

“No road to peace exists other than that of the narrow path whose name is conversion.”



NATHAN SÖDERBLOM
(1866–1931)

Nathan SÖDERBLOM was among the pioneers of the ecumenical movement in Europe. Shaken by the horrors of World War I, he became an ardent promoter of peace among nations as well as of the unified witness of Christian churches. Especially as the Archbishop of Uppsala, he dedicated a substantial part of his agenda to international co-operation between churches in the field of common action.

SÖDERBLOM, who grew up in the family of a Swedish Pietist pastor, emphasised the fact that neither world peace, nor the unity of Christianity, can be attained by merely outer measures. Both of these ideals require a *metanoia* on the part of those involved in this striving. As a result of this belief, SÖDERBLOM dedicated his energy and time not only to the organisational part of the emerging ecumenical movement, but simultaneously he preached the inner obligation of the individuals involved in ecumenism. Similarly, the peace among nations was to him a matter of individual conversions:

“It is my belief that ‘leaving ourselves in peace’ with our self-conceit and evil passions does not lead to real peace. Peace can be reached only through fighting against the ancient Adam in ourselves and in others. (...) No road to peace exists other than that of the narrow path whose name is conversion. All men of goodwill ought to unite in perceiving this. We must not allow ourselves to be lulled into any monistic peace dream. (...) This fight must be directed primarily toward the primitive man within us. Impatient minds may perhaps find such a concept hopeless, pessimistic, and old-fashioned. But we must face reality. The noble and practical measures for world peace

will be realized only to the extent to which the supremacy of God conquers the hearts of the people.”

LIFE AND WORK

Nathan SÖDERBLOM was born in Trönö, Sweden, in 1866. As a student of the University of Uppsala he acquired a solid knowledge of languages (Latin, Greek, Hebrew and Arabic), which enabled him to study the Holy Scriptures from a deeper perspective and to be aware of the contextual factors in the ancient narratives. After his ordination in 1895, he was assigned as a pastor to a mental hospital in Uppsala, but shortly after accepted the challenge of the spiritual care of the Swedish community in Paris, where he served from 1894–1901.

In these years SÖDERBLOM became familiar with the contemporary French spiritual and cultural movements and acquired a broad overview of international issues. The Swedish church administered by SÖDERBLOM in Paris was attended by a number of important Swedish thinkers and writers – such as Alfred NOBEL or August STRINDBERG – some of whom became his friends. During his seven-year stay in France he was also charged with the spiritual care of Swedish seamen at Calais and dedicated his time to study, becoming a doctor of Protestant theology at the Sorbonne.

After his return to Sweden, SÖDERBLOM held a teaching position at the University of Uppsala between 1901 and 1914. In 1914 he was appointed the Archbishop of Uppsala and the Primate of Sweden and could pursue his ecumenical efforts now also from the position of an official representative of the ecclesial hierarchy. In many instances SÖDERBLOM used his position to support pioneer grass-roots initiatives created by

people who at times faced the difficulty of finding adequate backing in clerical circles.

The peak of SÖDERBLOM’s ecumenical “career” was the Stockholm Conference in 1925, which brought together Anglican, Protestant and Orthodox Christians and crowned his efforts from the previous years. The Archbishop of Uppsala had been, however, attentive to ecumenical strivings throughout the world for several decades by that time. Especially during World War I he supported joint peace initiatives, such as those organized by the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship Through the Churches.

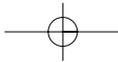
The fact that the war managed to unite Christians of various denominations in common witness led SÖDERBLOM to the conviction that “applied Christianity” should be among the first steps on the path to the unity of the Church. The Christian Conference on Life and Work that SÖDERBLOM helped to organise presented this message also at the first World Conference on Faith and Order in Lausanne in 1927, where more than 400 delegates from over a hundred churches met to discuss the prospects of ecumenism. For his commitment to peace Nathan SÖDERBLOM was in 1950 awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

SPIRITUALIZING PATRIOTISM

The movement of Life and Work that grew out of ecumenical peace initiatives was to some extent a parallel effort to doctrinal dialogue that was centered around Faith and Order. The lesson SÖDERBLOM and other activists of Life and Work learned in their peace-promoting activities was that united action has a large-scale political impact. SÖDERBLOM used to express this with the quote by Lloyd George, who claimed that “if the church communities of Great Britain were unanimous about a question, no government could oppose it.”

Already in the international debate on destructive nationalism and religious narrow-mindedness, the Archbishop of Uppsala saw that even at the political level a real change is needed, not just enforced modifications. In his speech on the occasion of his reception of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1950,

MINI-BIOGRAPHY



SÖDERBLOM borrowed a quote from Adolf von Harnack to illustrate the necessity of inner re-prioritization of values on the part of Christians: "We are delighted when noble patriotism is brought to light in this world of material interests, but poor indeed is the man who finds his highest ideals in patriotism alone or sees the nation as the epitome of all good. What a relapse from the time when we in this world experienced the presence of Jesus Christ among us! We should, therefore, strive with all our might for Christian unity of mankind and we should be generous in our small circles to prove that the brotherly unification of mankind is not an idealistic dream of utopians but a realistic aim, inseparable from the Gospel."

THE FULFILLED PROPHECY OF NATHAN SÖDERBLOM

One of the disappointments that the emerging ecumenical movement experienced during the mid-war years and that had an impact also on the ecumenical activities of the Archbishop of Uppsala was the deprecatory stance of the Roman Catholic

Church towards ecumenism. Nonetheless, SÖDERBLOM did not lose his hopes of co-operation with the Roman Catholics and followed actively the grass-roots initiatives among the Catholics.

In his Nobel Lecture he quoted the words uttered by his friend Wilfred Monod during the 1925 Stockholm Conference: "In communion with Chrysostom and Origen, with Pascal and St. Francis of Assisi, with Luther and Livingstone, let us first turn to our brothers separated from us, the Roman Catholics, whose seats among us have remained empty in the physical sense, but whose spiritual presence is deeply felt." SÖDERBLOM did not live long enough to see the change in the Roman Catholic Church happen, but it is beyond doubt that his spiritual heritage contributed to the changes that led to the embracement of ecumenism by the Roman Catholic Church at the Second Vatican Council.

Suggested Reading
The quotes from Nathan SÖDERBLOM's Nobel Lecture, as well as the biographical data, are cited according to: <http://nobelprize.org/peace/laureates/1930/soderblom-bio.html>; <http://nobelprize.org/peace/laureates/1930/soderblom-lecture.html>.

ROUSE Ruth – NEILL Stephan C., eds., *A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517–1948*. London, 1954.
SÖDERBLOM Nathan, *Christian Fellowship: The United Life and Work of Christendom*. New York, 1925.
SÖDERBLOM Nathan, *The Church and Peace*. Oxford 1929.

SUNDKLER Bengt G.M., *Nathan Söderblom: His Life and Work*. London, 1968.

ULLA UTTRUP was born in 1979 in Frederikshavn, Denmark. She studied economics in Copenhagen and Berlin. She took part in study programmes in Hamburg, Gothenburg and Berkeley, California. Apart from economics, she is also interested in theology, ecumenism and the science of religions. In 2002 she spent four months in Taiwan, where she took part in an interfaith study programme. Currently she is doing her PhD studies in Berlin. She is also an active member of Amnesty International.

Jesus said: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." St. Paul wrote: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God." St. Peter wrote: "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake." This rule was valid even when Nero was emperor of Rome. Romantics and unthinking individuals have taken offense at such words. But society and history are not built of romantic effusions and dreamy ideas, but by labor according to the dictates of conscience and the order of law. There is one universal tenet: "We ought to obey God rather than men."

—From Nathan SÖDERBLOM's Nobel Lecture held on December 11, 1950, in Oslo.

Serge TANKEU KESSEU

Higher Education in Africa: Context and Prospects

Higher education has been a major issue in all the debates these past decades in Africa and around the world. Our educational system is sick. In many areas of educational policies, people have become aware of this evil, of its magnitude and its meaning. Many reflective thinking workshops, debates and symposiums have been organised one, two and countless more times on this issue.

Despite all this, the lack of organisation in universities and secondary schools, with their rampant failure rate, is increasing every year. The alienation of elites, which is related to the absence of reliable state and social policies confronted with the failing educational system, is very problematic.

The current analysis is an additive tool to understand the situation of education in Africa; it opens new horizons on opportunities and alternatives likely to enroot Africa in her permanent quest for a more and more effective educational dynamic.

How did we get to this point? What are the possible ways out? And how can our faith and hope completely free us and enable us to reach academic excellence in higher education at the world level? We will focus on these questions while scrutinizing the crucial issue of higher education in Africa.

AFRICA AND EDUCATION: TIME FOR CRISES AND DOUBTS

The desire to take a concerted action with the other continents in the dynamic of giving and receiving was a total failure, mainly because of the mistaken approach adopted in the internal educational system of Africa, whose objective was to train new people after independence.

The "school of hostages" which was introduced in sub-Saharan Africa at the beginning of the XIXth century by the colonial powers was principally for the children of kings. Its primary aim was to perpetuate dominance. The goal of this approach was to build an innocent and socially strong Africa.

Particular students were singled out and suffused with an educational content that had nothing to do with the mentality of the colonised and did not consider his primary needs. Rather, it was designed to "wash his brain" and make out of his "savage" mentality a "civilised" one likely to emancipate the Negro and lift him up to the level of a "man."

Moreover, this colonial educational approach aimed at raising colonial administrations in our countries to use those few-trained indigenous people as subordinates. Because of their knowledge of the local culture, they were then used as interpreters with local populations to explain the essential cultural elements of the colonised to the coloniser.

