

Religion and Politics – Discourse on Authority in the Swedish Realm under Gustav Vasa

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In the early 1520s, the Reformation and the resulting debates over claims to power and the relationship between spiritual and secular authority led to profound upheavals in Central Europe. At the same time, the northern parts of Europe experienced significant changes due to the dissolution of the Kalmar Union. Following a Swedish uprising against Danish dominance, Gustav Vasa was elected King of Sweden on June 6, 1523, leading to the formation of an independent Swedish realm. Although his election initially confirmed and legitimized his claim to power within Sweden, the uprising he led and Sweden's secession from the Kalmar Union could also be seen as an act of usurpation. Both domestically and internationally, his newly established rule and the newly formed Swedish realm were by no means universally accepted or secure long-term. This situation particularly at the beginning of Gustav Vasa's reign highlighted the need and desire for legitimization and recognition of the new rule. These significant changes and upheavals led to intensive and comprehensive communication about authority (*Herrschaft*) and the conditions of its legitimacy in the Swedish realm.

This dissertation examines the communication about authority and the associated processes of negotiating the legitimacy of governance in early modern Sweden under Gustav Vasa, with a focus on the interconnection of religion and politics. The central questions explore how the new king and the newly established Swedish realm addressed their legitimacy deficits, contemporary discourses on ideas of order, and the negotiation of claims to power and the associated balancing of interests among the four estates.

This study examines the period of Gustav Vasa's accession to power and the first half of his reign (1520–1540), focusing not on the king himself but on the Swedish realm. This approach aims to comprehensively grasp the contemporary discourses and negotiation processes. Religious debates and rationales are included into the analysis based on the premise that these not only significantly influenced the known explanatory and interpretive frameworks of the time but were also inextricable from the political debates and negotiation processes.

While German and international research have extensively examined communication about authority in the Early Modern period, a specific study of the Swedish realm in this context is still lacking. Swedish research on the other hand has largely neglected the role of religion and

religious narratives in discourses of sovereignty. This dissertation addresses both research gaps by integrating historical and church historical perspectives in an interdisciplinary manner.

Against this background, five events or contexts from the study period are closely examined and analyzed according to specific categories. These are: the pamphlet *Von den grausamen tyrannischen Misshandlungen* published by Gustav Vasa and the Swedish Council against Christian II in 1522/23; the church coronation ceremony around January 12, 1528, in Uppsala; the bishop and archbishop issues in the context of dynastic marriage politics; the role of the city of Stockholm and its German-speaking population; and the high treason trial at the turn of 1539/40.

Examining these seemingly disparate contexts reveals that they all address the question of 'good' and 'righteous' divinely ordained sovereignty and a divinely ordered human coexistence. These concepts were used to legitimize Gustav Vasa's rule, although the actors had varying interpretations of them. Recurring debates over claims to power and the responsibilities of authorities in relation to their subjects carried significant conflict potential and were resolved in various ways. Additionally, it becomes evident that the discussions on the doctrine of the two kingdoms and the relationship between spiritual and secular authority, which were prevalent in Central Europe, increasingly found resonance and were negotiated within the Swedish realm as well.

This dissertation thus provides new impetus for the study and evaluation of the Reformation in the Swedish realm and highlights the close intertwining of religious and political arguments in the communication about authority.