowed the Churches of Scientology (operating as churches), to register as religions on the 13<sup>th</sup> of March 2000 by the National Judicial Board for public lands and funds<sup>89</sup>. The law also allowed people to become atheist or choose it as freewill, unlike the

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<sup>88</sup> Government of Sweden, Ministry of Culture, *Swedish Code of Status, Act on Religious Communities: Section Three SFS1998:1593* (Sweden, 1998), 1. See also [http://www.sweden.gov.se/download/04636561.pdf?major=1&minor=27831&cn=attachmentPublDuplicat or\\_0\\_attachment](http://www.sweden.gov.se/download/04636561.pdf?major=1&minor=27831&cn=attachmentPublDuplicat or_0_attachment) (Accessed 2010 06 28)

<sup>89</sup> T.R. Reid, “Church of Scientology Registered as a Religious Community,” *The Washington Post*, 13 March 2000.

Act of 1951 that made some people atheist once they decided to quit the CoS and could not join any other faith because such faith(s) were not recognised by the State.

### *3.1.2.2 Fee Collection*

The collection of fees in the Church, deducted by government on individual taxable income earned, in a way makes members of the Church think that they have to pay money to access faith or to seek God, since members of the CoS are made to pay such dues or fees involuntarily. As stated in the Act on Religious Communities, the payment of these same fees in other religious communities is expected to be voluntary. Another interesting angle to the collection of fees is that like the CoS, other religious communities can apply for the collection of Church fees on its behalf by government, but unlike the Church of Sweden, they are required to pay for the cost government would incur in the collection. This is totally discriminatory.

### *3.1.2.3 Definition of Religious Communities*

Section 5 of the Act defines registered religious communities as:

- The Church of Sweden, and
- Religious communities that have been registered in accordance with this act<sup>90</sup>

This definition clearly discriminates against other religious communities and places the CoS above them. The definition seems to suggest that there is only ‘one recognised church.’ A literal interpretation of this definition means that, though the CoS is a

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<sup>90</sup> Government of Sweden, Ministry of Culture, *Swedish Code of Status, Act on Religious Communities: Section Five SFS1998:1593* (Sweden, 1998), 1.

religious community, it is separate from other religious communities. Again by this definition, it seems the CoS does not need to register because as the Act stipulates, it is only other religious communities that must register in accordance with the Act. It is however a known fact that the CoS is not the only registered religious communities, so why single it out in the definition?

#### 3.1.2.4 *Exemptions of CoS from Aspects of the Act on Religious Communities*

Section six of the same Act on Religious Communities also states in part that, “provisions contained in sections 7-12, section 13, paragraphs 1 to 3 and section 17 do not apply to the Church of Sweden.”<sup>91</sup> It is interesting that as a religious community, the CoS is exempted from certain provisions in the Act that govern all religious communities. What are in these provisions that the Church is exempted from Section 17 of the Act states in part that: “Appeals against a decision made by a registration authority may be lodged with a general administration court within two months of date of decision ...”<sup>92</sup> If this provision does not apply to the CoS, then does that mean the Church does not have a legal right to seek redress if it feels its right as a religious community is not being respected, since there is no provision in the CoS Act that gives the Church a legal option?

Admittedly, there are certain portions of the Act on Religious Communities that the CoS has been exempted from, that can be explained or justified. Having been the only ‘required-recognized’ Church for more than four centuries, the CoS has met some of these requirements in the past. For instance, section 7 subsections 1 and 2 of the Act,

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<sup>91</sup> Government of Sweden, Ministry of Culture, *Swedish Code of Status, Act on Religious Communities: Section Six SFS1998:1593* (Sweden, 1998), 1.

<sup>92</sup> Government of Sweden, Ministry of Culture, *Swedish Code of Status, Act on Religious Communities: Section Seventeen SFS1998:1593* (Sweden, 1998), 4.

which states among other things that, a religious community can be registered at its own request and that such religious communities should have a governing board or equivalent body which is basically the organizational structure of the community seems to have been met by the church already.

### *3.1.2.5 State Grants to Religious Communities*

Section 16 (State helps with fees to registered religious communities) of the Act grants the CoS a right to receive “help from the state with the setting, debiting and accounting of fees from members of the Church of Sweden and with the collection of these fees ...”<sup>93</sup>

The same section however leaves the decision to extend the same help to other religious communities. In 1999 the government, in pursuant of this provision on the Act on support for Religious Communities, promulgated the Ordinance on Government grants to Religious Communities (SFS1999:974) on 25<sup>th</sup> November, 1999.<sup>94</sup> This extended development grants to religious communities under certain guidelines which will be delved into in the fourth chapter. Notwithstanding this Act on ‘grants to religious communities,’ section 16 still stands and any government can decide to halt the payment of such grants to all religious communities, with the exception of the CoS because section 16 clearly stipulates the right of the CoS to receive help from the State, but leaves that of other religious communities at the whims of succeeding governments’.

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<sup>93</sup> Government of Sweden, Ministry of Culture, *Swedish Code of Status, Act on Religious Communities: Section Sixteen SFS1998:1593* (Sweden, 1998), 3.

<sup>94</sup> Portions of this Act were subsequently amended by government in 2000:728 and 2005:227.



### **3.2.0 Closing Remarks**

The outcome of the analysis of these Acts (Church of Sweden Act, Act on Religious Communities and other related legislations) leaves me to predict that the impact of the 2000 reforms, almost a decade on, will not be significant, since some of the provisions in the Acts do not seek to achieve a total separation, as they still create reserves and a privilege position for the CoS within the religious sphere, with an assured State protection that effectively blocks the attainment of a total disestablishment. Is it government's ploy or way of controlling or monitoring religious groups after failing to control them under a single state sponsored church? Many, including Church leaders as I have earlier asserted, have described the 2000 reforms as an 'arrangement' and not 'disestablishment'. An impact assessment of the change in relations in 2000, almost ten years, will be our preoccupation in the fourth section of this work, where answers to some of these questions, will be provide

## SECTION FOUR

### 4.0.0 Introduction

These were the preferred conclusions of Kenneth E. Stegeby in 1999, when he wrote an article, less than a year to the change in relations between the Church-State in Sweden:

... although the Swedish government is intent on severing the ties between the Church and the State, the strong historical and political relationship between the two institutions prevents a wholesale separation at this time. Some preferential treatment of the Church of Sweden will appear to exist at least formally in the newly devised laws governing religion in Sweden. The upcoming disestablishment should not be viewed as a complete separation; rather, it should be viewed as one more step-a substantial one-in the process of completely separating the Church and the state. Just as it took Christianity several attempts and three hundred years to overcome the pagan religion in Sweden, further reaching reforms will be required before Sweden achieves full equality between all denominations. [The development of the Church of Sweden has been one of evolution rather than revolution.] The disestablishment that will take place in the year two thousand is no different.<sup>95</sup>

Kenneth E. Stegeby predicated or postulated that the process of complete or total separation between the two powers of State and Church was not going to be an event. This was an admission even before the reforms became operational that, the 2000 reforms were not going to be a complete one or that the new law was not enough to seal a total separation and level the religious sphere. This pessimistic statement about the reform is important in my quest to do an impact assessment of the same reform, almost a decade after the implementation. This statement will be a guiding issue in this section of the work, as I investigate through my field studies, to find out if the two powers of State and Church having been in union for centuries could part company easily, almost a decade on.

In the light of Stegeby's observation and postulations, a decade down memory lane and almost a decade after the reform became operational; I would like to find out:

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<sup>95</sup> Stegeby, Kenneth E. "An Analysis of the Impending Disestablishment of the Church of Sweden." *Brigham Young University Law Review* 1999, no.2 (1999): 704.

- if the expectations of the reform have been achieved (total divorce)
- If any new changes have been initiated or are in the process of being introduced which would be positive signs and give hope to liberalist and others that the Church-State divorce is possible (amendments or adjustments).

This will be done by analyzing key components of reforms based on sampled views from key implementers of the reforms, other stake holders and the wider Swedish citizenry.

#### *4.1.0 Religious Freedom: Perspectives from Religious Communities*

Generally no one is limited in assessing faith in Sweden. The Act on Religious Communities grants this freedom and indeed during my field studies, the perspective of the leaders of religious communities says it all. According to a close source at the Islamic Centre in Gavle, Muslims all over Sweden are able to practice their faith without any hindrance. Indeed, the source made comparison between the observance of Islam in other European countries like France and Italy and described the Swedish situation as the best. The source spoke of improvements since year 2000, stating that before 2000; the Islamic faith was not well diffused among the citizenry and news about the faith's activities could be assessed from only the media, whose reportage on the faith did not present the true teachings of the faith. However since the 2000 reforms, accesses to other medium of communications like the Internet and other public and private media have help to promote the faith and brought it closer to the Swedish citizenry, some of whom have professed and embraced Islam. He added however that, a section of the Swedish society, most of whom are not Muslims, still ascribe negative connotation to the faith. This is as a result of the global terrorism, which has normally been associated with Islamic

fundamentalist. He however, commended the Swedish citizenry which he described as civilized and secular and thus open to all faiths.

Many protestant and so called Free Church adherents affirmed the position of my source at the Islamic Center in Gavle, that there is more freedom of religion than before, but they maintained that there is still room for greater freedom. Most of them called for greater freedom and the breaking of ties between the Church and the State. Many religious communities have for many years tagged and described the CoS as a ‘favoured church,’ one which has State support and funding. Though this perception seems to be gradually dying down after the reforms, some religious leaders still insists there is a State bias towards them. According to the 2007 report on CoS activities, the Church fostered new relations with other religious communities both internally and externally. Externally it has fostered links with many churches in the Southern part of Africa. Internally, the Church is part of the National Council of Churches in Sweden. Relation between the CoS and the Catholic Church that became sour during the reformation period has improved somewhat. As a parish priest in Gavle observed: “On matters of theology we do not have disagreements. Most of our current differences stem from moral disagreements”. These include the issues of divorce, marriage, female ordination and currently same-sex marriage.

## **4.2.0 The Church Reforms**

### *4.2.1 Church Membership and Attendance*

Anders Bäckström, Ninna Edgardh and Per Pettersson have noted that as a result of “... the change in relationship between state and church the decline in membership has

accelerated somewhat.”<sup>96</sup> Before the change in relations there was a steady decline though slow.<sup>97</sup> They have predicted that in all probability the decline in CoS would continue. The statistics, which shows an annual decline of 1%, is a worrying sign. On Church attendance, Anders Lindberg of the Church House in Uppsala contends that, though there has been a big shift in comparison to the previous Church, this has never come up for discussion at the Synod level. Meaning presently the issue of decline in Church attendance is not a worrying issue for the Church. Anders Lindberg was however quick to add that for him and other well meaning priests within the Church, it is a worrying development that, many church members do not attend mass. As witnessed during a Swedish mass in Stockholm, a two storey sitting capacity Church auditorium was not even a quarter full at the ground floor, despite reforms in the liturgy to allow more laity participation. Anders Lindberg has for instance noted that, over the years the Church’s liturgy has been modified to allow greater participation from the laity. The laity now takes the first and second readings, help in administrating communion, assists in the collection of offertory and other liturgical activities.

Though these reforms do not seem enough, Anders Lindberg rules out any possibility of the Church becoming charismatic, though the acceptance of such revival movements had worked in other denominations. A stand many may find surprising , since the Church has over the years responded to the societal call to the extent that it has made significant changes in its doctrine on ordination and marriage. Thus it will be interesting that the same Church will not accept revival movements, if that would increase church

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<sup>96</sup> Bäckström, Anders; Edgardh Ninna and Pettersson Per. *Religious Change in Northern Europe - The Case of Sweden: From State Church to Free Folk Church. Final Report*. Translated by Craig McKay. Stockholm: Verbum, 2004; Stockholm: Verbum, 2004:65.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid

membership. It is a known fact that many protestant churches and even the Catholic Church have made significant changes to their liturgy to meet the evangelical renewal that swept across the world.

#### 4.2.2 Church Boards

Politicians on Church Boards seem to present a challenge to the progress of most parishes, observed a parish priest in Gävle. Most members on this "... Local Parish Councils opposed ... separation from the Church."<sup>98</sup> The Parish Council is the board of the local church that oversees its work and finances. This Parish Council according to Arne Rasmusson, is not really elected by the worshipping congregation."<sup>99</sup> The majority of the people who vote in these elections, are the larger mobilized troops of the various political parties,"<sup>100</sup> against the small group of active church goers. As emphasized by a parish priest in Gävle, "... many parish council members do not normally attend Sunday service."<sup>101</sup>

It is estimated that 60% of these members go to church at least once a month, with a considerable minority "... considering themselves atheists or agnostics"<sup>102</sup>. As Arne Rasmusson asserted these state of affairs "... tends to create tension between the clergy

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Arne Rasmusson, "Church and State in Sweden: A New Relationship." *Christian Centaury*, 3 May 2000.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid

<sup>101</sup> Personal Interview with Rev. Peter Stjerndorff, Parish Priest (*Kyrkoherde*) Staffans Församling, Brynäsgratan in Gävle, Friday 20<sup>th</sup> February, 2009 at 9:23Hours.

<sup>102</sup> Arne Rasmusson. "Church and State in Sweden: A New Relationship." *Christian Centaury*, 3 May 2000.

and active church people on one hand, and the very mixed parish councils on the other”.<sup>103</sup>

#### **4.3.0 State Support for Religious Communities: The Case of Atheists**

State support, in the form of grants to religious communities does not have the support of the atheist groupings in Sweden. They contend that they do not benefit in any way from the churches activities. This pattern of subsidy for religious communities by government does not look sustainable in the future. This is because as the numbers of religious communities grow, demand for State support would grow to an extent that it may not be able to extend these grants to religious communities. Indeed, views picked up from religious leaders indicate that the government may halt or reduce its subvention to religious organizations in the coming years. The CoS, which is seen as a favoured church, is currently locked up in talks with government on the State financing for the maintenance of old churches that are of historical importance.

As secular as the Swedish society is, many atheists have argued that they see no need for State support for religious grouping. The State seems to be justifying sponsorship to other religious communities across board, in order to avoid critics who may raise concerns about its previous and continuing subventions to the CoS.

#### **4.4.0 Religious Education in School**

Though religious education in schools seems to be taught on a level paring after the reforms in the early 1950s, a religious education teacher in Stockholm, indicate that it is

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

still tilted towards Christianity somewhat. For instance, the principles and foundation on which these schools are built are described as Christian. Again, religious study teaches are told to introduce their students to Christianity and other religious groups. The source however intimated that a new educational reform was eminent and may probably address these short falls in the curriculum. Again a source at the Islamic Centre in Gavle also expressed some reservations about how religious education, especially Islam is thought in public schools. The source was of the view that some course instructors in religious education are not well vest in Islam and most often do not introduce students to the what he describes as the “... true faith and teaching of Islam.”<sup>104</sup>

#### **4.5.0 Current Links between Church and State**

The Church has kept more or less a monopoly on funerals and has in comparison with other religious communities a privilege position regarding the right to officiate marriage legally. This function and that of other investments does not allow the Church to concentrate on its core function of providing spiritual guidance to it members.

Again the new law, (2000 Reform) states in part that the Church must be Evangelical Lutheran, open folk church, Episcopal and democratic, with presence all over Sweden. This arrangement allows the State to retain the right to intervene in the affairs of the Church, (despite the separation) if the State feels the Church is moving towards “an

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<sup>104</sup> Personal Interview with a Muslim leader at the Islamic Centre in Gavle Central, Gavle 4<sup>th</sup> March, 2009 at 12 Hours.



undesirable direction.”<sup>105</sup> Many critics say the arrangement shows that the CoS does not trust its own democratic process.

#### **4.6.0 Closing Remarks**

It is evident that the separation processes still need some changes at both the State and Church levels to attain a total separation and the liberalization of the religious sphere. The next and final section of this work will primarily deal with the major finding this research work made.

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<sup>105</sup> Arne Rasmusson, “*Church and State in Sweden: A New Relationship*,” *Christian Centaury*, 3 May 2000, 494.

## **SECTION FIVE**

### **5.0.0 Introduction**

This final section of the work will be dedicated to discussing my major findings and proposals for further research as well as my conclusion.

### **5.1.0 Major Findings**

The following are my findings and conclusions after an impact assessment of Church-State Relations in Sweden during my six weeks field study.

#### *5.1.1 Church and State Separation*

Though the Church of Sweden and the State formally were separated in January 2000, the two still maintain some formal and many informal ties. For example, the Church of Sweden receives State subsidies for its churches and other historically important buildings because of their importance to Swedish national heritage. The Church has also kept the right to collect compulsory taxes from its members. Though total separation between the Church and State is possible in the foreseeable future, it is difficult to predict when this separation can be achieved. It may take a long time before a real and total separation between the Church and State is achieved.

#### *5.1.2 Freedom of Religion*

The new law on religious communities provides for freedom of religion. Other laws and policies also contribute to the free practice of religion. By and large, the state respects religious freedom and its observance. During the period of this field study, there had not been any changes to the religious communities act or any other related law that could

lead one to conclude that government was blocking the liberalized religious sphere. However as outlined in other sections of this work, there are still areas that need reforms to ensure fairness among all religious communities. The Swedish citizenry in calling for freedom of religion did so not necessarily to secede from the CoS to join other churches or other religious communities. The intent of some was to remain atheist.

### *5.1.3 Religion and Morality*

Religion and morality are separate issues or entities when it comes to spirituality in Sweden. Spirituality or religion is a private matter which is left to the individual to decide. In view of this, government does not register the religion of citizens, but relies on statistics submitted by religious communities when they apply for state grants.

### *5.1.4 Church Membership and Attendance.*

The CoS does not seem worried about church attendance for as much as members attend events like baptisms, confirmations, weddings and funerals and pay their membership fees. The Church seemed to recognize one as a member of the Church once he/ she paid his or her church fees rather than necessarily attending church services.

### *5.1.5 Church Boards*

The Church Boards seem to pose the biggest challenge for most parish priests. The priests believe that most members on these boards, rather than promote the interest of the Church, promote that of their political parties as well as their personal interest.

### *5.1.6 Religious Education*

There seems to be “... subtle dominance of Christianity in Sweden, stemming from the joint history of the state and the church.”<sup>106</sup> For instance, it has been captured in the Teaching Plan for the state schools (which are in the majority), that the schools be dependent on Christian ethics. Again, there is still no leverage in the teaching of religious education in schools, since the syllabus is not clear and specific on the number of periods to be allotted to the teaching of each religion. This weakness in the system can sometimes be abused by teachers, who may give more attention to their faith. Some religious groups have expressed concern that they are not satisfied with the ways their faith is taught in the schools, especially the Islamic community.

### *5.1.7 Church of Sweden and the Swedish Society*

Though the majority of Swedish citizens support the cutting of leanings between the churches and state, they still want the Church to maintain some of her social service provisions like funerals, marriages and other secular issues that will maintain its public appeal. Some also support state financing of old church buildings which are of historical importance to the state.

### *5.1.8 State Support for Religious Communities*

There are a number of religious communities, cooperative bodies and parishes that receive state grants in the form of organizational grants, grants for activities, project grants and a special grant for theological training. There are also special taxation benefits,

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<sup>106</sup> Christina Johnsson, *Discrimination on Grounds of Religion and Belief: Sweden* (Migration Policy Group, 2004), 2.

though limited for some religious communities aside the Church of Sweden. Among them are the Reformed Church in Sweden, the Pentecostal Movement, the Evangelical Inner Mission (part of the Church of Swedish), the Evangelical Free Church, the Roman-Catholic Church, the Syrian-Orthodox Church, the United Islamic Congregations of Sweden and the Swedish Muslim Association.<sup>107</sup>

Sections of the Swedish society, especially atheist and liberalist have questioned the rationale behind giving of grants to religious groups to build churches and train their leaders. To them, such grants should instead be used to improve social services.

#### *5.1.9 Tax Collection*

Though most people, including the clergy of the CoS, want more independence from the state, they nonetheless want the maintenance of the collection of church fees by the state, since as they contend; it is easy for the State to implement such deductions.

#### *5.1.10 Historical Association and Church of Sweden Decisions*

Historical association between the Church and the State has always (even after the 2000 reforms) influenced or impacted the Church decisions, especially on moral issues. The Church sees itself as a 'folk church' and in many cases has towed the line of the State that normally trumpets the sentiments of the Swedish society. Again it has been said that the Church does not want to be seen as one that is not progressive, hence the decision to change it doctrines and stands to reflect the changing realities in the Swedish society.

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<sup>107</sup>Ibid.

### **5.2.0 Further Research**

As a further research I propose a study into the current relation between the Church and other religious communities, especially the Catholic Church, (which the Church of Sweden broke away from in the 16<sup>th</sup> century), in the light of this current reforms. A more comprehensive build up of this work, exactly a decade from now, when possibly further and significant reforms might have taken place would also be a good research piece.

### **5.3.0 Conclusion**

It is worth noting that, though this work may not be comprehensive enough, it nonetheless makes a fair assessment of the impact of the changing relations between the Church and the State a decade into the new relations. It is clear from the findings, that the journey towards a total disestablishment between the Church and State is a long one. In as much as it may not be wishful to think that such a separation is possible in the future, I must emphasize; in the light of these current realities on the ground that a complete decoupling of Church-State ties may require another generation, with new thinking and ideas to achieve a total separation.

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Rev. Peter Stjerndorff, Parish Priest (Kyrkoherde) Staffans församling, Brynäsgratan in Gävle. Gävle, Friday 20<sup>th</sup> February, 2009 at 9:23Hours.

Rev. Anders Lindberg, Director, Deputy Secretary General the Secretariat for Theology and Ecumenism at the Central Church Office, Uppsala. Uppsala, 3rd March, 2009 at 16:05 Hours.

Rev. Anders Lindberg, Director, Deputy Secretary General the Secretariat for Theology and Ecumenism at the Central Church Office, Uppsala. Follow-up interview, 9<sup>th</sup> March, 2009 at 14:05 Hours.

### **Secondary informants (interviews conducted by Fredrick Acheampong), anonymous interviewees**

Personal Interview with a Swedish Politician in Gävle Central (Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> February, 2009 at 16 Hours).

Personal Interview with a High School Religious Education teacher in Stockholm (Saturday 21<sup>th</sup> February, 2009 at 18 Hours).

Follow up on Personal Interview with a High School Religious Education teacher in Stockholm (Sunday 22<sup>th</sup> February, 2009 at 10:15 Hours).

Personal Interview with a Ghanaian immigrant in Gävle Central (Monday 9<sup>th</sup> March, 2009 at 12:15 Hours).

Personal Interview with a Muslim leader at the Islamic Centre in Gävle Central (4<sup>th</sup> March, 2009 at 12 Hours).

Follow up Personal Interview with a Muslim leader at the Islamic Centre in Gävle Central (Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> March, 2009 at 12 Hours).

Personal Interview with a Swedish Atheist on a train from Gävle Central to Uppsala (Tuesday 3rd March, 2009 at 13:42Hours).

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