

Nathan Söderblom (1866-1931)

by DIETZ LANGE

Lars Olof Jonathan Söderblom, called Nathan since childhood, was born in the tiny village of Trönö, in the province of Hälsingland, Northern Sweden, on January 15, 1866. His father Jonas, son of a farmer, was the minister there. He was a follower of the Lutheran revival movement of Carl Olof Rosenius. Jonas was highly educated but theologically very conservative. He was extremely self-disciplined. Possessing a strong interest in foreign missions, he was an effective preacher and a dutiful servant of his congregation. He was equally devoted to his family, yet somewhat harsh and very strict with regard to educating his children. Nathan's mother Sophia, nee Blume, was the daughter of a Danish doctor who had come to Sweden in order to help out with a cholera epidemic in the 1860s and had stayed on. She was interested in poetry, a gentle, somewhat passive personality with a good sense of humor. She frequently had to compensate for the sometimes weird, Spartan ideas about childrearing that her husband held. However, an early onset of deafness on Sophia's part and the great difference of character between the spouses led to their gradual estrangement, and she more and more retreated to her own rooms.

Nathan was the second of seven siblings, two of whom had died in infancy. Sweden was a poor country at the time, with a high rate of emigration to the United States. Salaries for pastors were low. Most of those in rural areas had some agriculture on the side, which meant that their children had to help in the field from an early age. Nathan got his first schooling at home until the age of nine. His father, who had soon discovered his son's intellectual gifts, even taught him Latin. However, his mother was by far the better teacher, as Nathan gratefully remembered all his life. He was himself a fortunate blend of his parents' heritage: a relentless worker, able to concentrate on several things simultaneously, with a quick grasp even of highly sophisticated and abstract subjects. Yet he was always down-to-earth in his thinking. His particular forte was empathy

with people. He could converse with the king as well as with a peasant on an equal footing and thus was predestined for pastoral care.

Nathan received a solid classical education, with German and French as modern languages, and he developed a special interest in Scripture and church history early on. At the age of 17 he enrolled at Uppsala University for the three-year liberal arts course leading to the degree of *filosofie kandidat*, roughly the equivalent of a B. A. His grades were particularly good in classical languages and Arabic.

The young man then went on to study theology. In those years the faculty was not very attractive. The religious scene in the country was immersed in controversies between a rigidly orthodox state church, rapidly growing revival movements, and radical philosophical monism intruding from the European continent. But the professors of theology tended to insulate themselves from outside influences, in particular from historical criticism which carried the day in Germany. This was exactly what instigated the curiosity of the brighter students. One of these who had spent a term or two at a German university brought home Wellhausen's volume on the history of Israel. Söderblom borrowed and devoured it. Likewise, he became an avid reader of German New Testament exegesis, especially the Göttingen-based History of Religions School, Adolf Harnack's history of dogma, Albrecht Ritschl's works, Schleiermacher, Otto Pfeleiderer, Wilhelm Herrmann, and others. He discussed all these things with a couple of friends: Nils Johan Göransson (later professor of dogmatics) and Samuel Fries, a gifted Old Testament scholar. They also read modern novels and poetry on an international scale. All this fascinated Söderblom but also plunged him into a deep personal crisis, since it stood in stark contrast to the religious orientation he had received back home. It took him two separate steps to solve the problem. The first step came in the fall of 1889. That was the discovery that God had not revealed himself in a book or a doctrine but in history, most clearly in the person of Jesus Christ. This chimed in with the thought of the great nineteenth-century Swedish philosopher-historian Erik Gustaf Geijer, a prime representative of Romanticism whom Söderblom admired all his life.

But that was only a solution on the intellectual level. What troubled him on the truly religious, existential level was that he seemed to lack the consciousness of sin which was so essential to revivalist piety. On the other hand, at times even his longing for certainty of faith appeared to him as selfish and therefore sinful. So he was caught in a quagmire that reminds one of Martin Luther's repeated inner struggles, as well as of Søren Kierkegaard's dialectical philosophy, both of which Söderblom knew well already. Help was provided a couple of months later by a little booklet by the Scottish revivalist preacher W. P. Mackay, "Grace and Truth," which was widely read at the time and warmly recommended by the American Dwight L. Moody. Mackay's point was that a Christian had to turn his gaze away from self-analysis and toward Christ's redemptive suffering on the cross. This new orientation was supplemented several years later by yet another deep religious experience that reminded him of the fact that the God of love continued to be the stern judge, and that his grace can only be understood and valued against this somber background.

Through this development, Söderblom had gained inner freedom. He continued to adhere to the type of piety he had grown up in, but it was stripped of its inherent narrowness. The liberal conviction that Scripture and the history of dogma must be interpreted by modern historical methods, with no strings attached, was here to stay. But it received a counterweight in a growing appreciation of Martin Luther which actually became a major guideline of his later thought, at first strongly influenced by Albrecht Ritschl, but quite independent later on from Ritschl's rather one-sided interpretation of the reformer. The liberal streak of his thought caused a deep conflict with his father; which seems to have been resolved no sooner than at the deathbed of the old pastor, even though Söderblom was unswerving in his reverence for him.

A further boost towards a wider perspective in religion and in life as a whole was Söderblom's two-month stay in the United States, in particular his participation as a delegate to the Student Christian Movement's conference in Northfield, Massachusetts, in 1890. He was impressed both by the personality of its leader, Dwight L. Moody, and by the fact that members of the most different

denominations, conservative as well as liberal, were able to discuss the Christian faith without the slightest attempt at proselytizing. This was the first formative ecumenical experience for him.

In 1891, Söderblom met Anna Forsell, daughter of a sea captain and a student of history. They quickly fell in love with each other, and they got engaged the following year, the day after Söderblom had taken his exam as *teologie kandidat* (roughly corresponding to a master's degree). Doctoral studies in the field of history of religions followed. This decision was motivated by his early interest in foreign missions as well as in the question of the essence of religion itself and the place of Christianity within it. His doctoral thesis treated the eschatology of the ancient Persian religion of Mazdeism.

In 1892 he was ordained. His professional life began with an appointment as chaplain at a psychiatric ward in a suburb of Uppsala. Only a year on, he was informed that there was to be an opening at the pastorate for the Scandinavian congregation in Paris in 1894. He applied and got the post. Anna and he got married soon after that. The new development also meant that he had to rush his doctoral thesis through the necessary steps. He did submit it in the nick of time—and was refused. So he had to rework and enlarge it in Paris.

The pastoral tasks in France included both the congregation in Paris which was quite a mixed lot: some diplomats, many domestic servants and manual workers, some artists; and care for Scandinavian sailors in Calais during the summertime. In both places, Söderblom encountered severe problems of poverty and exploitation. But with his active support of the needy and natural charm he easily won the trust of the people. Participation in a conference of the “Evangelic Social Congress” around Friedrich Naumann in Erfurt in 1896 helped him view the social problems in a larger perspective. These experiences found their literary echo in a book on “The Sermon on the Mount in Our Time,” as well as in an interesting little treatise on “Religion and Social Development.”¹ In the latter, he turned against both Manchester capitalism and Marxist revolutionary ideas and pleaded for a reformist stance. Apart from these issues, there was one more thing that particularly aroused his interest and wrath. That was the infamous Dreyfus affair and the ugly face of anti-Semitism. In addition to all this, Söderblom had to take care of a rapidly growing

family. The first five out of twelve children were born in Paris—one of whom died in infancy during these years. The parents also extended generous hospitality to artists and many others and took a lively interest in the great city's cultural life.

Last but not least, Söderblom underwent a hefty program of academic studies at the Sorbonne. He heard lectures by historians of religion like Antoine Meillet and Albert Réville, famous theologians like Auguste Sabatier, and philosophers like Émile Boutroux and Henri Bergson. Of these, Sabatier, co-founder of the school of symbolo-fideism, became his most important teacher. Sabatier's basic tenet that all religious statements are symbolic in nature became part of the groundwork of Söderblom's own theological concept. Finally, the friendship with the renowned Roman Catholic scholar Alfred Loisy should be mentioned. Loisy was later excommunicated as a modernist. Through discussions with him, with Paul Sabatier, biographer of St. Francis of Assisi, as well as with mainstream Catholics Söderblom gained a many-faceted picture of Roman Catholicism which was of great importance for his later ecumenical work.

Small wonder that finishing his doctoral thesis in the midst of all these activities took its time, all the more since he extended it from a very specialized study on Persian religion into a comparative study in the eschatology of all those major religions that have developed one.² He thus laid the ground for his scholarly life-work of a phenomenology of religion which covered the whole world of religions. He submitted his thesis in time and passed his doctoral exam with flying colors in 1901.

Then two vastly different but equally incisive events happened in rapid succession. First, his father died—thankfully not before reconciliation between the two men had occurred. Second, Söderblom's application for a professor's chair in the history of religions at the theological faculty of Uppsala University was accepted. So now he had to start academic teaching. He was already remembered in Uppsala for two lectures he had given earlier as part of the application process: one on Schleiermacher's famous *Speeches on Religion*; the other a comparative study of temptation: Buddha, Zoroaster, and Jesus. Yet the reception he received was quite mixed.

The students were enthusiastic, whereas the conservative faculty was pretty reserved because of the new professor's liberal outlook.

Söderblom's inaugural lecture and his introductory speech to the students became a milestone in the history of the faculty. Theology was not a very attractive field of study in Sweden in those years. Söderblom's vigorous plea for reconciliation between genuine Christian piety and modern theology, with the express inclusion of the history of religions as an integral part of it, did a lot to change that. The two fields were to be united by a common respect for reality, he said. General history of religion served to sharpen the eyes both for the kinship of Christianity with other religions and also for its very essence. For useful studies in this field some religious experience of one's own is an indispensable prerequisite, but that must not lead to partisan judgment on any religion. Söderblom conceded that such an unprejudiced approach did not preclude severe religious crises for the students, such as the one he himself had gone through. Nonetheless, he congratulated them on their choice of study and profession.

As the field of history of religion had been rapidly expanding since the latter half of the nineteenth century, the new job meant an enormous workload. Furthermore, given that the chair Söderblom occupied had the nebulous name of *teologiska prenotioner och encyklopedi* (roughly: "encyclopedia of preconceptions of theology"), his scholarly focus could also be understood as a free-for-all. Söderblom did consider it his primary task to plow through the whole of world religions both empirically and philosophically (with a particular emphasis on primitive religions and on Buddhism). But as he consistently viewed Christianity as part of the general history of religion, he felt free to include such subjects as Roman Catholic modernism, Luther, and Swedish church history.³ All of these were very much in need of fresh insights. The subject of Catholicism became particularly urgent when the Vatican excommunicated the rebellious modernists.⁴ His lecture on these became the basis of a book on "The Problem of Religion within Catholicism and Protestantism," probably still the best treatment of modernism but unfortunately never translated.⁵ The likes of Loisy, John Henry Newman, and Friedrich von Hügel are viewed as more or less

radical in many respects, such as their use of historical criticism to investigate Scripture, yet also as arch-Catholic, in that all of them continued to cling to the Roman church as the ultimate authority.

One more book should be mentioned in particular, just because it has rarely received the attention it deserves, namely, *The Study of Religion*.⁶ It is an overview of that entire scholarly discipline, intended as an introduction for students, one that systematically exposes the relationships among its different parts. As such it stands in the tradition of Schleiermacher's famous *Kurze Darstellung des theologischen Studiums*, yet is distinguished from it in three important aspects. Although Christianity is the first and most extensively treated religion, because it is the most important one in the Western world, it is not the exclusive subject but is incorporated into the world of religions in general. Second, a philosophical definition is not offered at the beginning, since such a definition is the goal of the project, following empirical descriptions, comparisons, and evaluations within the philosophy of religion. Third, church government (both as shaping its organization and as free theological reflection) is not the one purpose of studying religion, as with Schleiermacher, but rather a by-product. Nonetheless Söderblom thinks that this by-product is even more effectively served by his approach than by the conventional exclusiveness of Christian theology.

Söderblom's standing in the faculty as well as in his church was not free of conflict. One example was his old friend Samuel Fries, whose application for the chair of New Testament exegesis fell through in 1902 because of his liberal views, whereas a decidedly less qualified candidate was preferred. Even more disturbing was the case of Torgny Segerstedt, one of his disciples, the following year. His doctoral thesis on the origin of polytheism, though excellent from a scholarly point of view, was rejected by the majority of the faculty on the ground that it lacked "Christian substance."⁷ That created a veritable public scandal—to no avail. Söderblom then for a while even thought of resigning from his post.

One particular interest of Söderblom during his period as an Uppsala professor was to shake up the faculty's provincialism by broadening relations with other countries. His most obvious

achievement in this respect is setting up the Olaus Petri Foundation. This outfit was meant as an equivalent to the Gifford- and Hibbert Lectures in Britain. A wealthy lady had donated a considerable sum of money for the purpose. The foundation, which is still in existence, has indeed lived up to its goal. Luminaries such as Franz Cumont, Ignaz Goldziher, Adolf Harnack, Friedrich Heiler, and Rudolf Otto have delivered lectures there. In addition, gifted students were to be given scholarships for a year of study abroad.

Söderblom did not limit his activities to his duties as an academic teacher. He also served as a part-time pastor at *Trefaldighetskyrkan* (Trinity Church), and he took an active part in the *ungkyrkorörelse* (Young Church Movement). That was a movement for church reform with an emphasis on lay activity and striving to deliver the state church from its widespread staleness and superficiality, to counter atheistic tendencies in the intellectual world, to appeal to the younger generation, and to win back the class of laborers. It turned out to be the most significant such movement in the twentieth century. It harbored pretty strong nationalistic undercurrents during its first years, but since the beginning of World War I it moved towards Söderblom's more international course. Far more wholehearted was Söderblom's support of the movement's social policies. The most obvious case in point was his very explicit vote for more social justice during the Great Strike of 1909. That secured him the attention of many a trade union representative later on when he had become archbishop.

Domestic reform would not suffice, Söderblom felt. The Swedish church had to open its eyes to the outside world. There had already been talk of a rapprochement between the Anglican and the Swedish churches, on the ground that both had bishops and the apostolic succession. But these talks had been lingering for some time. That changed when Söderblom invited an Anglican delegation to Uppsala in 1909. They agreed with the Swedes on many things in principle, despite the fact that Söderblom had unequivocally stated that the apostolic succession was a good thing but not essential for the goal of church unity. However, it took until 1922 until the two churches formally agreed on inter-communion. All of these activities created an important platform for those larger ecumenical plans which had been launched by then.

In order to introduce his own church to the Anglican community as a whole, Söderblom wrote two longer essays in an American journal.⁸ The former of these describes the origin of the Swedish state church, how it was able to retain its independent administration when virtually all bishops converted to the Reformation, how all those traditions were carefully preserved that did not contradict the Lutheran interpretation of the faith, and how it defended its independence against state efforts to meddle with its internal affairs, most notably at the synod of 1593 against the machinations of the Swedish-Polish king Sigismund III to force it back into Roman Catholicism. The second essay contains the nucleus of Söderblom's ecumenical theory: Since the time of a monolithic church organization has irrevocably gone by, the goal must be a new *corpus evangelicorum*. Such a body should not be uniform but preserve the different traditions of the various Protestant churches. They were to be united in both "contest" and "cooperation."⁹

The year 1912 brought the next important change in Söderblom's life. He had received a call to the new chair of history of religions at the University of Leipzig in Germany. He simultaneously kept his professorship in Uppsala since he considered the new assignment as only temporary. But inevitably he was more removed from his manifold activities back home. So this period turned out to be the pinnacle of Söderblom's scholarly career.

Leipzig was a booming industrial and commercial city of 600,000 inhabitants with an extremely attractive cultural life. It was the presentations of Bach's music, for one, which particularly appealed to the Söderbloms. There were interesting members of the faculty like the church historian Albert Hauck and the systematic theologian Ludwig Ihmels. On the other hand, this was also the time of brash militaristic nationalism on the eve of the Great War. So for all his considerable success in teaching and his love for German culture, Söderblom never felt quite at home in the country.

Of his teaching program, it is the lectures on Comparative Eschatology and on Holiness that stand out. Both subjects were carried through the whole history of religions. The lecture on eschatology was much more than a rehash of his doctoral thesis. It included, for instance, a thoroughgoing critique of modern

philosophers of history such as Friedrich Nietzsche. However, more important, even in Söderblom's own estimation, was the lecture on the idea of holiness. Here special attention was given to the "primitive" religions. These were thought by contemporary researchers to provide the key to the essence of religion itself. Söderblom did not share this view, which to a large extent was a romantic reaction of nineteenth century scholars to an increasingly mechanistic and positivistic view on life. But he did consider the notions of *mana* and *taboo* as important keys to that problem. This lecture became the basis of his most important book in the field, *Gudstrons uppkomst*, which appeared in Swedish in 1914 and in German in 1916 (as *Das Werden des Gottesglaubens*).¹⁰ More on that below.

May 20, 1914, produced a great surprise: Söderblom's nomination as archbishop of Sweden. Only weeks later, the First World War broke out. This was more than just coincidence. It meant that from now on, Söderblom's church activities were inseparably intertwined with his untiring efforts to help restore peace. He rightly interpreted the new turn of world events as the most devastating catastrophe of modern times, which marked the definitive end to the cultural optimism of the preceding period.¹¹

Söderblom was installed in his new office on November 8, 1914. His first official action was the publication of a voluminous pastoral letter.¹² In it he aimed at three things in particular. One, he stretched out a hand of dialogue to the strong conservative forces in his church who were extremely skeptical of his nomination, without however compromising on his liberal convictions. Second, he praised social reforms by the state as an indirect effect of Christian ethics and tried to win over the estranged working class from their hostile attitude towards religion. Third, and most importantly, he spoke of the daunting tasks that the new world situation posed to his country and also his church. This part of the letter was reinforced by the sermon of September 6 on "The Two Gods" which belongs to the most lucid texts we have of him. Here he severely criticizes the national "gods" or idols, holding sway even in the churches of the warring nations. Later, he chided the self-righteousness of the neutral nations as equally doomed.¹³

In his new function Söderblom proved to be equally gifted for pastoral care and the administration of a large organization. Probably his most outstanding achievements were the thorough inspections of the congregations. He had an excellent rapport with people of all walks of life, and he could remember for years the details of many a person he had met only once. Equally important were his great strides at opening up the rather stuffy church life both toward a more natural relationship to the Free Churches and to the churches of the world.

This leads us to Söderblom's ecumenical activities. The outbreak of the war had demonstrated to him the necessity for the churches in the neutral countries of taking on the task of mediation. This concerned not only the peace appeals which they repeatedly issued under Söderblom's leadership. More immediately these churches strove to bring together to the conference table church leaders from the warring countries. These activities met with fierce resistance in the warring nations, not only during the war, but even afterwards. Many people saw Söderblom as part of the problem because he had criticized the war crimes of both sides with equal severity. Yet it is mostly due to his stubbornly following through with his plans that finally, in 1925, some seven years after the war ended, that the first world conference of churches could take place in Stockholm.

That conference was the first big international meeting of the "Life and Work" branch of the ecumenical movement. Söderblom considered the other branch, "Faith and Order," as quite useful; in fact, he served as one of its vice-presidents for several years. But since he was convinced that the major differences between the churches in theology and church constitution would be here to stay, having a centuries-old development behind them, "Life and Work" always had priority for him. From this fact his adversaries within both Roman Catholicism and conservative Protestantism derived the critical jibe that the conference lacked a theological foundation. We shall see that this is utterly wrong. But indeed, its primary goal was to establish a basis for cooperation in coping with the tremendous misery, both material and spiritual, that the war had left behind. Wisely, Söderblom had reached an agreement beforehand that the hot question of who was guilty of the war was excluded from the

conference's agenda. Therefore the conversations occurred in a surprisingly amiable atmosphere. This in itself can be counted as a great success.

Understandably, though, tensions were not entirely absent. The situation was confounded by the fact that not only was the confrontation of nationalities a source of irritation, but there was also a deep chasm between two main theological traditions within Protestantism. This concerned the very principles for approaching social and political problems. On one side there was conservative Lutheranism with its doctrine of the orders of creation. According to that, government was the executor of God's will and had to be obeyed, almost regardless of what it decreed. The Kingdom of God would then have direct relevance only for the personal life of Christians, whereas worldly institutions had to follow their own rules dictated by practical reason. The Anglo-Saxon line of thought, which was guided both by Calvinism and the American Social Gospel, differed radically from that approach. Churchmen of this school believed that the Kingdom of God was a goal to be brought about by social action. Söderblom, a Lutheran but open to Calvinist ideas, took an intermediate position. For him, it went without saying that the Kingdom of God can only be brought about by God himself. However, Christianity proclaims that believers inspired by the love of God will extend that love, not only to their personal relationships, but also to society at large. Social and political institutions as such cannot be regarded as the work of God but are steeped in sinfulness and therefore in constant need of being improved. The conference neither yielded a solution to the theological problems, nor did it produce much in the way of tangible results concerning the urgent practical needs. Yet it had laid the foundation for a more peaceful cooperation in the future.

However, hopes for progress in this area were subdued considerably during the coming years. Nationalism increasingly grew in strength once again and it finally led to the rise of Fascism and National Socialism which for many years brought the ecumenical accomplishments to nil. The ecumenical movement itself also lacked the necessary drive, particularly since Söderblom, its energetic leader, increasingly suffered poor health and was less and less able to

shoulder his enormous workload. The follow-up Continuation Committee did not work efficiently. And the next big conference in Lausanne in 1927, in which Söderblom took part, this time of the Faith and Order branch, was a flop. It foundered because the Anglo-Catholic wing of the Anglican Church, which was strongly represented there, had insisted on episcopacy as the indispensable presupposition for any kind of church unity. In addition, the Vatican, which had already refused to take part in the Stockholm Conference, unequivocally doomed the ecumenical movement as heretical in the encyclical "Mortalium animos" in 1928 and prohibited Catholics in no uncertain terms from participating in any of its activities.¹⁴

As there was no significant success to be expected in the field of ecumenism for the foreseeable future, Söderblom to a certain extent was able again to turn to his scholarly interests. Even before Stockholm, he had managed to produce a remarkable book on Luther, based on life-long study of the Reformer's writings. It contains lectures delivered in Swedish churches mostly on the occasion of the 400th anniversary of the Reformation in 1917. Already its title arouses curiosity: *Humor and Melancholy and Other Studies in Luther*.¹⁵ It is not, as one might surmise from that, a psychological interpretation in the strict sense. However, as Söderblom was convinced that religion is basically a personal relationship to the holy, with all institutional aspects including doctrine being only secondary, his aim was to locate the new understanding of the Christian faith firmly in Luther's personal life. So he made heavy use of the sermons, the table talks and the letters. Humor represents Luther's distance from himself and melancholy represents his frequent tribulations. His central concern, Söderblom claimed, is with the problem of certainty of faith without the mediation of the church's authority.

During his tenure as archbishop Söderblom only infrequently reverted to his proper field of history of religion. Here he only was able to publish a couple of articles, maybe because he felt that he had not been able to participate in the ongoing debates for too long. He did find the time to summarize his life work in the Gifford Lectures on "The Living God," which he delivered toward the very end of his life in 1931. However, he could only conceive and deliver the

former half of it before he died; of the second half only an outline and a few notes are extant in his records.¹⁶

But the lull in the ecumenical development seems to have suggested to Söderblom that he should devote some time to the very core of theology. This he did in writing a book on the passion of Christ, *Kristi pinas historia* ("History of Christ's Suffering"). It is an interpretation of the passion story for laity.¹⁷ One can also call it a literary work of art. On the face of it, the book offers "only" an interpretation of the Biblical narrative on the basis of a solid historical exegesis. But it is conceived as a drama, a bit like a passion play, with "acts" and "scenes." There is a compilation of texts from the Gospels at the head of each part which is assigned the function of the choir in a Greek tragedy: announcing what is going to happen next. The text is interspersed with references to different views of the passion in the history of devotional life and in literature and art, as well as with comparisons to other religions, thus opening a world-wide perspective. In addition the author constantly refers to the church's life today. There is a long passage on our participation in the Lord's Supper. So the "congregation" finds itself on the "stage" too, as it were. It is also represented by the many stanzas from hymns and poems at the end of many passages. All of this serves to express the basic tenet of the book: the purpose of Christ's vicarious suffering is our salvation and that of all humankind. It sets an end to all ritual sacrifice as it actually is God's own love which sacrifices itself on the Cross.

A fitting reward for an extraordinary career was the conferment of the Nobel Peace Prize upon him in 1930. Söderblom probably was the only laureate in history who had known Alfred Nobel personally. He had talked over the latter's idea of the foundation with him in Paris and buried him in San Remo in 1896. He could remind his listeners in his official speech that even Nobel had thought of an international court of arbitration and of sanctions against war.¹⁸

The final years of Söderblom's life were increasingly marked by illnesses. He had already had bleeding stomach ulcers in the period of 1906—1908, and he had a heart attack in 1922, with frequent bouts of angina pectoris in the following years. In July 1931, he

suffered an onslaught of intestinal obstruction. Because of the acute danger to his life, the doctors had to decide for immediate surgery, in spite of the risk posed by the poor condition of the patient's heart. The operation was successful, but two massive heart attacks followed. Söderblom died on July 12, 1931, when he was only sixty-five years old. But he left a truly remarkable literary heritage.

Söderblom's Works

Revelation

Söderblom's first important publication after his installment as professor was a booklet on the nature of revelation.¹⁹ It was occasioned by two lectures of the German orientalist Friedrich Delitzsch on Babylon and the Bible, who asserted the moral and religious superiority of Babylonian culture over ancient Israel. He concluded that the Old Testament could not lay claim to be based on divine revelation because of its many moral shortcomings.²⁰ This publication had caused quite a stir in Germany and beyond. Söderblom replied briefly on two points. First, there is no exact correspondence between the development of culture and of religion, since a supernatural origin can be claimed only for the latter. Second, revelation must not be identified with the verbal inspiration of the Bible or information about a doctrine, as Delitzsch had done. Rather, it is the divine itself which is revealed to the believer.

From this starting point Söderblom went on to unfold a theory of revelation with the aim of determining Christianity's locus in the world of religions. For him the most plausible explanation of the existence of religions is that they are not based on human invention but on some kind of divine initiative. However, as revelation enters a cultural context, it takes on different shapes. Söderblom distinguished between general and special revelation. General revelation is not what orthodoxy took the term to mean, nor has it anything to do with the abstract "natural religion" of the Enlightenment. Rather, it takes on a peculiar individuality in every single historical religious collective. Nonetheless, general revelation is represented by a specific type of religion that is characterized by the contrast between nature and spirit.

Söderblom called these the religions of culture and of nature. Such religions belong to clans, tribes, and nations. They are bound up with tangible objects, such as holy locations, rites and customs, organizations and their representatives, holy books and so on. One can therefore also speak of institutional religions.

But there is a tendency in this type of religion to radicalize the contrast of nature and spirit into the “dualism” of finite and infinite. It then becomes a “mysticism of infinity” which is marked by an essentially negative evaluation of the world. Therefore its goal is to redeem the individual from suffering by dissolving it in infinity. The most obvious example is the nirvana of Buddhism. The goal here is to be achieved by asceticism and exercises of meditation. Such religions are thus based on a mysticism of exercise.

Thus far this seems to be a pretty clear description. However, the terminology is not without certain flaws. For example, the classification of Buddhism, of all religions, as a religion of culture, even though its objective is to leave the whole world behind it, including culture, seems unfortunate.²¹ This is probably why Söderblom later abandoned that terminology. On the other hand, we have those religions which are based on special revelation. That term is not to be identified with the biblical religions, nor is it a term of dogmatics, but one of the phenomenology of religions. It denotes a kind of revelation that occurs through a particular person, the founder of a religion, at a particular time and place in history, and entails something essentially new. Söderblom called these religions prophetic or personal religions, such as Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity. Their godhead is not a nondescript infinity but a “living God” who acts in history and turns directly to the heart of the human person. The guiding principle of such religions is the “dualism” of good and evil. Therefore they put a strong emphasis on ethics and the conscience of the believer. This implies a positive attitude to the world as a good creation which is entrusted to humankind for cultivating.

The contrast between the two kinds of religion is stark but not absolute. So the institutional religions also are to some extent personal in that they require wholehearted support. On the other hand, even personal religions cannot do without an institutional

framework like tradition, symbolic actions, and the like. It is the priorities that count. A case in point is the relationship between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. For the former, adherence to the church as an institution is the prerequisite for participation in salvation, whereas for Protestantism it is personal faith which is primary. This faith does create a church institution, too, which is indispensable for its social life in this world, but for the Protestant it is secondary to the community of believers and, like all human products, of only preliminary duration. Similarly, there are moments of meditation and of “exercise” even in prophetic religions, but they are to be strictly subordinated to the immediacy of personal certainty.

One might add that the relative right thus accorded even to a mysticism of infinity implies the insight that a rigidly exclusive preference of prophetic religion would lure us into the trap of anthropomorphism. This is probably what Söderblom had in mind when he indicated a certain relativity to his distinction. Yet to my knowledge he did not explicitly state that anywhere. So predominant was his orientation by the philosophy of personality of his great mentor Erik Gustaf Geijer that he contented himself with just that hint.

A further criterion for the distinction between types of religions is their view of suffering. It is at this point that Buddhism and Christianity come to represent the exemplary opposites within the history of religions. While the Buddhist seeks to escape suffering, aiming at a state of infinite harmony, the Christian expressly integrates it in the road to salvation. Söderblom illustrates this point with Luther’s tribulations, thereby implicitly criticizing even some tendencies in contemporary Protestant liberal theology.

Holiness

Söderblom’s most important feat in the field of history of religion is his discovery of the idea of holiness as basic to all religions, years before Rudolf Otto’s famous book on *The Idea of the Holy* (1917). If religion is based on revelation, not on human cunning, then its origin is supernatural. This origin ought to be the same for all religions. It then cannot be equated with the notion of God, since

neither Buddhism nor primitive religions worship a God. Söderblom's name for this supernatural origin is holiness. The notion of holiness thus is even more basic than the idea of God. It is that which inspires utter fear and trembling as well as unlimited trust and certainty. Söderblom stated this double character of all religion early on, almost in passing, in a book review, at that time still without using the very term of holiness: "The sentiments of trust and fear, accompanied by a cult and exerting a powerful influence on all of life, the total of feelings, actions, and concepts, which we call religion . . ." ²² Söderblom had first hit upon the notion of holiness in the Old Testament, of course. In his first lecture on the subject in Uppsala 1912, he still devoted more than half of his time to that source. ²³ Other elements contributing to his understanding of holiness were his deep religious experiences that solved the crisis he had been suffering in his student days, as well as his intensive study of Martin Luther.

These facts notwithstanding, it is not appropriate to say that Söderblom had tried to force a notion from the Judeo-Christian tradition on the whole world of religion. It was, as we have already mentioned, particularly his thorough study of the primitive religions that provided him with plenty of other pertinent samples. This subject was attractive for him not just because it was so predominant in contemporary research, but also because it was closely related to Christian missions. It was missionaries to whom the bulk of the knowledge of those religions was still owed. For a scholar in comparative religions whose goal it was to discover the very essence of religion as such, that entailed an enticement to inquire for similarities despite the vast cultural differences. However, Söderblom went far beyond that and searched the whole world of religions in order to be sure of the result.

For that purpose, Söderblom also had to examine critically the many competing theories of his day which claimed to define the essence of all religions by one single scheme: animism, totemism, and others. I cannot here reproduce this highly complex debate. ²⁴ Suffice it to say that Söderblom found a grain of truth in all of them but deemed them deficient altogether in their single-cause simplicity: No key opens all doors, as he often said.

For his own solution he claimed two basic presuppositions. One is revelation. This is directed not only against David Hume's theory of religion and, even more so, against Ludwig Feuerbach's scathing criticism, but more specifically against a very successful author of his own time, the French sociologist Émile Durkheim. This scholar derived religion from the desire of primitive society to establish a basis for minimum moral authority. In effect, religion was for him the self-deification of human society.²⁵ In the excessive nationalism of his day, Söderblom may have seen the practical consequences of Durkheim's view.

It has been concluded from Söderblom's criticism of Durkheim that he was not interested in the social aspect of religion. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Religious rites and customs played a significant role in his teaching, let alone his lively interest in the institutional shape of the Christian church.²⁶ He did insist, however, that though religion certainly does have important social functions, it cannot be defined by these but exceeds all functions it might perchance be serving.

The second presupposition is that religion, in spite of its close relation to ethics, by all means is more than just the foundation of morals or a sort of meta-ethics. Rather, Söderblom reminds us of Schleiermacher's injunction that religion is a realm all of itself, neither separated from morals or rationality, nor identical to either of them. In this respect, he has gone through a process of development. At the onset of his earliest article on holiness, he at first stressed the genuinely religious character of the notion. But as he went on, he so much emphasized religion's function of reinforcing the moral imperative, that in the end it appears to be some kind of meta-ethics after all.²⁷ This was very much in line with contemporary Neo-Kantian philosophy of religion.²⁸ But in the following years he gradually elaborated more clearly the specifically religious character of holiness and established it as the one concept that defines all religion. In a book written in 1910 one characteristic sentence can be found which he frequently repeated: "A pious person is the one who seriously considers something as holy."²⁹ Here he differentiates between a more ethically-oriented (Kant) and a more esthetically-oriented approach (Goethe); above these, he places Luther who is said to represent a truly existential religious attitude.

Definite clarity on this point was, however, not reached before the Leipzig years. This was when Söderblom not only wrote his fundamental article on Holiness for the renowned *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, but also presented his lecture on holiness in a completely new version.³⁰ He now made more extensive use than before of the terms *taboo* and *mana*. Human religion is nothing but unconditional submission to the mysterious power of holiness. This power consists of the threat of annihilation and at the same time the source of life. The basic feeling it incites in humans is awe.³¹ Ultimately there is a tendency in the history of religions to overcome the ubiquitous distinction between “holy” and “profane” in the direction of sanctification of the whole world. Söderblom illustrated all this with an overwhelming wealth of examples. He thereby showed that his concept had definitely grown beyond being just a synthesis of Old Testament and primitive religions.

There still is a certain one-sidedness in this lecture which is already indicated in its heading: it works primarily with the notion of *taboo* (9 out of 20 paragraphs), much less with *mana*, so that holiness appears to be inspiring primarily fear. “Mercy” is declared to be only secondary in this context (pp. 105–109). This is corrected in the book *Gudstrons uppkomst*, which contains the definitive version of Söderblom’s theory of holiness. Now it is the positive power of *mana* which takes the lead.³² The aspect of fear by no means disappears. On the contrary, it continues to serve as a strong defense against any bland religion of culture or naive complacency. But this latest turn did enable Söderblom to work out the creative capacity of holiness which in the final analysis supercedes its destructive capacity.

It may be instructive to add a short comparison with Rudolf Otto’s book *The Idea of the Holy*.³³ This book obviously came after Söderblom’s main contributions to the subject; Otto had already reviewed *Gudstrons uppkomst* in its Swedish version, and in some ways he built upon the ideas elaborated there. However, he had been inquiring on the same track even earlier. Apart from the question of priority there is also a difference in content. What Otto called the Holy is a synthesis of the irrational Numinous (divine) with rationality (this term taken in a very wide sense). It is this synthesis which aroused Otto’s interest (compare the book’s subtitle),

a synthesis which develops along with culture in the course of history until it reaches its peak in Christianity. So the decisive motivation obviously comes from Christian theology, not so much from comparative religion. For Söderblom on the other hand, the holy is that which Otto called the “Numinous.” Therefore, in his view the holy can be subject neither to any kind of synthesis or development, because it is the supernatural itself. It is the human being’s confrontation with this destructive and creative transcendent power which attracted Söderblom’s attention. He was thereby better able than Otto to avoid any domestication of the idea of the holy. This is why Gustaf Aulén was probably right in considering Söderblom’s concept superior to that of his German colleague.³⁴

Mediation

The holy must be mediated in some way if it is to be understood by humans. Having excluded synthesis as a means to that end, Söderblom suggested a dialectical process of *contest* and *cooperation* between the various religions which keeps occurring throughout all of history. When and how this process reaches its goal must be left to God, even though Christians are personally convinced that their religion will be vindicated in the end. This basic openness recommends Söderblom’s concept as conforming to the reality of a pluralistic world of religions.

This idea of “contest” and “cooperation” was originally taken not from the science of religions but from social science. Söderblom borrowed the former term from the British social philosopher Benjamin Kidd.³⁵ It had been Kidd’s contention that in the general struggle for survival the race with the best religiously-based moral system would survive, and that was to his mind the Anglo-Saxons’ system. Söderblom did not buy the Darwinist and racist implications of this treatise, and he added the idea of cooperation for good measure. He did, however, use the term of “contest” as one of the key notions of his social theory.

Söderblom first applied that idea to the social problems of his day, as indicated above. Clearly in accord with the German Naumann group, he directed it against both exploitative capitalism and the

ideology of revolutionary class struggle. Instead he pleaded for peaceful, non-violent negotiations between labor and management (later to be called cooperation), for union power and gradual elimination of paternalism, better housing and working conditions. This does not preclude strikes which are sometimes unavoidable. But the negotiating table should be preferred if possible.³⁶

In the following years he extended the use of the term to cover all kinds of social relationships: to religions (especially in the context of missions), to Christian denominations, to nations. In all those cases, he combined it with “cooperation” or one of its synonyms.³⁷

By this extension Söderblom made several important implications which must be pointed out explicitly. For one thing, he made religion a subject not only of the science of religion but also of his social philosophy. That means that religion in spite of its indispensable base in personal experience also is a social phenomenon as a collective individuality. It is in this latter respect that it is involved in contest and cooperation. Second, the connotations of contest or competition are not, as Söderblom’s biographer Sundkler would have it, limited to something as harmless as a sporting contest.³⁸ Rather, they include even violent conflicts such as war. The point here is that such conflicts must be defused as quickly and effectively as possible, so that competition can really be coupled with cooperation.

A few more remarks are necessary on contest and cooperation in the ecumenical context. It is here that these notions have come to play their most important role. Not surprisingly, it is also in this area that the most grievous misunderstandings of Söderblom’s theory have occurred, with consequences that in part influence even current debates on church unity. It is a well-known fact that Söderblom often lamented the separations and disunity of the Christian church and worked hard for decades to overcome them. However, the question is what sort of unity it is that he wanted to be installed.

It may be taken for granted that in criticizing disunity, it was very much the polemics and even downright hatred so common between Roman Catholics and Protestants at the time that provoked Söderblom’s criticism, as well as the sometimes strained relations between the Lutheran state church and the “free churches” (Baptists,

Pentecostals, etc.) in his own country. It does not follow from this, however, that his goal was one single uniform super-church the world over. On the contrary, that is the Roman Catholic ideal of church unity. For Söderblom, his basic notions of contest and cooperation clearly show that in his vision of unity the different denominations would continue to exist. It is not variety as such which constituted the problem; separations of different church bodies sometimes even turn out to be inevitable, as in the case of the Reformation, even though Luther had never actually wanted to found a new church institution. Besides, as a historian of religion Söderblom knew very well that no large world religion has ever been able to maintain a monolithic organization in the long run. So what he aimed at was a “unity in variety.”³⁹

Söderblom’s earliest model of such a unity may have been the Massachusetts conference that he had attended as a young student. Another link is an essay by the German church historian Adolf Harnack. It uses the picture of a garden where there is a residence for each of the Christian denominations. These have their different accommodations but share common responsibility for the garden.⁴⁰ Similarly, Söderblom stated that the unity of the churches consisted in their common faith in Christ, whereas their joint responsibility meant confronting the misery in the world. In this way, Protestantism could justly claim its own kind of universality or catholicity, with equal legitimacy as the Greek Orthodox and the Roman churches. This is what Söderblom called “evangelic catholicity.”⁴¹ Those three large representatives of the Christian tradition must be able to coexist peacefully.⁴² The only adequate organizational structure for church unity then is some sort of federation, something like the Federal Council of Churches in the United States. Indeed Söderblom as early as in 1919 launched the idea of a World Council of Churches.⁴³ Uniformity of doctrine and organization, on the other hand, could only be achieved by either force or hypocrisy. Neither of these is an option to which Protestants could or should agree. However, Söderblom strongly emphasized that the combination of contest and cooperation must be imbued with love.⁴⁴

The great test of these ideas was the Conference of Life and Work in Stockholm in 1925. Söderblom had conceived of it all along as

the churches becoming the vanguard of reconciliation between the nations. He even thought of the Christian faith as the “soul” of the League of Nations. This organization had to establish an international order of law. Such an order was, to Söderblom’s mind, a continuation of God’s creation. In order to be that, it needed a religious foundation. It appears that church unity (of the kind just described) was to him no less than a continuation of God’s revelation in Christ. This parallelism between the League and ecumenism does not entail, however, that it is the church which should be the League’s soul, as a Swedish churchman has suggested.⁴⁵ Söderblom had thought of a religious, not an ecclesiastical basis for international law. Whether or not there was any chance of the Christian faith to be accepted as such by the League is, of course, open to debate, to say the least. For the League consisted not only of (nominally) Christian nations and its dependencies but also of non-Christian ones such as Persia, China, and Japan. But before discarding this as just a relic of the age-old dream of a “Christian world,” one should remember that Söderblom had, in an interesting little booklet of 1919, uttered the hope that religion might undergo a thorough renewal.⁴⁶ The world catastrophe of the war had caused immense suffering and thereby destroyed the previous century’s illusion of infinite progress towards a better world. So it was the religion of the Cross that Söderblom hoped could serve as a more adequate basis for modern life than old-time liberalism.

Söderblom’s Legacy

Söderblom was, like everyone else, a child of his time. But he was also one of those geniuses able to glimpse beyond the confines of their immediate present. Therefore it does not appear futile to raise the question what legacy this man’s work may have for our own time. First, Söderblom understood his *phenomenology of religion* as a comparative study of religions with the aim of getting a clear picture not only of what distinguishes them but also of what they have in common, in order to get an idea of what religion as such really is. This search appears to have largely been abandoned in the field of history of religion. This is due to the pervasive suspicion that it is

guided by an illegitimate interest of Christian theology. Therefore many scholars in the field have reverted to the nineteenth-century ideal of “pure” or “objective” science. However, the ideal of absolute objectivity has been shown to be an epistemological mirage by nineteenth-century philosophers like Wilhelm Dilthey and by twentieth-century sociology of knowledge. The subconscious romanticism of the frantic search for the essence of religion in primitive religions is a vivid illustration of the point. The insistence of some researchers that religion has to be understood exclusively as a stratagem of humans for reaching mundane ends is no proof of objectivity. Söderblom seems to me to be right in comparing that sort of “neutrality” to an unmusical person who sets out to judge a piece of music. Instead he claims that any historian of religion must have some kind of religious experience. Besides, modern empiricism tends to make religion *nothing but* a part of psychology, sociology, or ethnology. What kind of part? What is religion as such? For all the wealth of empirical data—which has increased tremendously since Söderblom’s day, making some of his findings obsolete—one often looks in vain for a clear-cut answer to such simple questions. Söderblom’s own description of religion as being gripped by the holy and proclaiming it in word and deed is, to my mind, as true today as when it was first stated. In addition, it is a timely antidote against the blandness and superficiality of much that calls itself religion in the Western world today.

In Söderblom’s time, European societies were not really pluralistic in religious terms. Yet his advice, secondly, to treat *religious pluralism* by means of a combination of contest and cooperation seems astonishingly appropriate, even today. It is threatened, however, from two quarters. One is Fundamentalism, which at Söderblom’s time was pretty much limited to the United States (Princeton theology) and not yet prone to use pressure or even force in order to further its agenda. But even here, Söderblom’s idea still defines the desirable method of inter-religious dialogue. To be sure, there are instances in which worldly authorities will have to intervene with some sort of coercion in order to preserve religious freedom. The other threat comes from secularism, which has spread so much more widely in the Western world since Söderblom’s time. Here the problem is that of

engaging people in a dialogue and cooperation that they do not seem to have any interest in. This may turn out to be just as difficult as inducing fundamentalists to a measure of tolerance. However, even this phenomenon does not speak against Soderblom's overall view.

What has been said about the relationship between religions analogously applies to that between the Christian denominations. It is much to be regretted that Soderblom's ingenious idea of *evangelic catholicity*, thirdly, has been either forgotten or distorted to mean a synthesis of Protestant "freedom of Christian people" with Roman Catholic belief in church authority. This is what Friedrich Heiler once construed Soderblom's idea to mean.⁴⁷ Today all too many Protestants of different persuasions seem to adhere to that kind of oxymoron. It seems to me particularly obvious in the talks conducted between the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Church. It does not take prophetic inspiration to predict that such talks will not get anywhere as long as this problem is not tackled. Meanwhile it is worth remembering that it is the World Council of Churches which thus far has followed Soderblom's concept fairly closely, and has fared far better in this respect.

As for the "*Christian soul*" that Soderblom demanded for the League of Nations, finally it seems obvious that this idea is definitely dated. Instead, the pairing of contest and cooperation should be applied to the different world views guiding the members of the United Nations. Yet recourse to some basic ideas common to all major religions like the obligation to procure peace certainly is the remaining grain of truth of Soderblom's proposal.

In sum, there is still a lot to be learned from the great Swedish scholar and churchman, and I hope that with improving accessibility of the sources he will be read more widely in the future.⁴⁸

NOTES

1 Nathan Soderblom, *Jesu bergspredikan och vår tid* (Stockholm: P. A. Norstedt, 1898), *Religionen och den sociala utvecklingen* (Stockholm: Bohlen and Co., 1898), German translation *Die Religion und die soziale Entwicklung* (Freiburg: J. C. B. Mohr, 1898).

2 Nathan Soderblom, *La vie future d'après le Mazdeisme a la lumiere des croyances paralleles des autres religions. Etude d'eschatologie comparee* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1901).

3 Bengt Sundkler, *Nathan Soderblom: His Life and Work* (Lund: Gleerup, 1968), 61ff.

- 4 Papal encyclical by Pius X, *Pascendi dominici gregis* (The Vatican, September 8, 1907) Denzinger 3475–3500
- 5 Nathan Soderblom, *Religionsproblemet inom katolicism och protestantism* (Stockholm H Gebers, 1910)
- 6 Nathan Soderblom, *Studiet av religionen* (Stockholm Ljus, 1908, 2nd and 3rd ed 1916) Reprinted in E Ehnmark, ed., *Om studiet av religionen* (Lund Gleerups, 1951), 49–152 German translation in D Lange, ed., *Nathan Soderblom, Ausgewählte Werke*, vol 1 (Göttingen Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 165–252 Not available in English
- 7 Eva Stohlander-Axelsson, *Ett brännglas för tidens strålar*, Ph D diss., Lund University (2001), esp 210ff., and 222
- 8 Nathan Soderblom, “On the Character of the Church of Sweden” and “On the Soul of the Church of Sweden,” *The Constructive Quarterly* 3 (1915), 281–310 and 506–45 Swedish version *Svenska kyrkans kropp och själ* (Stockholm P A Norstedt, 1916)
- 9 Nathan Soderblom, “On the Soul of the Church of Sweden,” 544 For more on these terms, see below
- 10 Nathan Soderblom, *Gudströms uppkomst* (Stockholm Hugo Gebers, 1914) German translation *Das Werden des Gottesglaubens* (Leipzig Hinrichs, 1916)
- 11 Nathan Soderblom, *Världskatastrofens inverkan* (1924), in his *Tal och skrifter*, vol 4 (Stockholm Åhlen & Soner, 1933), 249–261
- 12 Nathan Soderblom, *Herdabref* (Uppsala FC Askerberg, 1914)
- 13 Nathan Soderblom, *De två gudarne*, in Nathan Soderblom, *Nar stunderna vaxla och strida*, vol 2 (Stockholm 1935), German translation *Ausgewählte Werke Bd 1*, 127–37, idem, *Neutral egenrättfärdighet in Kristendomen och vår tid* 12 (1916), 116–122 English “Our Spiritual Peril as Neutrals,” *The Constructive Quarterly* 5 (1917, 91–96
- 14 Papal encyclical, *Mortalium animos* (The Vatican, 1928) in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 20 (1928), 5–16
- 15 Nathan Soderblom, *Humor och melankoli och andra Lutherstudier* (Stockholm Sveriges kristliga studentorelses, 1919) A German translation is in preparation as part of a 4-volume edition of *Selected Works* Not available in English
- 16 Nathan Soderblom, *Den levande Guden grundformer av personlig religion* (Stockholm Svenska Kyrkans Diakonistyrelses Bokförlag, 1932), English *The Living God* (London Oxford University Press, 1933)
- 17 Nathan Soderblom, *Kristi pinas historia Vår Herres Jesu Kristi lidande En passionsbok för stilla veckan och andra veckor* (Stockholm, 1928) German translation in *N S, Ausgewählte Werke*, vol 3 (Göttingen Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013)
- 18 Nathan Soderblom, *Kyrkans fredsplikt, dess vagar och mål* (Stockholm 1931), 3
- 19 Nathan Soderblom, *Uppenbarelsereligion* (Stockholm Svenska Kyrkans Diakonistyrelses Bokförlag, 1903, 2d ed., 1930) English translation *The Nature of Revelation* (New York Oxford University Press, 1933)
- 20 Friedrich Delitzsch, *Babel und Bibel* (Stuttgart Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1903, 2d ed., 1904) Friedrich Delitzsch (1850–1922) was the son of the Old Testament scholar Franz Delitzsch (1813–90)
- 21 This has been pointed out by the Dutch author J M van Veen, *Nathan Soderblom Leven en denken van een godsdiensthistoricus* (Amsterdam H J Paris, 1940), 169–172
- 22 Nathan Soderblom, review of E Stecké, *Die Urreligion der Germanen* in *Revue de l’histoire des religions* 42 (1900), 275–278 French in the original Here 277
- 23 Carl-Martin Edsman, *Manniskan och det heliga* (Stockholm Carlsson, 1995), 236

- 24 For a fuller presentation, see my biography, *Nathan Soderblom und seine Zeit* (Göttingen Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 227–243, or the monographic treatments by Eric J Sharpe, *Comparative Religion* (LaSalle Open Court, 1975), and Hans G Kippenberg, *Die Entdeckung der Religionsgeschichte* (Munich C H Beck, 1997)
- 25 Émile Durkheim, *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, 5th ed (Paris Presses Universitaires de France, 1968), 24, 50–68 This work was originally published in 1912 in Paris *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life A Study in Religious Sociology* (London Allen & Unwin, 1912)
- 26 See the list of lectures compiled by Bengt Sundkler, *Nathan Soderblom*, 62
- 27 See Nathan Soderblom, “Helig, Helighet,” in *Nordisk familjebok, konversationslexikon* (Stockholm Aktiebolaget Familjebokens forlag, 1909), II 310–14
- 28 See, for example, Wilhelm Windelband, *Das Heilige Skizze zur Religionsphilosophie* (Tübingen J C B Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1911)
- 29 Nathan Soderblom, *Religionsproblemet* (1910), 388 See also Nathan Soderblom, *Der evangelische Begriff eines Heiligen* (Greifswald L Bamberg, 1925)
- 30 Nathan Soderblom, “Holiness,” *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* (1913), 6 731–41, lecture manuscript, “Heiligkeit” – Lecture manuscript, einschließlich Tabu, unrein, rein, etc (Leipzig, summer term 1913) – unpublished, NSS C, MS 1913, box 42, Univ Library Uppsala
- 31 Nathan Soderblom, “Holiness,” ERE (1913), 6 731
- 32 See the German version, Nathan Soderblom, *Das Werden des Gottesglaubens* (1916), 33–113
- 33 Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy An Inquiry into the Non-rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine in Relation to the Rational* (New York Oxford University Press, 1950) The German original was published in 1917
- 34 Gustaf Aulén, *Det teologiska nutdslaget* in *Svensk teologisk kvartalskrift* 5 (1929), 119–146 (here 127)
- 35 B Kidd, *Social Evolution* (London Macmillan and Co, 1894) Soderblom wrote a long review of it in French (32 pages!) which, however, was never published, probably because of its length The draft survives in his records, NSS MS 1897
- 36 Nathan Soderblom, *Religionen och den sociala utvecklingen* (1898), 126–129, German version 74–76
- 37 For religions Nathan Soderblom, *Religionsproblemet* (1910), 453, *Missionens motiv och kulturvarde*, in Nathan Soderblom, *Ur religionens historia* (Stockholm 1915), 170–199 (here 197), for Christian denominations *On the Soul of the Church of Sweden* (1915), 544ff, for nations *De två gudarne*, in Nathan Soderblom, *Nar stunderna vaxla och strida*, vol 2 (Stockholm 1935), 103–112 (here 106, 109)
- 38 Sundkler, *Nathan Soderblom*, 69
- 39 Nathan Soderblom, *Christian Fellowship or the United Life and Work of Christendom* (New York Revel, 1923), 21
- 40 Adolf Harnack, “Protestantismus und Katholizismus in Deutschland,” in Adolf von Harnack, *Reden und Aufsätze*, N F 1 (Giessen, 1911), 225–250
- 41 Nathan Soderblom, “Evangelische Katholizität,” in *Festschrift A Deissmann* (Tübingen J C B Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1927), 327–334
- 42 This has nothing to do with the so-called branch theory That is an idea designed by the Anglican William Palmer in 1833, the point of which was that the “branches” were the old episcopal churches The criterion for unity thus was an institutional one, which Soderblom always roundly rejected Cf ODCC 3 1997, 232

43. The first instance I know of is a letter to Johannes Kolmodin on March 8, 1919 (N.S. ecumenical collection, Univ. Library Uppsala); the first presentation in print was in *Evangelisk katolicitet* in: E. Lehman and others, *Eng kristendom, Kyrkans enhet* 7 (1919), 65–126; he repeated it in “The Church and International Goodwill,” in: *The Contemporary Review* 116 (1919), 309–315.

44. Nathan Soderblom, *Christian Fellowship* (1923), 155–180.

45. Sven-Erik Brodd, “The Church as the Soul of European Civilization. Archbishop N. Soderblom on Church and Society, in *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte* 4 (1991), 128–138. This is high-church wishful thinking.

46. Nathan Soderblom, *Gå vi mot religionens fornyelse?* (Stockholm: Sveriges Kristliga Studentorelsen, 1919). German translation: *Ausgewählte Werke Bd. 2*, 139–63.

47. Friedrich Heiler, *Evangelische Katholizität* (Munich: Reinhardt, 1926), 152, 163, 172–175.

48. I have in recent years made some strides to mend the sorry state of affairs somewhat, although only partly in English. See *N. Soderblom, Brev—Lettres—Briefe—Letters* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), a collection from his correspondence both in the original languages and an English translation; the biography of 2011 (note 24 above), which is based on a wide array of original sources, including unpublished ones, and finally an ongoing series of selected sources in German translation, *Ausgewählte Werke* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht).



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