

Article

The Dissolution of the Monasteries in Sweden during the Reformation

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Abstract: This article discusses the dissolution of the monasteries in 16th century Sweden. The approximately fifty monasteries and friar's convents that existed in Sweden in the early 16th century were all dissolved over a period of about eighty years. Decisive for this development were decisions during the Diet in Västerås 1527, which decreed that monasteries that depended on tax from their estates should be subordinated under a nobleman, and that the mendicant friars should not be allowed to travel outside their convents more than ten weeks each year. Whilst most of the monasteries inhabited by monks or brothers had been dissolved before the 1560s, four female houses were still in existence at this time. These remaining nunneries were supported financially by the state, possibly to safeguard the nuns' social welfare. However, the monastic institutions were to meet a short-lived revival through the reign of King Johan III (rule 1568–1592), who not only supported them economically but also renovated a few of them and allowed Catholic priests to encourage Catholicism in Vadstena Abbey. Through this process of re-catholicizing, any prospects of creating successful Evangelical communities in Sweden were lost. The last remaining nunnery, Vadstena Abbey, was a vibrant Catholic institution when it was forced to close in 1595.

Keywords: monasteries; nunneries; mendicant friars; dissolution; Reformation; Sweden



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1. Introduction

Monastic life was established in Sweden during the 12th century, and it endured until the last decades of the 16th century.¹ At the time of the Reformation, there existed about fifty monasteries and mendicant houses in Sweden (see Table 1), a number which in a North European perspective must be regarded as relatively low (see Clark 2022, p. 8). In Denmark, which was the politically leading kingdom in Scandinavia during the Late Middle Ages, there existed more than 100 monasteries and mendicant houses, whereas in Norway, there were only about thirty (Bisgaard 2019, p. 12; Ekroll 2019, p. 151; see also Berntson 2015, p. 30). This uneven distribution of monasteries in Scandinavia is evident if we just look at the archdioceses. In the archdiocese of Uppsala (which was the center of a church province that encompassed most parts of Sweden), there were about eight monasteries and mendicant houses, whereas in the archdiocese of Lund (which was the center of a church province that encompassed most of Denmark at that time), the number was thirty (see Berntson 2018, p. 47). However, despite the relatively low number of monastic and mendicant houses in Sweden, many of them had, at the time of the Reformation, existed for almost four hundred years and made a strong impact on the kingdom, and, in the case of the Birgittine order and Vadstena Abbey, been of both spiritual and political significance in various parts of Europe.

The oldest monasteries in Sweden, Alvastra and Nydala (both founded 1143), were Cistercians, being daughter houses of Clairvaux (France 1992, pp. 3, 8, 29, 35–36, 38–40; Ortved 1933, pp. 53, 56, 141, 225, 256). The Cistercian monasteries were spread in various provinces in what we today would consider as the southern parts of Sweden. No monastic or mendicant houses were established north of the province of Dalarna, where the Cistercian

monastery Mons Domini (Gudsberga) was instituted in 1486 and thereby became the northernmost monastery in Sweden (McGuire 1982, pp. 186–87; Ortvad 1933, pp. 316, 323, 363, 401, 483–85, 519). During the earliest phase of monastic history in Sweden, there was also a Hospitaller monastery established in Eskilstuna, with the Danish Antvorskov as its mother house (Reitzel-Nielsen 1984, pp. 80, 205, 210, 212, 221–26; Pernler 1992, p. 34).

Table 1. Monasteries, nunneries, and mendicant houses in Sweden before the Reformation. The schedule is from (Berntson 2003, p. 61; 2019a, p. 127).

Monasteries and Nunneries		Mendicant Houses	
Cistercians	Carthusians (male)	Dominicans	Franciscans
<i>Monasteries</i>	Gripsholm	<i>Brethren</i>	<i>Brethren</i>
Alvastra		Kalmar	Arboga
Husby	Hospitallers (male)	Lödöse	Enköping
Julita	Eskilstuna	Sigtuna	Jönköping
Nydala	Kronobäck	Skara	Krokek
Varnhem	(Stockholm)	Skänninge	Kökar (Hamnö)
		Stockholm	Linköping
<i>Nunneries</i>	Bridgettines	Strängnäs	Nyköping
Askeby	Naantali (Nådendal)	Vyborg (Viborg)	Nylödöse
Gudhem	Vadstena	Västerås	Rauma (Raumo)
Riseberga		Turku (Åbo)	Skara
Sko	Order of the Holy Ghost (male)		Stockholm
Vreta	Söderköping	<i>Sisters</i>	Söderköping
Vårfruberga	(Lindholmen)	Skänninge	Uppsala
			Vyborg (Viborg)
		Antonites (male)	Växjö
		Ramundeboda	
			<i>Sisters</i>
		Carmelites (male)	Stockholm
		Örebro	

The culturally most important diocese in Sweden was Linköping, situated in the south part of the Kingdom, which was the home of the pious and politically active woman Birgitta Birgersdotter (1303–1373), who created the Order of the Most Holy Saviour (*Ordo Sanctissimi Salvatoris*, abbreviated OSsS) based on the Saviour's rule (*Regula Salvatoris*) which was revealed to Birgitta in one of her many revelations and was approved by Pope Urban V in 1370. The cultural and theological importance of the Linköping diocese was in many respects a consequence of Birgitta's legacy. Vadstena Abbey in the Diocese of Linköping became the mother house of the order and was consecrated 1384 as the first house of the Birgittine order. Whilst the houses of the order spread in various places in Europe during the 14th and 15th centuries, in the kingdom of Sweden, there were only two Birgittine houses; apart from the mother house in Vadstena, there was also a convent in Naantali (Sw. Nådendal) in Finland, which was founded in 1440 (Cnattingius 1963, pp. 21–23, 14–17, 26, 69; Klockars 1979, p. 13; Nyberg 1991, pp. 78, 116–18, 130).

A late monastic establishment that would be of significance for the Reformation was Pax Mariae (Mariefred), the only monastic house in Scandinavia belonging to the Carthusian order. The donation that provided the estates for the establishment was provided

during the 1490s by none other than the steward of the kingdom, Sten Sture the elder (d. 1503), and consisted of his estate Gripsholm (Collijn 1935, pp. 149–50; Hallberg 1968, p. 2). Mariefred was one of the last monasteries to be instituted in Sweden, and it was, as we shall see, paradoxically also the first to be dissolved.²

Besides these monastic foundations, with its many estates and often favorable donations, there existed several mendicant houses in the kingdom. Of these, sixteen were Franciscan, and these were usually situated in the towns, except for Krokek in the forest of Kolmården, and Kökar, which was situated in the southeastern archipelago in Finland (Gallén 1989, p. 32; Gustavsson 1994, pp. 494, 497, 501–3; Samzelius 1965, p. 103). In the kingdom, we only find one house belonging to the Poor Clares, and this was situated in Stockholm, in a neighborhood even today known as the “Clara quarters” (Gallén 1989, pp. 32, 47; Leinberg 1890, p. 104; Rasmussen 1994, pp. 5, 23; 2002, pp. 500–17). Furthermore, eleven mendicant houses belonged to the Dominicans and one to the Hospital Brothers of St. Anthony, which had a guest house for travellers in the forest between the provinces of Närke and Västergötland. There was also one house that belonged to the Carmelites, in the city of Örebro, established in the 1450s (Dahlerup 1963, p. 298; Gallén 1946, pp. 12, 21–22, 37–40, 43, 55, 137, 183, 188–95; 1958, pp. 178–79, 183–84; Grandinson 1933, p. 56; Hallberg 1968, p. 11; Leinberg 1890, p. 71; Pernler 1992, p. 41).

All these institutions were dissolved during the years between 1526 and 1595. However, during these years, their situation varied, and for a time, it was even likely that at least a few of them would be able to survive the Reformation. My hypothesis in this article is that the dissolution of the monasteries in Sweden should be understood in relation to the complex confessionalization process in the Kingdom during the 16th century. Sometimes it has been held that the Reformation in Sweden was “far more tortuous and much slower” than in Denmark, and whilst Denmark received a Church Order in 1537, under the supervision of Martin Luther’s colleague Johannes Bugenhagen, in Sweden a similar Church Order was not approved by the King until 1571, and as Ole Peter Grell has put it, “only in a confessionally vague form” (Grell 1995, p. 5). A less vague confession was issued only in 1593, when the Augsburg Confession was approved as the faith of the Kingdom at the Church synod in Uppsala 1593. This lack of “proper institutionalization of the Reformation” made, according to Grell, the Church in Sweden “susceptible to greater changes in royal church policy” (Grell 1995, p. 5).

Still, the differences between Denmark and Sweden should not be pushed too hard, and in practical congregational life, Sweden became affected by Lutheranism long before 1571 (Berntson 2014a, p. 10). Even though a confessionalization in the German sense for Sweden began not earlier than the 1590s, Sweden did not stand outside the confessional development that occurred in Denmark and Germany at the same time. Mathias Asche convincingly characterizes the Swedish development as a “late confessionalization” (Asche 2003, p. 17). Similarities between Sweden and the confessionalized states in Europe emerged already during the 1540s, especially concerning the worldly power strengthening its hold over the Church organization down to the parish level, both concerning the properties belonging to the Church and the faith of clergy and ordinary people (Buchholz 2003, p. 182–83; see also Berntson 2017, p. 262; 2019b, p. 44). Due to King Johan III’s catholicizing policy aiming to unify the Church in Sweden with Rome but under its own conditions, the situation during the 1570s until the early 1590s is rather confusing when it comes to the confessionalization process in Sweden. As Tarald Rasmussen has argued, the development in Sweden during these years turns out to be “confessionally ambiguous” compared with, for example, the development in Denmark (Rasmussen 2017, pp. 112–13). Whilst the Reformation as a political and economic event began in Sweden in the early 1520s, we could tentatively divide the confessionalization process in Sweden into three phases: an informal (or “late”) confessionalization between 1540 and 1570; an ambiguous confessionalization between 1570 and 1592; and a genuine Lutheran confessionalization from 1593 and onwards. With this periodization as a basis, I aim to relate these phases to

the dissolution of the monasteries in Sweden, arguing that the fate of the monasteries in many ways follows the pattern of this periodization.

2. Monastic Life in Sweden before the Reformation

The monastic and mendicant houses in Sweden before the Reformation enjoyed relative freedom if we compare them to the situation for similar institutions in Denmark, where several monastic houses had been under state pressure and in many cases also been placed under secular rule since the late 15th century (Berntson 2015, pp. 30–33). In traditional historiography, it was claimed that the fate of the monasteries in Sweden was sealed before the Reformation because they were rich, wealthy, and had lost their “spiritual ardor”. However, these ideas could be scrutinized in a critical way. First, the way of describing the number of estates donated to the houses, and thereby categorizing them as either “rich” or “poor” (see, for example, Collijn 1935, p. 157; Larsson 1998, pp. 85–86; Pernler 1992, p. 35; Stensland 1945, p. 40), is hazardous. The number of estates does not say much about the actual wealth in a monastery. The mere ownership of many estates does not really say anything about the profit. Even though it is reasonable to say that, during certain circumstances, a monastery had the ability to have a good income, it nevertheless also always had expenses, just like any other company (Berntson 2003, pp. 41–43). However, many monasteries experienced a deterioration in terms of donations during the late 15th century. This tendency has been understood as part of a trend among the nobility to decrease the wealth of the Church (Norborg 1958, pp. 66–70). What we see during the decades preceding the Reformation is a political and economic struggle between the Church and temporal power concerning both donations and political influence, a struggle that in many ways reached its climax through the creation of a state church during the Reformation.

Second, the idea that the monasteries during the end of the Middle Ages were in some form of decay and had lost their “spiritual ardour” (see, for example, Hall 1907, p. 19; Holmquist 1933, p. 36; Larsson 1998, p. 85; 2002, pp. 121–22; Westman 1918, p. 78) is a generalized idea that echoes 16th century anti-Catholic polemics. Even though we do find criticism levelled against, for example, the Franciscans from bishop Hans Brask of Linköping who, standing firm in Catholic faith and canon law, during the early 1520s claimed that the Franciscan order was in decay and that the mendicant wanderings in the country should be forbidden (see Berntson 2003, p. 58; Stobaeus 2010, pp. 166–70), this criticism could be related to the jurisdictional tensions between Catholic bishops and mendicants. The fact that mendicant friars provided pastoral care and preaching in the dioceses without being subordinated to the bishop also resulted in various conflicts outside Sweden between bishops and Franciscans (Lawrence 1984, pp. 213–14; Stobaeus 2010, p. 167). Even though the criticism raised by Bishop Brask against the Franciscans may have been based on true events, it is debateable whether or not these kinds of scandals had increased during the years preceding the Reformation since, throughout the history of monasticism, we find several examples of monks and nuns disobeying the monastic rules.³ All in all, there are no objective means of defining what a “spiritual ardour” really is and how it is to be measured.

Besides the decreasing interest of the nobility in giving donations to the monasteries, these institutions also faced other problems during the first decades of the 16th century. The tensions in the Kalmar Union, which had been established 1397 between the three Scandinavian kingdoms (Denmark, Norway, and Sweden) and which was abolished through the election of Gustav Vasa as king of Sweden in 1523, also affected monastic and mendicant houses. During the early 16th century, the tensions resulted in warfare, which also affected the monasteries, of which some were damaged or set on fire (Berggren 1902, pp. 63–64; Gallén 1958, pp. 183–94; Torbrand 1968, pp. 80, 83–84; see also Berntson 2019a, p. 128–29). After the Danish king Christian, after several years of warfare, was accepted as king of Sweden in the Nordic union, and after executing many noblemen, burghers, and bishops during the Bloodbath in Stockholm in the autumn of 1520, on the way home to Denmark, he

murdered some monks in Nydala Abbey, probably as a way to silence political opposition. The murder, which was conducted through drowning them in an icy lake close to the monastery, was later used as Swedish propaganda against Christian II's rule (see GR 1, pp. 14, 23).

Related to the tensions in the Nordic Union, there was also sometimes a complicated relationship between the Swedish monastic and mendicant houses and their Danish mother houses. Among the Franciscans, there were disagreements concerning the Observant reform (Gallén 1989, pp. 48–49; Lindbaek 1914, pp. 50, 65; Westman 1918, pp. 79–80). This reform had found success in many mendicant orders during the early 16th century emphasizing poverty ideals.⁴ This conflict affected the Franciscan province of Dacia (consisting of the Scandinavian Franciscan houses) where the provincial ministers were alternatively to come from Denmark or from Sweden and Norway (Lindbaek 1914, p. 50). Even though the Danish Franciscans before the Reformation all had become Observant, it is likely that the Conventual tradition remained its position in Sweden, which might be because the Observant reform was regarded as something Danish (Gallén 1989, pp. 48–49; Lindbaek 1914, p. 65; Westman 1918, pp. 79–80).⁵ In a likewise manner, the Hospitaller houses in Sweden were in conflict with their Danish motherhouse in Antvorskov since the middle of the 15th century (Hatt Olsen 1961, pp. 324–27; 1962, pp. 104–5; Reitzel-Nielsen 1984, pp. 310–11; see also Berntson 2006, pp. 60–61). The Hospitallers in Eskilstuna had good relations with the key figures in Swedish political groups opposing the Union, which could both be a reason for or consequence of their opposition to their Danish mother house (Gallén 1962, sp. 602; Konow 1995, p. 64; Reitzel-Nielsen 1984, pp. 263–64, 310–12).

Just like in other parts of Europe, the theologians who wanted to reform the church were rather skeptical about monastic life. One of Martin Luther's students, the Swedish theologian, deacon, and chancellor Olaus Petri (d. 1552), spelled out harsh criticism against the monasteries in some of his writing in the second half of the 1520s. He wrote a whole book on this subject, whose title would be translated as "A small book in which monastic life is explained" (1528) (Sw. *Een liten boock j huilko closterleffwerne forclarat warder*). Whilst Olaus Petri was in many ways a faithful pupil of Luther, his exposition on the problems of monastic life slightly differed from his master (on Luther's view, see, for example, Lohse 1963, pp. 344–55). Whereas Martin Luther concentrates his criticism on the monastic vows which he regarded as a good work being a false way to salvation, and Olaus Petri certainly shared this view, the latter concentrated his own polemics at the lack of biblical foundation for monastic vows and monastic life (see Berntson 2003, pp. 190–198). In Olaus Petri's, as well as in Luther's, mind, monastic life had not any foundation in the Scriptures; instead, it began several hundred years later with the desert hermits Paul and Anthony (OPSS 1, pp. 278–79). The idea propagated by contemporary monastics, that the prophets in the Bible and the "devout men" that Luke mentions in Acts 2:5 should have been monks, is dismissed by Olaus Petri (OPSS 1 pp. 280–81). In the same manner as Martin Luther and Philipp Melancton, Olaus Petri thought that the monastic vows violated the baptismal vows, and it also violated the evangelical freedom that Paul was talking about. The monastic vows were furthermore impossible to uphold. It was according to Olaus Petri impossible for a man to live in complete chastity without committing or at least longing for fornication (see OPSS 1, p. 485; see also Berntson 2003, pp. 193–95; Ingebrand 1964, p. 319). Rather, man was created with a natural sexual desire, and this had to be controlled through marriage. Even though monks and nuns were said to live in chastity, they had not the grace to do that fully, something that he found evident in everyday life in a monastery. Olaus Petri claimed that the nuns he knew eagerly spoke or wrote to men and they eagerly wanted to provide men who visited them with gifts such as wreaths or handkerchiefs and make them promise not to forget them, and these acts indicated that they "have yearnings and lust for men, and a natural desire in their bodies" (my translation) (OPSS 1, pp. 347–48, 522–23).

It should, however, also be noted, that Olaus Petri did not formally reject all forms of monastic life in history. Just like Luther, Olaus Petri gave his appreciation of the early monastic movement among the desert hermits in Egypt in the fourth century, where they

neither gave vows nor followed monastic rules. Instead, they followed only the Bible, and these monasteries were rather to be regarded as a kind of “Bible-schools”, which thereby could be described by Olaus Petri as “honest”. The decay rather started with Benedict of Nursia and his rule and reached a climax with the lazy mendicant friars during the 13th century (see OPSS 1, pp. 279–80, 478–79; see also [Berntson 2003](#), pp. 195–97; [Ingebrand 1964](#), p. 58). Olaus Petri never explicitly argued for a reform of the monasteries into their original state, as a form of Bible school without vows or rules, but his positive estimation of early monasticism opens the door to a reform of the monastic houses in this direction, into “Bible schools” (see OPSS 1, pp. 197–98; see also [Berntson 2003](#), pp. 197–98). This implicit will to transform the monasteries without abolishing them corresponds to the actual will sometimes promulgated by the Swedish government to reform the monastic houses in various ways.

3. Intensified State Control of the Monasteries

During the early years of the 1520s, an upheaval was created in Sweden against the Danish oppression, which resulted in Gustav Vasa being elected as king of Sweden on 6th June 1523 (a date which in modern times has become the National Day of Sweden), which marks the beginning of a regime which is associated with the introduction of the Reformation in Sweden. Gustav Vasa, whose election in practice marks the dissolution of the Nordic Union, was in urgent need of economic resources to safeguard its position. Since the independent Swedish regime was seen as illegitimate by the Danish King, and furthermore, since Gustav Vasa was regarded as a usurper among parts of the higher nobility in Sweden, he was also in need of ideological and theological legitimization. As it turned out, the Reformation could kill these two birds with one stone. The necessary economic resources were sought after among the churches and the monasteries. As has been noticed, the nobility in Sweden had tried for many decades to limit the increasing wealth of the church by directing various donations to secular authorities. And through subordinating the Church, especially by relieving the bishops of their “worldly” power, he effectively got rid of what he considered as his hardest political enemy.

However, one should hesitate to regard Gustav Vasa’s many infringements on the monasteries as steps in a “plan” to eventually dissolve all monasteries, as has sometimes been held (see, for example, [Holmquist 1933](#), p. 101; [Härdelin 1998](#), p. 133). At the time of his accession to the throne in 1523, until the Diet in Västerås in 1527, Gustav Vasa was hardly not aware of the possibility of dissolving the monasteries in the whole kingdom. Furthermore, during his regime, he never accomplished such an endeavor. Even though Gustav Vasa, during the first five years of his rule, does not seem to have considered any plan to dissolve all the Swedish monasteries, it is evident that he tried to subordinate both churches and monasteries and in various ways use their resources for political purposes. To improve the state economy and to pay the debts to Hansan (who had provided Gustav Vasa with necessary military resources to win the war against Christian II), the state issued confiscations of silver in churches and monasteries during the years 1523 and 1524. These confiscations were not presented as confiscations but rather as loans which were said to be paid back later, and they were not directed solely toward the monasteries. Even though confiscations of silver and other valuables were not something new, neither in Sweden nor in the rest of Europe (see [Berntson 2003](#), pp. 69–70), in the long run, they became a first step toward the increased control of monasteries and churches in the kingdom ([Berntson 2003](#), p. 74). An even more controversial step toward state control of monasteries was the establishment of the prevalent Danish policy of quartering royal soldiers and their horses in both monasteries and parsonages ([Berntson 2003](#), pp. 74–75). The most controversial step in the increasing state control of monasteries was taken in 1526, when Gustav Vasa claimed the property of the Carthusian monastery Pax Mariae (Mariefred) in the estate of Gripsholm, which was mentioned earlier. Gustav Vasa claimed that the estate was his own heritage, since he was an heir to the earlier steward Sten Sture the elder. However doubtful this justification was, this claim was to become an important precedent for later

confiscations of monastic estates. As we shall see, at the Diet of Västerås in 1527, this act was used by the nobility for the right of all noblemen to reclaim estates given or sold to churches and monasteries (GR 4, p. 217).

These successive steps toward increasing state control of monastic estates and properties through taxations, confiscations, quartering royal soldiers and their horses in monasteries and the actual dissolution of Pax Mariae did not go unnoticed by ordinary people. Rather, during the upheavals in the province of Dalarna during 1525 and 1527, all these infringements against churches and monasteries were used as arguments against the king (Berntson 2010a, pp. 53–55, 98, 230–31). During the first upheaval in Dalarna in 1525, the peasants accused the king of confiscating treasures from churches and monasteries, such as chalices, monstrances, and relic shrines, which were all devoted to upholding the “Service of the Lord” (HSH 23, p. 17). I suggest that this phrase, which will be discussed at length below, was a way of describing various ways in which people, especially clergy but also laypeople, in various ways performed a “service to the Lord”, not only through mass celebration but also through singing of the hours, going on pilgrimages, and so on. Likewise, during the second upheaval in Dalarna in 1527, the king was targeted with accusations of having destroyed churches and monasteries and of having quartered royal soldiers and their horses in monasteries (Samuelsson 1925, pp. 96–97; GR 4, pp. 170–71). Due to this series of accusations, the king gathered a Diet in the city of Västerås in 1527 to regain the trust and confidence of the estates, i.e., burghers, peasants, and nobility (Berntson 2003, pp. 93–94). The clergy was not allowed to be part of the decision making, even though it was present at the Diet. During the meeting, burghers, peasants, and nobility all eventually pledged allegiance to the king, who threatened to resign due to the political turbulence in Dalarna. During this Diet, which incorrectly has been known as the “Reformation Diet” in Swedish history, the church was in effect subordinated to the state. Through these decisions, in the long run, a state church was created, even though its confessional stance was still unclear. The subordination to the state also affected the monastic and mendicant houses. It was decided that the mendicant friars were to limit their walkabouts in the country, and for the monasteries, it was decided that they should have secular administrators and that the nobility should have the right to reclaim some of the monastic estates.

4. Depopulation of the Mendicant Houses

Some mendicant friars, both Dominicans and Franciscans, did participate in the two upheavals that preceded the Diet in Västerås in 1527, and because of this, all friars were accused by the king of being propagandists among the people, spreading false rumors about the government. This was the main reason behind the decision to regulate and limit the mendicant travels during which they travelled around and gathered alms (see GR 4, p. 225; see also Berntson 2003, pp. 94–95). It was decreed that the mendicant friars were only to leave their houses for ten weeks every year. In this decree, it was officially claimed that the friars spread “deceit” (*bedregerij*) and “lies” (*lygn*) in society (the decision known as Västerås Ordinantia is printed in GR 4, pp. 242–43). This decision was the main reason behind the depopulation of the mendicant houses that followed during the approximately ten years after the Diet. Since the economy in the mendicant houses was largely based on the alms that the friars collected during these travels, the limitation of their travels created economic problems for the communities (Berntson 2003, pp. 95–112; see also Jakobsen 2007, pp. 179–84). Consequently, most of the mendicant houses were depopulated during the period from the Diet until the earlier half of the 1530s. Some were closed rather soon after the Diet, indicating that the regulations struck them rather hard. For example, the Blackfriars’ houses in Stockholm and Västerås closed in 1528, and the Greyfriars in Arboga had to close their house just one year later (Berntson 2003, pp. 96–97). Mostly, the dissolution of the mendicant houses in Sweden remains a rather anonymous process. For most of the houses, we have no records of how or when they were depopulated or closed. To understand how they were dissolved, we must make conclusions based on scarce notices and records of exhaustive confiscations of monastic properties, which most

likely occurred after they were depopulated. From such observations, it could be suggested that most of the mendicant houses were closed during the first three or four years after the Diet. However, some houses were not totally depopulated. For a time, elder or sick friars could stay in some of the houses. From scarce notices, we know, for example, that a “sick monk” lived in the Franciscan house in Skara even in 1539, and that the Franciscan house in remote Krokek housed elder brethren as late as 1544 (Berntson 2003, p. 98).

After the mendicant houses were depopulated, they were sometimes transformed into charitable institutions and thereby they became part of the general ambition to improve the situation for the alms-houses and hospitals in Sweden (Berntson 2003, pp. 99–105). These kinds of transformations were sanctioned politically during the Diet in Strängnäs in 1529, where the king answered the popular criticism against him concerning the dissolution of the monastic houses by saying that they could very well be maintained if they, for example, took care of poor and sick people (GR 6, p. 148; see also Ivarsson 1970, pp. 19–20). This policy was only applied to the mendicant houses, and in some cases, the friars were welcomed to stay there and tend to sick and poor people (Berntson 2003, pp. 100–2). However, with one exception, we do not know whether the friars accepted this opportunity. After the Diet in Västerås, the Poor Clares in Stockholm had to move to the abandoned (male) Franciscan house at Gråmunkeholmen (literally the “Grey monks’ islet”, nowadays Riddarholmen), and were also supposed to stay there after it had transformed into a charitable institution (Sw. *helgeandshus*) 1531. This house, which moved to Danviken (east of the city) in 1551, still housed some (former) Poor Clares as late as the 1570s who still at that time kept the custom of calling their superior “abbess” (see GR 4, pp. 209, 218, 221, 225; GR 7, p. 252; see also Berntson 2003, pp. 102–3; Klockhoff 1935, pp. 120–21).

5. Secular Administration of the Monastic Economy

In the King’s introductory speech at the Diet in Västerås 1527, he gave a gloomy overview concerning the economic situation in the kingdom. It was held that the nobility and the crown were “weakened”, and this weakness was due to many estates that had been given, sold, or pledged to church and monastic institutions. One important reason for the economic problems was that the Church, its bishops, and its monasteries were wealthier than the crown and the noblemen. The estates (nobility, burghers, and peasants) were basically on the same line as the King in this matter. It was decided that all landed property that had been given, sold, or pledged to churches and monasteries since the 1450s was allowed to be given back to the donors’ families (GR 4, p. 230; see also Berntson 2003, pp. 211–13). Based on this decision, many noblemen reclaimed monastic estates during the years that followed the Diet. However, it is difficult to fully investigate in what way these reclamations really affected the monastic economies, and it is likewise unclear what consequences they had for their dissolution. The loss of one estate alone does not say so much about the loss, since we usually are not familiar with the economic value of it. It is also difficult to number the range of the monastic estates before the Diet. Furthermore, it is very likely that many estates were reclaimed from the monasteries without being noted in the source material. It is, however, likely that these reclamations of monastic estates were one of many problematic circumstances behind the dissolution (Berntson 2003, pp. 125–29).

A more important factor behind the dissolution was the decision to grant the administration of the monastic economy to external seculars. At the Diet in Västerås in 1527, the nobility suggested that the king should grant rule over all monasteries in the kingdom to representatives of the nobility. It was decided that monks and nuns should remain in their convents, and therefore, the noblemen were obliged to provide them with food and beer. (GR 4, p. 230).

This decision was not fully carried through directly after the Diet. Even though some monasteries almost immediately became governed by seculars, many retained the right to *avercorn* (*avrad*) among their tenants for several years (see Berntson 2003, pp. 132–57). Here it is possible to observe the difference from a gender perspective. The nunneries did for a longer time enjoy the right to administer the incomes and be provided with the

avercorn from their commoners in comparison with the institutions that housed monks. Eventually they would all lose it, and the problems of providing food and performing repairs and renovations on the buildings were most probably the main reason behind their depopulation. Most monasteries and nunneries who based their economy on interest from farmers were also depopulated after they had lost control of the economy (Berntson 2003, pp. 144–57). At the time of King Gustav Vasa's death in 1560, there still existed four monastic institutions in the kingdom, and these were all nunneries: the Cistercian abbeys in Sko and Vreta and the Birgittine abbeys in Naantali (Sw. Nådendal) and Vadstena. These institutions lived on because their abbesses had managed to create agreements with the King concerning purveyance (Berntson 2003, pp. 157–60).

6. Twilight Existence of the Nunneries

In Vadstena Abbey, the abbess lost her rule over the administration on the estates during the early years of the 1530s. Thereafter, the nunnery was to rely on smaller donations, given both by common people as well as some members of the nobility, for example, Queen Margareta Leijonhufvud (see Nyberg 1991, pp. 390–91). The situation made the abbess complain to the King, which led to state supplies with yearly provisions for the nunnery from the late 1540s until the dissolution in 1595 (Berntson 2003, pp. 149–57). The situation was similar in Vreta Abbey, which from the late 1530s until 1549 was governed by Ebba Eriksson, who was the King's second cousin and his mother-in-law, and besides this, also a devout Catholic. From 1549, the government became responsible for food supplies to the nuns in Vreta, which housed nuns until 1582 at the latest (see Berntson 2003, pp. 144–45; 2010c, pp. 372–75). We find a similar situation in Sko Abbey, which might have had the opportunity to govern itself until the early 1550s (Berntson 2003, pp. 145–46). Here the abbess and the convent continuously claimed the right to be supplied and protected by the King, and this was supported until 1587. Naantali (Sw. Nådendal) Abbey also reached an agreement with the King which made the abbess responsible for the economy from 1530 until the early 1550s, and thereafter, the secular government were responsible for the administration. In 1558, there were still fifteen nuns and six brethren living there (Ivarsson 1970, pp. 87–88). However, in 1576, there only remained four nuns in Naantali, and between 1581 and 1592, it was only inhabited by a single nun, Elin Knutsdotter, and her servants (Ivarsson 1970, pp. 92–94).

The relatively long survival of female convents in Sweden has been explained in various ways. First, it has been claimed that nunneries were not a "political threat" against the State, and therefore, they could remain for several decades (Lindblom 1961, p. 1; Ivarsson 1970, p. 30). However, this theory is mere speculation without any support, neither in general theories nor in the source material. Furthermore, it is based on a questionable assumption. Nuns could very well have been regarded as a political threat at this time. In a letter from the King to his bailiffs in the 1540s, it was, for example, decreed that the female Dominicans in Skänninge should not be permitted to leave their convent, since he feared that they would spread lies and propaganda among the peasants if their house was dissolved (GR 16, p. 214). Consequently, the female Dominicans were regarded as a "political threat", and this was actually a reason why the convent should remain (which it did until the sisters were moved to Vadstena Abbey in 1544). Second, regarding Vadstena Abbey, it has been claimed that it was not dissolved because it was regarded as a "national monument" (Nyman 1997, p. 223; Hidal 2000, p. 56). This theory and the anachronistic use of the term "national monument" lacks support in the source material and says more about later views on cultural heritage. Third, it has been suggested that the nunneries survived because the nobility wanted to use them as a place for their unmarried daughters (Andrén 1999, p. 129; Fritz 2000, p. 202; Holmquist 1933, p. 333; Wiking 1949, p. 66). Just like the second theory, this idea has been used especially to explain the long survival of Vadstena Abbey. Of all three explanations, this is the most intriguing one, since we do find a similar discussion in Denmark and parts of Germany. However, there are some problems with the theory when it comes to the Swedish scene. To begin with, this theory is not based

on source material whatsoever. Furthermore, it is based on the idea that most of the nuns living in Vadstena Abbey were from the nobility. However, even though most abbesses were of noble descent, it rather seems that only a minority of the nuns had this background. Rather, the number of daughters of noble descent seems to have been in decline at the time of the Reformation (see Wallin 1991, p. 314; see also Jacobsen 1989, p. 49). This does not imply that the theory needs to be completely dismissed. The abbesses who were of noble descent could through their status as such defend their monasteries from a relatively powerful position.

The main reason behind the survival of the nunneries was rather that the state supplied food provisions to them, and these agreements were settled because of the social problems that would arise for nuns and sisters who had to leave their secluded life in their convents. This theory corresponds to theories used to explain the relatively long endurance of nunneries in, for example, Germany (Oliva 1998a, pp. 87–88, 97–98; 1998b, pp. 201–2; Roper 1991, pp. 214, 220, 235, 237; Wiesner 1988, p. 154; 1989, pp. 10–11). Whilst a former monk or friar could work as a parish minister or teacher, basically all professions in society were closed for women. The only option was to get married, and this was not so easy, since a former nun might be too old or even skeptical about marriage, since she had taken a vow of celibacy (Berntson 2003, pp. 159–60). This way of explaining the survival of the nunneries not only corresponds to research on German preconditions, but it is also supported by source material in Sweden. I will here give just a few examples. Already in 1533, the Lutheran Archbishop Laurentius Petri wrote in an exposition on the decisions from the Diet in Västerås 1527 that the remaining monasteries were upheld since old monks and nuns otherwise would not be able to take care of themselves (HSRK pp. 76–77, 93–94). Furthermore, in 1530, the King explicitly gave the abbess in Naantali (Sw. Nådendal) the right to administer the monastic estates because the elder brethren and sisters had nowhere to go if it was closed (see GR 7, p. 118). And in an undated letter from the Cistercian Abbey of Gudsberga, brother Joakim expressed gratitude toward the King since he had provided the monastery with “bread and protection” and pleaded for continued supplies, since the remaining monks were old and sick and could therefore not work as vicars or chaplains (Berntson 2003, p. 160), implying that in a similar manner as the nuns, elder monks could remain in their convents as a kind of retirement.

7. Various Forms of Resistance against the Dissolution of the Monasteries

The Reformation in Sweden has often been regarded as a magisterial Reformation which was performed in a top-down process. In later research, this picture has been nuanced, and especially international historians now rather tend to emphasize the interactive aspects of the practical implementation of the Reformation, where both the church and local nobility were deeply involved in the Swedish Reformation process (see Kress 2021, pp. 15–17; Lavery 2018, pp. 12–13). Another kind of interaction or even negotiation is to be found in the violence and upheavals that were a part of Late Medieval political culture in Sweden (Berntson 2017, pp. 287–300). During, for example, the many upheavals that King Gustav Vasa had to face, especially during his first ten years in reign, we find that he was pressured by the peasants and other groups to clarify his stance concerning the “poisoned” Lutheran faith. One of the arguments for talking about this faith as “poisoned” was the dissolution of the monasteries, which was described as dangerous since, through it, the “Service of the Lord” (Sw. *Guds tjänst*) was limited if not abolished. For example, in letters that were issued by the rebels during the western uprising in 1529, it was claimed that they rose against the King because the “Service of the Lord” had disappeared from the monasteries (GR 6, p. 358), indicating a loss of monks and nuns who spent much of their time praying, both with Divine Office and with Masses for the souls of the departed. The importance of this service could be seen as an expression of a covenant thought that the monasteries through their prayers provided God with services, and He in return provided his people with protection and grace. The term “Service of the Lord” also had a wider aspect, denoting various services that were performed by priests and monks, but also

pilgrimage. It was not only priestly ordained monks that would perform the “Service of the Lord” but also nuns and pilgrims (Berntson 2003, pp. 292–311; 2010a, pp. 282–86; 2012, pp. 52–59). Consequently, a disruption of this “Service of the Lord” implied that a covenant was broken, an act that was associated with eternal damnation and with punishment in this world through famine and disasters (on the impact of God’s vengeance, see Malmstedt 1994, pp. 211–13; see also the discussions in Berntson 2003, pp. 299–303; 2010a, pp. 296–301; Stobaеus 2008, pp. 118–22). In a letter issued in May 1525 by inhabitants in the province of Dalarna to the King, the rebels argued that they feared God’s vengeance since the King had stolen treasures, such as chalices, monstrances, and relic shrines, that were devoted to the “Service of the Lord”, from churches and monasteries: “For which Your harsh acts, we strongly fear that God’s wrath and revenge will strike the kingdom and ourselves, if penance is not performed” (my translation) (HSH 23, pp. 17–18; see also Berntson 2003, p. 302). Since the establishment of a monastery as well as providing donations to it could be regarded as a way of decreasing the wrath of God (see, for example, Berntson 2003, pp. 301–2), it may not seem surprising that the dissolution of a monastery was feared to increase the same wrath (Berntson 2003, pp. 300–3; 2010a, pp. 296–301).

Responding to this resistance against the dissolution of the monasteries as a reduction of the “Service of the Lord”, the King would in various situations argue for a new understanding of this expression. In the King’s rhetoric, the *true* “Service of the Lord” was an obligation of *all* Christians, not only of priests, monks, and nuns, and it denoted an ethical way of living, not primarily celebrating masses or reading the Divine Office (Berntson 2003, pp. 305–6). Supposedly, this way of understanding “Service of the Lord” was derived from the theologian Olaus Petri, who in his books talked about the true “Service of the Lord” as being a good neighbor rather than upholding old and false traditions (OPSS 1, pp. 270–72; a similar perspective is found in the Danish theologian Peder Laurentsen’s discussion in Malmøbøgen, see Berntson 2012, pp. 55–56). The true “Service of the Lord” was according to the King not identical with “roaring in the monasteries”, i.e., singing the mass or Divine Office⁶, as the rebels held, but instead to love and help people in need. When the King confiscated “unnecessary” chalices or monstrances in churches and monasteries, he did this to protect his people and his kingdom and was thereby actually performing the true “Service of the Lord”. These moral acts could, according to the King, be compared with “lazy” monks and “greedy” bishops who were only thinking about themselves (Berntson 2003, p. 305; 2010a, pp. 333–43). In one way, this could be seen as a rhetorical game of words, but it also reflects a theological or ecclesiological transformation. The association of “Service of the Lord” with masses, devotion to the saints, and Divine Office reflect an ecclesiology where righteousness was provided by a sacramentally based Church instituted by Christ, a view that was challenged by protestants for whom the value of the material and sacramental forms of devotion was relativized. The close association between outward material and ritual forms of “Service of the Lord” tended from the reformers perspective to diminish the importance of the immaterial and non-ritualized meeting between man and God and the inevitable moral consequences of this meeting (Berntson 2012, pp. 58–59). From such a perspective, it was logical to transform mendicant houses into hospitals and to reform nunneries into institutions who performed teaching or tended to the sick and poor (Berntson 2003, pp. 310–11).

8. The Idea of Evangelical Communities in Sweden

Even though the decisions concerning faith were consciously made vague during the Diet in Västerås in 1527, during the 1540s, the Swedish government articulated in a clearer way its adherence to Evangelical faith without delineating this faith in a confession document or in an official church order. It was, for example, important for the government to suppress various forms of Catholic traditions (Berntson 2010a, pp. 240–42). This Evangelical turn was being opposed through the Dacke rebellion in the province of Småland during the years 1542 and 1543, where the rebels demanded the King to return to the old Mass and they also criticized the confiscations of silver from the churches. Instead, they demanded

the reintroduction of holy water, blessed salt, and blessed palms (GR 15, pp. 287–88; see also [Berntson 2014b](#), pp. 91–98). This reactionary Catholic stand was used by the king after the rebellion had been quelled, as an argument for clarifying the Kingdom's Evangelical standpoint. In the King's rhetoric, all upheavals against him were inspired by Catholic bishops and by Catholic priests (SRA 1:1, pp. 342–44; [Berntson 2010a](#), pp. 260–61), and it was therefore important to suppress all Catholic political influence in society.

Consequently, it was of utmost importance to make Catholics living in the monasteries turn Evangelical. This was not a unique policy for Sweden. In Germany, there are many examples of especially nunneries turned Evangelical, and there are a few similar examples also in Denmark, where the Birgittine Maribo Abbey in the 1550s was turned into an institution for daughters of noble standing ([Jørgensen 2019](#); see also [Berntson 2010b](#)). In Sweden, it could be argued that at least the idea of turning monasteries into Evangelical communities did exist in the 16th century. In Vadstena Abbey, the king attempted to make both nuns and the remaining brethren accept the Reformation ([Berntson 2003](#), pp. 224–25). After visiting Vadstena Abbey in 1580, the Jesuit Antonio Possevino (1534–1611) could report to Rome that the nuns had been obliged for many years to listen to Evangelical preaching in the Abbey Church. Furthermore, there were rumors that the nuns had accepted communion *sub utraque* (Theiner 1839, p. 29). However, Possevino had also been told that the nuns had put wax and cotton in their ears and thereby avoided hearing the heretical preaching (see [Berntson 2003](#), p. 226). We find a more positive affirmation of the Reformation of the Abbey in Rasmus Ludvigssons's chronicle from the 1570s, where he claimed that the nuns in Vadstena who wanted to remain and serve God in the right way could do this if they adopted the right and pure Evangelical teaching. After the nuns had been instructed on faith matters and after teaching them to sing hymns and songs in Swedish, they had, according to Ludvigsson, really accepted this faith (HH 20, pp. 101–2). Around fifty years later, the Catholic professor Johannes Messenius also acknowledged that at least some of the inhabitants in the Abbey had become Lutherans (Messenius, *Scandia* 5, p. 103; Messenius, CSB, pp. 234–35). Unfortunately, we have very few sources apart from these chronicles and Possevino's letter to Rome that provide us with information on what really happened. But according to a royal letter, two of the brethren in Vadstena Abbey had promised to stand firm in the Evangelical faith (GR 19, p. 96). We find a similar situation in Naantali (Sw. Nådendal), the other Birgittine Abbey in the kingdom, where both monks and nuns were said to have promised to become "Evangelical persons" in life and teaching during bishop Michael Agricola's visitation there in 1554. During the visit, the inhabitants in the Abbey were forbidden to sing or read St. Birgitta's revelations and they were only allowed to celebrate mass in Swedish or in Finnish. The Latin mass was thereby abolished. Furthermore, the Abbey was thereafter supposed to receive and teach children and young women (HTH 8, p. 70; see also [Ivarsson 1970](#), p. 30; [Klockars 1979](#), p. 187; [Leinberg 1890](#), pp. 281–82). In the (former) Cistercian Abbey Sko, the nuns were also obliged to listen to Evangelical sermons in the Abbey church and to abolish all Catholic ceremonies. In a same manner as in Naantali, the nuns were supposed to teach children and young women. Unlike Naantali and Vadstena, no more nuns were allowed to enter Sko Abbey (see [Ivarsson 1970](#), p. 26). A final example is found in the (former) Birgittine abbey Marientaal in Tallinn, which was ruled by the Swedish government since 1561, where the nuns were allowed to remain if they abolished all Catholic ceremonies and their false "Service of the Lord" (see [Ivarsson 1970](#), p. 26; [Leinberg 1890](#), pp. 286–87). Consequently, we find in both Marientaal, Naantali, Sko, and Vadstena governmental attempts to persuade nuns (and brethren) to become protestants. However, apart from some notices concerning Naantali and Vadstena, we do not have so many indications that these attempts ever were successful.

Yet it is hazardous to say that these attempts reveal a governmental policy of creating long-standing evangelical communities in Sweden. This policy could very well have only been temporary, to make the nunneries socially acceptable until the old nuns died. Furthermore, we do not have firm indications that the nuns really became protestants. Nevertheless, the idea that nunneries with nuns accepting the Reformation was at least

a temporal possibility, and was a living idea in Sweden from the 1540s until the 1570s (Berntson 2003, p. 228).

9. A Limited Revival during Johan III's Reign

Johan III's (rule 1568–1592) Catholicizing church policy implied a revival for some of the remaining nunneries in the Kingdom. His Catholicizing policy is usually understood as an expression of the Irenical theology that Johan III was interested in, and one of its purposes was to make Sweden into an example for religious peace in Europe (Andrén 1990, p. 339; 1999, p. 156; Holmquist 1933, pp. 16, 36, 41; Montgomery 1995, pp. 148–152; Serenius 1966, p. 336; Strömberg-Back 1963, pp. 194–95). However, his policy eventually caused suspicion from both Catholics and not least from the emerging Lutheran Orthodoxy. The king explicitly wanted to restore some convents and Abbey churches that had been abandoned during the earlier regimes. As one step in this policy, it was decreed in the Church order *Nova Ordinantia* (1575) that monasteries in the kingdom should be restored, albeit in a new way. From now on, the monasteries were to house old clergymen and others who wanted to distance themselves from the world, and in these monasteries, they could live a life in prayer, godliness, and preach and sing God's words. These monasteries were also to house elder women and young maidens who did not want to marry. Furthermore, they could function as schools where orphans could learn to read, write, sing, and sew. But it was forbidden to pledge monastic vows (HRSB 2:II, p. 349). In practice, we do see a renovation of some of the still inhabited monasteries, such as Naantali (Sw. Nådendal), Vadstena, and Vreta. Some abbey churches in dissolved monasteries such as Alvastra and Gråmunkeholmen were also renovated (Ivarsson 1970, pp. 106–8, 112–19, 125–40). One of the most exhaustive renovations happened in the (former) Cistercian abbey Vreta, where both the church and the convent (which was still inhabited) were renovated (Ivarsson 1970, pp. 116–17, 244; see also Berntson 2010c, pp. 375–79). Furthermore, some parts of Vadstena Abbey were renovated, most famously, the so-called Sanctum Sanctorum (known also as St. Birgittas praying chamber) with a still existing painting where St. Birgitta and her daughter, the first director of the convent, St Katarina (dressed in the Birgittine habit), were depicted (Lindblom 1961, pp. 8–9, 21, 37). Some nunneries were also revived in another way since the King approved the acceptance of new nuns in Naantali and Vadstena. In a more controversial manner, he also permitted Catholic priests to be sent to Vadstena Abbey (Ivarsson 1970, pp. 71, 80, 93). Through this policy, Vadstena Abbey remained a Catholic institution in a Kingdom that walked the path toward Lutheran Orthodoxy.

10. The Final Act

At the time of Johan III's death in November 1592, Vadstena Abbey was the only inhabited nunnery still existing in Sweden. Johan III was succeeded by his son Sigismund (ruled 1592–1599), who was also King of Poland, and furthermore raised as a Catholic. Due to his absence from Sweden before his coronation, his uncle duke Charles (Sw. Karl), who favored Lutheranism, convened a Church Council in Uppsala in March 1593, where the Augsburg Confession was accepted as the faith of the Kingdom. In October 1595, Charles became in practice the leader of the Kingdom after being elected as Steward during a Diet in October 1595. To create a firm political position, he accepted various demands from the Lutheran Orthodox clergy to remove all remaining Catholic institutions from the Kingdom that were still protected by the Catholic king (Berntson 2003, p. 249). This policy would eventually result in a civil war which ended with the defeat of Sigismund in 1598 and a victory for Duke Charles (who later became Charles IX) and for Lutheranism. Before that, Vadstena Abbey was closed by the duke and his allies.

After the visits of the Jesuit Antonio Possevino, the Catholic tradition in Vadstena had been strengthened at the same time as the theological development in the Kingdom was influenced by Lutheran Orthodoxy. In December 1595, Vadstena Abbey was visited by the duke, the newly elected Archbishop Abraham Angermannus, who was well known for his Lutheran Orthodox position, and some other prominent political leaders. According

to a chronicle written by the Catholic historian Johannes Messenius, the nuns were able to choose between either accepting the Lutheran faith and remaining in the convent or refusing to convert and thereby being expelled from it. According to Messenius, all nuns chose to remain Catholics and therefore left the convent. The nuns stayed in the city of Vadstena during the winter, and during the following summer some of them left for Gdansk in Poland where they were accepted into another nunnery in the Birgittine order.⁷ Through this dissolution, the last monastery in Sweden was closed, almost exactly eighty years after the closing of Pax Mariae (Mariefred) in Gripsholm. The events during the latter half of the 16th century show that the monasteries in Sweden turned out to be too Catholic and thereby failed to find a place in the evolving Lutheran Orthodoxy. If they had been more willing to adopt Protestant Reformation ideas, there was at least theoretically a possibility that they would survive.

11. Conclusions

Initially, we briefly outlined three phases in the Reformation in Sweden: an informal or “late” confessionalization between 1540 and 1570, an ambiguous confessionalization between 1570 and 1592, and a genuine Lutheran confessionalization from 1593. Even before these phases, the dissolution of the monasteries was directed by the financial needs of the state, and it was not deemed necessary to dissolve them all. Some houses, especially nunneries, still lived on, financed by the state, not least because of the social problems that might ensue if nuns were to be thrown out into the world. However, during the informal or “late” confessionalization from the 1540s, it also became of importance to reform the remaining monasteries by making nuns and brethren adhere to the still rather vague confession promoted by the king, to make them subordinate to the state and avoid political disturbances caused by presumed Catholic propaganda.

The period between 1570 and 1592 is here described as a time of ambiguous confessionalization, with an approved but confessionally vague Church Order in 1571 leaving room for the King to perform a Catholicizing policy, including a renewal for both inhabited and abandoned monasteries. This revival consisted of both renovations of the material houses and allowance of a Catholic revival, especially in Vadstena Abbey. However, this Catholicizing policy created problems for Vadstena as the last remaining monastery in Sweden during the Lutheran confessionalization in the 1590s, when the Abbey was put in the crossfire between Duke Charles, supported with the Lutheran Orthodox clergy, and the Catholic King Sigismund. Whilst the informal and ambiguous confessionalization between the 1540s and 1580s created possibilities for some kind of survival of at least some nunneries in Sweden, they did not find any place in the Lutheran confessionalization in Sweden.

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Notes

- ¹ Monastic life was officially re-introduced in Sweden in the 20th century after the prohibition against monasteries was lifted 1951.
- ² Pax Mariae was, however, not the last monastic institution to become established in Sweden. The last order to be instituted was the Order of the Holy Ghost, of which one house was established in the city of Söderköping 1510, and another was on the way to being built in Västergötland in the 1520s (Berntson 2003, p. 35; Gallén 1961, p. 313; Hedqvist 1893, pp. 109–10; Lindbaek 1906, p. 65).
- ³ Still Otfried Czaika finds it constructive to use the theme of a “Plausibilitätsverluste” created by sexual abuses among monks and nuns in Scandinavian monasteries, as a possible way of explaining the relatively fast dissolution process; see (Czaika 2019, p. 46).
- ⁴ Among the Franciscans, the Observants opposed the Conventuals, who were open to the traditional ownership of property and estates (Gallén 1959, p. 570; Lindbaek 1914, pp. 55–65). Through a decision in 1517, the Observants reached a superior position in relation to the Conventuals who thereby became a subordinated—but accepted in canon law—minority (Lindbaek 1914, pp. 74–75).

- ⁵ The tensions between Danish and Swedish Franciscans were brought to the surface when the Danish provincial minister Jens Mogensen died in 1515, and he was replaced by the Swedish friar Lars Johansson, a transition which was in line with the regulation. However, Lars Johansson was only to have authority over the Swedish (and maybe also the Norwegian) houses, which may have been due to the Danish Observants not agreeing to be subordinated to a Conventional Swede (see Gallén 1989, pp. 48–49; Lindbaek 1914, pp. 74–75; Rasmussen 1994, pp. 8–9).
- ⁶ This expression was according to Peder Svart's chronicle used by the king; see PS, p. 94.
- ⁷ The most cited source on this dissolution is Messenius, *Scondia* 8 p. 31. Messenius gives a similar account in Messenius, CSB, pp. 242–43. Another perspective on this dissolution is found in Knut Persons chronicle on King Charles IX from 1616, HSH 10 p. 41). What is less known is that two younger sisters stayed in the city of Vadstena and in the surrounding countryside until their deaths (Berntson 2003, p. 252).

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