Wilhelm Kardemark, »Health through Work: Lutheran and gendered perspectives in Swedish health magazines 1910–13«

**ABSTRACT**

This article analyses Lutheran and gendered perspectives in Swedish health magazines published from 1910 to 1913. As the article shows, we may talk of a masculine middle-class bias that, in the magazines, intertwined with a Lutheran outlook on life. Hard work and discipline as well as a willingness to be at the service of one's neighbour are emphasized as essential to life and good health. The notion of the calling is seen as a key factor in explaining the Lutheran perspective on health. The emphasis on the calling and a Lutheran view of society are seen as crucial aspects that distinguish the Swedish approach to health from those of muscular Christianity.

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**Keywords:** health; Lutheranism; vocation; masculinity; hegemonic masculinity; muscular Christianity

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HEALTH THROUGH WORK: Lutheran and
gendered perspectives in Swedish health
magazines 1910–13

INTRODUCTION

Great and disastrous is the mistake of those who preach freedom from work as the joy in life. No, work is one of the most important prerequisites of happiness. But it has to be the right amount of work, neither too much, nor too little, for overstrain is unhealthy and just as unhygienic as sloth about which Luther said: »Rast ich so rost ich«. I would, apropos Luther, like to remind us of the true, practical and notable words of the catechism: »Work promotes health and prosperity, prevents numerous opportunities for sin«.¹

To the author of these words, published in the Swedish health magazine Hälsokällan (The Well of Health) at the beginning of 1910s, there is a connection between health and work. If you rest you will rust, and of course any kind of corrosion to body or mind cannot be a good thing. The relation between health and work, along with the author’s quoting of Martin Luther and the catechism, may strike today’s readers as somewhat curious. This writer – Dr. Hjalmar Selldén – and his readership have a different frame of reference from that of today’s readers of health magazines. To the readership and authors of the studied material, the Christian tradition and Luther’s words were obvious references to include when making a statement about health. As such, it is an example of how religion as a part of culture can be one influential factor in the moulding of perspectives on health. Following this, my aim with this article is to discuss Christian, and in particular Lutheran perspectives, and the role they play in shaping views on health and gendered health norms in Sweden in the early twentieth century. By doing so I hope to shed light on the relationship between »religion«, »culture« and »health« in a context where the Lutheran tradition was strong but also increasingly challenged. To a growing number of Swedes, faith in the church and Christian tradition were shaken by biblical criticism and scientific advancements. To an increasing number of men, Christianity and religious belief seemed more and more feminine, emotional and irrational and far from what a modern man could believe.²
In order to achieve the aim of this article, three magazines published during the period 1910 to 1913 will be analysed. These magazines are not to be seen as particularly »religious« or »Christian« in the sense of being published by Christian organizations or having an obvious Christian agenda. Rather, they should be considered »mainstream«, dealing with a number of issues relating to health from influential perspectives of the time – Lutheran, medical and others. What we may identify as Christian and more specifically Lutheran perspectives should be understood as manifestations of assumptions that were commonly held in Sweden at the turn of the century. Core features of the Lutheran perspective will be approached after a description of the studied material and a brief characterization of muscular Christianity. The research on the latter is informative as it shows how Christian outlooks have affected perspectives on issues such as health and embodiment. Towards the end of this article I will return to perspectives of muscular Christianity as well as a gender perspective focusing on questions of masculinity.

**HEALTH MAGAZINES**

The magazines analysed are *Hälsovänn*en (*The Friend of Health*), *Hälsovindar* (*Winds of Health*), and *Hälsokällan* (*The Well of Health*). *Hälsovänn*en was published continuously from 1886 until 1961, and for this study I have chosen the 1911 and 1912 volumes. With the extremely productive health reformer Henrik Berg as its editor from 1906 until the middle of the nineteen thirties, and a periodicity of 24 issues a year, this should be considered one of the most important popular health magazines in Sweden at that time. In terms of years of publication and periodicity, *Hälsovindar* and *Hälsovänn*en are less influential magazines. The former was only published from 1912 to 1913 with a total of five issues. The latter has a more extensive publication in terms of issues, with 15 in one volume for the years 1910 and 1911. The three magazines make up the entire body of mainstream health magazines published in Sweden the period in question.

All three magazines take a comprehensive approach to health, discussing it at both an individual and a societal level, and often from a nationalistic perspective, that presents questions of the health and welfare of individuals as pressing national issues. Most of the writers tend to paint a fairly grim picture of their time and express an obvious concern regarding the state of Sweden and the Swedes. The negative view of the contemporary society should be seen in relation to events such as the »loss« of Norway in 1905, which to the nationalistic mindset of the time was disastrous. Sweden is by no means the only European country in which nationalistic sentiments were thriving and, in their wake, increased international tensions.
In Sweden, issues of the survival of the nation are reflected in increased military spending and the 1901 decision for mandatory conscription. This is not only a time of nationalism, however. It is also a time of emerging evangelical revivalist denominations and socialist trade unions that by 1920 were attracting an equal number of members, roughly 300,000 adult members each. These organizations and the related temperance movement should, among other things, be understood in the light of the poor working and living conditions of the growing working class, discussions of universal suffrage and overall high levels of alcohol consumption. To this national picture we could also add increased worries about the growing numbers of persons afflicted by «nerve conditions», sexual liberation and new urban lifestyles. Many of these concerns are related to experiences of Sweden going through fundamental changes in a rapid process of modernization marked by industrialization and urbanization. These processes are seen as creating a situation where basic human needs are hard to meet, and «unnatural» needs are created causing «nerve problems» and physical health problems related to over- and under-eating, sedentary lifestyles and over-taxing physical activity. It is, as the magazines tell the story, a time out of control where basic values of moderation, balance and discipline are lost. This negative image is by no means unique to the studied material or to Sweden; rather, a strongly pessimistic outlook may be seen in a number of different materials and in most parts of the Western world during the period.4

MUSCULAR CHRISTIANITY

In the Anglo-Saxon sphere, the movement and ideal known as muscular Christianity was one answer to problems such as those described in the Swedish health magazines. The ideas and fears of the movement in many cases relate to those of the health magazines and often touch upon issues of health and manliness. It is thus illuminating to set the studied material under scrutiny in relation to it, as a way to arrive at a more profound understanding of how different cultural and theological contexts mould discussions on health. With a background in Victorian Britain, the evolution and advancement of this influential movement should be seen in relation to both religious motifs and an increasing interest in health issues. According to Watson, Weir and Friend, who have studied the movement’s theological and historical roots, we may talk of a «preoccupation with health» amongst the Victorians that was due to changes related to urbanization, industrialization, advancements in the medical sciences and a threat of war.5

In matters of theological background to the movement, Christian Socialism was influential on key figures such as the writers and friends Charles Kingsley (1819–1875) and Thomas Hughes (1822–1896). At a time of increasing social unrest, the
Christian Socialists reacted to the social injustices suffered by the working classes and pursued solutions to these social ills by promoting education and moral change. Christian Socialists saw athletics as one way to rectify the situation, regarding it as a character-building activity and as a means to overcome class division. With this understanding, Christianity was an impetus for action in a hostile world. In order to be of use in the struggle for improved morals and physical conditions, Christians needed manliness, physical power and character to prepare them to stand up for ideals and high moral standards. What was definitely not needed was the introspective, contemplative, effeminate and ascetic life advocated by the left and right wings of the Anglican Church. The prolific writer Kingsley strongly opposed the perspectives of the dissenting evangelicals and the Catholic-leaning Oxford movement for their denigration of human corporeality as much as for their lack of interest in social issues. For Kingsley, the body was at the centre, neither to be abused nor to be ignored, but rather to be developed through activities likely to enhance the body’s serviceability.\(^6\)

Activities likely to develop body and character included fishing, hunting, camping and of course sports, and the latter came to be a vital part of organizations that shared the ideals of muscular Christianity. Although a high valorization and acceptance of sports should be seen as an important part of muscular Christianity, the relationship between sports and religion was not without tensions. The muscular Christian view of life promoted an ideal of a balanced life and thus the proper use of time. A too-keen interest in sports would not leave much time for other important activities, and sports might even become an end in themselves rather than a means to achieving something else. To Hughes, this risk was evident; sports and other leisure activities were supposed to be recreational and as such an important counterpart to work, but they must never become a calling.\(^7\)

Conflicting views on sports in relation to Christianity and the goals of muscular Christianity are also evident in the United States, where muscular Christian ideals found fertile soil during the last decades of the nineteenth century. With an influx of ideas from British muscular Christianity from the mid-nineteenth century, the last decades were somewhat of a breakthrough for many of the movement’s ideas on the other side of the Atlantic. Ironically, this breakthrough corresponds in time to a diminishing interest in its British home.

Approaching the turn of the century, an increasing fear of overcivilization became an important factor for the advancement of muscular Christianity. In the United States the fear of overcivilization was not least propagated by individuals and adamant muscular Christians, including the soon-to-be president, Theodore Roosevelt (1858–1919), who exhibited it in both
his deeds and his book *The Strenuous Life* (1901). During the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first ones of the new century, the Social Gospel movement developed and became an important institution for muscular Christian ideals in the United States. The Social Gospellers shared with Kingsley and Hughes an engagement in social issues and an understanding of Christianity as a religion that is conscious not only of humans’ spiritual but also their corporeal needs. In this theological and social context, caring for the body involved more than just staving off disease, it was also part and parcel of a higher goal: to be of service to humanity and to make the body into an instrument for God. One should therefore make it strong and fit for the challenges a life in the service of Christ could bring. It was a »temple« whose upkeep the »body as temple« theologians – to use the words of the American historian Clifford Putney – considered a virtue. To these men the body was not in itself weak, nor sinful, but rather one aspect of human life to develop and use in the service of God. A lack of strength and physical capacity, however, were sometimes associated with a less virtuous life. In some extreme cases the body-as-temple men »completely dropped the traditional Christian emphasis on confessing weakness in oneself and forgiving it in others.« Weakness was a sign of uselessness and not least an immoral neglect of the body.

**CHRISTIANITY, GENDER AND HEALTH IN SWEDEN**

Christianity, masculinity and, more broadly speaking, gender in Sweden at the time the material was published have been studied previously, but the focus was not on issues of health. Contributions to gender perspectives on Sweden and Northern Europe are made by the researchers involved in a project called *Christian Manliness: A Paradox of Modernity*. As the project title indicates, modernity is a point of departure for the researchers as they, among other things, analyse and discuss feminization theory, the men’s movement, stories of Lutheran and Catholic heroes, masculinity and crises of faith. In research dealing with the same period of time, the Swedish historian Inger Hammar has studied the women’s movement and gendered aspects of the Swedish Lutheran tradition.

The role of Christianity in the Swedish discussions on health at the turn of the century has so far not been analysed to any great extent. Swedish historians have touched upon the theme by mentioning »Christian virtues« while discussing medical perspectives at this time, and in a study on the rise of workers’ protection there is a brief comment on the pivotal role of work in Lutheran traditions.

The subject is paid somewhat more attention by the historian Eva Palmblad in her study on Swedish »hygieneism«, and the
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writings of henrik berg, the editor of hälsovänn. according to palmblad, we may talk of a »medico-theology« in which a scientific worldview and scientific ideals are intertwined with a christian worldview and ideals, together forming a strong narrative of health and sickness. at the core of this narrative is an idea of nature as god’s creation and that humankind, through scientific study, may learn to interpret the divine laws controlling human life and welfare. in this medico-theological perspective, the natural processes are god’s way of sustaining creation, and sickness is the result of human violations of the divine laws. this, according to palmblad, is accompanied by thoughts of redemption, sacrifice, penance and resurrection. as i will show later on in the analysis, a christian understanding of god as creator is important in terms of an overall outlook on life. in the views on god we can find in the studied material, god has given the principles of how nature works and how humans should live together, and as such we may talk of a medico-theology. however, i hesitate to relate the notion of a medico-theology to the specific theological concepts palmblad mentions. in order to more clearly see the christian, and in particular lutheran, aspects of the perspectives on health, we must be attentive to central features of the faith and tradition in the lutheran context. therefore we will first turn to the idea of vocation as it is an important part of protestant traditions and swedish lutheranism during the studied period. after this will we turn to the health magazines.14

the lutheran context

in the quotation at the beginning of this article, the writer makes explicit reference to martin luther’s catechism, a book whose words and thoughts were well known to his readership. luther’s small catechism was translated into the scandinavian national languages in the sixteenth century and became one of the most widely distributed books in sweden. together with the close bonds between state and church, it became a means to create a common outlook on life, society and issues of faith among the swedish populace. as historians have remarked, it was even hard to distinguish religious identity from national identity; to be swedish was to be lutheran. explaining the lutheran tradition, the small catechism, among other things, set out principles for the organization of life within the family and household as well as within the state. it was an important means of promoting an outlook on life by which each individual, according to his or her calling, had a role to fulfill in relation to others. dealing with basic lutheran principles, of which the call or vocation is one of the more important, it provides images of human relationality that it is important to be conscious of when approaching a material like the health magazines. the relational perspective of the lutheran tradition at
this time can in many cases be described as hierarchical, providing a rather static image of society.\textsuperscript{15}

In the Lutheran teaching on the calling, work is essential. It is through work that individuals fulfil their callings, which in turn are given to them by their position in one of the three estates, ecclesia (church), politia (politics) and oeconomia (the household). Not everyone has the same calling, but every calling has the same goal, namely, the well-being of one’s neighbour, and as such the calling has a relational character. In order to be of use to one’s fellow human beings, one is supposed to work. In the context of Martin Luther, work should not be limited to paid work. Rather, work includes all deeds that are beneficial to one’s neighbour. The work that comes into question is therefore not limited to religious actions but embraces all the good deeds that can be done in everyday life to meet the shifting needs of one’s neighbour. Good works are in accordance with the commandments, the first three of which describe what it means to love God, with the following seven guiding individuals to serve their neighbours. Among these seven, the fourth commandment, on honouring one’s father and mother, is given a special status and extended to include all superiors.\textsuperscript{16}

In the Lutheran perspective, work is an essential part of life through which the individual is not only of service to his or her neighbour. Work is also a basic human condition, something humans are created for and should not refrain from. Through work, humankind is part of God’s continuous re-creation of earth by which humans are provided with all the goods required for their well-being. Work as such is therefore not something »bad« or a result of sin; the sweat and toil that is often associated with work comes as a consequence of Eve’s misleading of Adam. To work in »the sweat of thy face« became the fate of men after Eve led Adam astray, whereas women faced another fate, to be subordinated to their husbands and to bear the pain of childbirth.\textsuperscript{17}

Understood in this way, work is not about achieving personal fulfilment or satisfaction. It is a basic fact of life, one way to answer the call to be of service to one’s neighbour, but also a way to carry one’s cross and a means for mortification of the body, a way to master misleading desire. To suffer in the service of others is a part of life and one way to discipline and correct a sinful human nature. In this light it is not necessary to enter monastic orders or to perform actions whose sole purpose is to correct and discipline body and mind, as true mortification is part of, and experienced in serving others.\textsuperscript{18}

From a Lutheran perspective, work and being of service to one’s neighbour are not related to the salvation or justification of the individual. Humans cannot justify themselves by performing certain actions. Rather, it is a matter of faith. It is through faith in Jesus Christ that humans can grasp the love
of God the Father and receive justification. Righteousness comes to humankind from outside and justification is received with faith, in the form of faith. As the German theologian Paul Althaus comments: »Faith is the work and gift of God. God justifies man by giving him faith.« In faith, Christ is present with and in the individual, and as such the individual is changed and part of Christ’s righteousness.

Simul justus et peccator – the Lutheran formula for describing the Christian as both sinner and righteous – is a crucial aspect of the anthropology just described. Every human is a sinner but is also justified, righteous and accepted by God. Humankind can neither earn the love of God through work nor change human nature through faith. In relation to work, faith is important as good works are born out of righteousness. Righteous individuals serve their neighbours as well as God, and by performing good works they give witness to their faith.

As sinful creatures, humans need the law of God. The law has two functions, the »civil« and the »theological« or »spiritual.« The first function is to hinder transgressions and crimes and make the preaching of the gospel possible. In this form the law gives offices and estates and thus stability to society and a position to each and every individual. The law in the first sense can be fulfilled, whereas the law in the other sense is impossible to fulfil. Its function is also different as it is to remind humans of their sinfulness. The law is God’s word, but only one part of it. The Gospel is just as important; it gives hope and the forgiveness of sins and is thus the opposite of the law. Both are needed; the law makes the preaching of the gospel possible and testifies to humans’ need of the gospel. The gospel testifies to God’s love of humankind and leads humans out of their despair. But the law is also essential with reference to the timely well-being of humankind. The law gives stability; law and order are made concrete in the vocations. As such, the vocation is a sign of God’s love as he, through all the different callings, provides everything humans need. Working as the hands of God, humans encounter God’s love through the works of other humans who, by work and service, follow their different callings and the law.

PART OF GOD’S CREATION

The magazines place human relationality at the centre of the conception of health. One’s relation to God, one’s neighbours and the nation give health meaning and value. Humans are created by God and therefore exist in an inevitable and asymmetric relation to him. The relation to God is also the background to the second relation, that to one’s neighbours, one’s fellow human beings. By being created by God, everyone is born into a relation to others, and all humans have a responsibility, a calling, to care for their neighbour and to be part of God’s continuous re-creation of earth. The third relation – which I
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will not dwell upon in this article – is in this highly nationalistic era just as inevitable as the two previous ones: all people are, whether or not they want to be, part of a nation.

The two initially mentioned relations that we meet in the magazines should, in many cases, be understood as expressions of a Christian, Lutheran culture. In this culture some theological conceptions and understandings have over time become self-evident and sometimes unquestioned facts of life that at the time were not necessarily seen as particularly religious or Christian. This is the case with understandings that should be viewed as Christian in a more general sense and those that can be seen as part of a Lutheran tradition. The notion of humankind as created by God is one example of quite general Christian conceptions that we can see in the studied material and as such it points to the material’s background in a broader Christian context. There are, however, perspectives and ideas in the material – for example the emphasis on work and work as a means to serve one’s neighbour – that should be understood as more specific for the Lutheran context.

The relation to God is asymmetric, since God is the creator who has set the overarching rules for life, both in terms of how nature works and in terms of how to lead a good and healthy life. This is sometimes expressed in relation to what kinds of medical treatment are acceptable, at other times in terms of what the basic premises for human life are, much in the same vein as Palmblad describes medico-theology. Reverend Nils Liljequist, a homeopathic physician who was well known at the time, gives vivid examples of this outlook on life and God in his Homeopathic Creed. Liljequist’s text is published in Hälsövinder, and should be understood as one example of a recurrent perspective in the magazine. We can also see Liljequist’s standpoint in for example an article that describes Luther as a health reformer that gives his view on good, natural treatments and how humans led healthy, natural lives in accordance with God’s will before the Fall and an article on the problems of vaccination. Liljequist’s creed consists of six articles and a concluding reflection in which the fallacies of allopathic medicine and the benefits and naturalness of homeopathy are explained. The bottom line of the arguments against allopathy is that it works from a perspective that does not pay due respect to the fact that humans are created by God. God created man from dust, and therefore nothing but natural substances, what regular soil and the human body are presumed to be made up of, shall enter the human body. The most dangerous unnatural substances are, of course, the allopathic drugs that are not only unnatural and harmful, but also unnecessary as God, when he created humans, gave them the ability to heal themselves. What physicians and others can do is care, rather than cure. From this perspective, health is
dependent on individuals’ adherence to the divine laws governing what is natural and on God’s love of humankind and his will to provide humans what they need for a good life.\textsuperscript{25}

The perspective expressed by Liljequist is also observable among other writers, who share Liljequist’s view on the status of the divine laws, but not necessarily his view on homeopathy. In their view, one must as a human come to an understanding of what it means to be created by God. We saw one example at the beginning of this article, where work was proclaimed as a basic condition of human life by referring to authorities that were important at the time, the catechism and expressions commonly ascribed to Luther. We can also see this perspective in \textit{Hälsovännen}, where one of the writers – Major Rolf Schenström – feels obliged to remind the reader: »In the sweat of thy face shall you feed yourself.« These words – also found in \textit{Hälsovindar} – are given as a biblical quotation and are, on the one hand, proclaimed as a guide God gave humans for their journey through life, and on the other hand as »psychological and physical laws« to which humans are »subordinated.«\textsuperscript{26} They are an aid and a support, something to hang on to, as well as signs of God’s love and his authority, and his power to shape human conditions and humans’ subordinate position in relation to him.

These ways of discussing issues of health and how one should live a good and healthy life should be perceived as expressions of common Christian understandings. But given the writers historical context we have also reason to interpret this in relation to the Lutheran notion of the law. The law explains how one should live and is the will of God. As we saw earlier, writers used this reasoning to explain why individuals should live as they propose. They, so to speak, make themselves advocates of the Divine Will as it is manifested in the scriptures. But what we also see is that the law is described as something that should be of use to humankind. It is supposed to help individuals to live a good life and is a means to create a good society. The rules to which humans are subordinated are not there for the sake of God but rather for the sake of human welfare. It is in the light of this that we should see Reverend Liljequist’s comment that one must comply with the worldly authorities, even if they try to prevent people from using homeopathic treatment: »A Christian shall always obey the authority, even if it is wrong, because the authority is given by God.«\textsuperscript{27}

God’s love of humankind is not restricted to providing guidelines and laws for how to live. It is also expressed through grace, which – in a Lutheran manner – cannot be earned but is rather something one already has: »For us Christians it is not a matter of merit or something to deserve […] for everything is grace«, as one writer comments.\textsuperscript{28} According to this view, humans are dependent on God, for it is he who lets individuals enjoy grace whereas there is little they can do to earn it. What
they can do, though, is trust and believe in God in order to have the strength to get through hard times and to have a sense of peace in their everyday lives. As a human, one needs to trust in God, understand that nothing happens without reason and that God lets humans go through hardships and even suffering for what, in the long run, is best for them. To some writers this view of life is a source of joy and relief and as such salubrious. It makes sickness and disease more comprehensible and gives a chance to express gratitude for what is good in life.

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**Called to Serve, Called to Health**

Moving on to the human-to-human relationship, this is the part of human relationality where the Lutheran teaching of the calling is most readily spotted. This, I believe, should not come as a surprise, given the emphasis on the relation to one’s neighbour we find in the idea of vocation. The well-being of one’s neighbour is the aim of all good works, and as the theologian Gustaf Wingren comments, «the calling could be said to be made up of such relations» – loving relations with other humans. The concept of the calling is, in other words, a relational concept that explains and gives a view on how to live in relation to others.

The impact of the teaching on vocation in the health magazines is threefold. Firstly, life in general and health in particular are given meaning and value in relation to others, in the ability to serve and to be conscious of the needs and well-being of one’s neighbour. Secondly, the individual’s service to and loving relationship with others are beneficial to the individual’s health. With this approach, health is dependent on the cultivation of a correct attitude and way of living in relation to one’s neighbour. Thirdly, the overall positive evaluation of work in almost all its forms reflects a culture where a Lutheran work ethic is a self-evident part of the outlook on life.

The magazines’ way of dealing with these issues has a gendered bias to it and should be seen in relation to discourses of middle-class masculinity in which the moulding of character, and thus moderation and mastery of passions, is recurrent. As we will see – and what I will come back to in the final section of this article – moderation, discipline and work are crucial and in that sense telling for what was seen as a healthy character.

Examples of how life and health are given meaning and value in relation to others may be seen when various topics are under discussion and explanations of the purpose of activities and outlooks on life are given. Outdoor activities and other forms of physical activity such as work are, for example, valuable tools for staying energetic so that «we may reach the aim: to be of the greatest use in life.» Echoing similar thoughts, moderation is only partially beneficial for the person who keeps a close eye on his or her eating, drinking and working habits. The aim of
overall moderation is, according to a clarification made by the editor, not least to be at the service of others. In keeping with this theme, the people one meets and lives with are the foremost object for the fulfilment of one’s duty to be happy, as another writer puts it. The individual has a responsibility to ensure that setbacks do not ruin the atmosphere or the mood of others. Rather, minor blows and setbacks are episodes that present opportunities to clean the heart of the cinder of egoism and complacency, and to develop a character that makes one apt to spread joy and happiness. What is called for according to these writers is a disciplining of one’s emotions, desires and attitudes. Sports should not be pursued for sheer enjoyment and one’s appetite for food and drink needs to be disciplined for the sake of others, just as one’s response to troublesome incidents must be closely watched over.

In an article on the benefits of physical education for the individual and the nation, one writer takes a position very similar to that of the proponents of muscular Christianity, with their view of sports and physical activity as means to mould a masculine character and important alternatives to bookish study. According to the Swedish writer of the article, physical education in the form of gymnastics is important as it develops the body and nourishes the will. Physical education is thus an urgent matter as it can improve individual and national health. Emphasis is on strength and vitality, and physical education is the key to counterbalancing the regular, intellectual, education that does not foster the will in the manner physical education does. The latter gives strength and an ability to distinguish good from bad and it teaches individuals how to choose what is good and to use it for the good of oneself and one’s neighbours. It is a means for moulding character, mental strength, willingness to serve and attentiveness to the needs of others. The gymnastics argued for here is the Swedish Ling gymnastics, the scientific and hygienic way to strengthen body and soul. In a manner typical of Hälsovännens, and telling for a culture where Lutheran and nationalistic perspectives intertwine, the objects for this development are not only one’s neighbours but also the Swedish nation, as the former are part of the latter.

A character that is marked not only by a willingness to be of service to others but also the strength and ability to do so is not presented by the writers merely as a means to care for others. What we also see is that a loving and caring relation with and attitude towards others is in itself health-promoting. In the long series The temple of health, Dr Hjalmar Selldén goes through what he calls the 16 pillars of health. These pillars deal with physiological and medical prerequisites for health as well as ethical and religious ones. The twelfth pillar deals with the right outlook on life and mainly discusses the
importance of having a sense of happiness and joy in life. Joy is, according to this article, a prerequisite for health; it becomes manifest in one’s relation to others and has its roots in the love of God and one’s neighbour. It shows itself in »the eyes« of the cheerful and »testifies to a happy soul that does not know anything better than to make others happy«. For Sell-dén, love of neighbour is truly salubrious as it brings joy and happiness to one’s own life and to the lives of others.

Much in the same vein, another writer argues for the need to master one’s thoughts and emotions. Under the heading »The hygienic care of body and soul« he explains such development of self-control as one way to show love and as a means to improve one’s health. Getting a firm grip on one’s emotional reactions is the first step towards a more considerate and scrupulous way of life in which »love of humankind« and altruism are the guiding words. For the sake of their own health, readers are called on to remember to »love humans« and that »we humans need each other«, the weak need the strong, and the poor need the rich. In this view, living a good and healthy life is inseparable from caring for others and being at their service by leading a considerate and generous way of life. As such, health is dependent on the individual’s ability to relate to others in a proper manner. Related to the perspectives described above, this means that love of one’s neighbour should be the guiding principle that shapes one’s entire being as well as how one encounters others. Bearing in mind Wingren’s point – that the call is made up of loving relations, the Lutheran and relational aspects of the outlook on health become more obvious. Health is not a property of the individual; it cannot be acquired by the person alone but is rather a relational and ethical concept. It is a relational concept in the sense that it is one of the fruits of living a life together with others. It is ethical as health receives its value in relation to others and as it is acquired through proper conduct and having the right attitude towards others.

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**THE WORK ETHIC**

Although it is a recurring theme, work is rarely given an explicit aim. It appears rather as a given whose aim one does not need to dwell upon but whose function and status in life sometimes need to be explained. Work is time and again explained as something one must engage in, as something one cannot refrain from, and in this sense it is very highly valued. The very first article of Hälsokällan describes this approach, explaining some basic facts of health that, according to the author, everyone should know. Work is given as a prerequisite of health and underlined by the same quotation from the catechism found at the beginning of this article, proclaiming work as a source of health and prosperity. Also emphasizing the importance of
work, the aforementioned Hjalmar Selldén who, in a way that is telling for all three magazines, makes work the core of his temple of health as he includes it in his definition of health. To Selldén, health is an experience of well-being, an absence of pain, and a good mood as well as a full ability to work and to enjoy work. To flee from work would be the same as fleeing one of the basic human conditions; it would be «unnatural» and therefore unhealthy. Illustrative of this perspective are the words of Hälsovänner’s editor Henrik Berg, who states that «those poor humans who do not work are always condemned to morbidity in one form or the other, for work is a basic condition of life». Humans are made for intellectual and physical work, and work in most forms strengthens the entire human being. One should never be ashamed of the work one does, and work is oftentimes the cure for various physical and psychological ailments. Joy of life and an overall positive outlook on life is closely connected to the ability to work and its realization, as it forces the individuals to leave their own problems and become absorbed in something else. This perspective is illustrated with the didactic story of a well-descended lady who, through work, overcomes her grief over the death of her husband and once again finds meaning in her life. By dismissing her maids, she forces herself to do all the daily chores and, step-by-step, she comes back to the world of the living; she accepts her husband’s death and is no longer preoccupied by it. «By all this work […] that took her time and her energies, she regained, little by little, her peace of mind and one could once again see her taking a walk, contentedly smiling.» After a few months of hard physical work the lady is once again able to let her thoughts and emotions leave her own situation, she once again becomes open to the world and to the people surrounding her.

The understanding of work as a key to health and as an indispensable part of life should be viewed in light of the writer’s Lutheran heritage and context. As pointed out earlier in this article, work is essentially something that is done for the sake of others; it is a natural part of life but also a means to gain mastery over misleading and sinful thoughts. The well-descended lady described above handles her situation in a manner that reflects a Lutheran culture when she dismisses her maids and takes up work to fill the time previously spent in melancholic thoughts. By doing the manual labour herself, she does what, according to this view, she was made for.

The esteem in which work is held in a Lutheran context also has some more obvious political implications and explains Selldén’s and others’ reluctant attitude towards the labour movement and socialism. The writers can agree with the workers that too much work can be hazardous, but cannot see any reason to substantially change how much they should work.
One of *Hälsovännens* anonymous writers comments on the benefits of the 1909 strike where numerous workers got some time off during the summer. But right after making those comments, he emphasizes that he does not support the strike and that he just wants to indicate some of the benefits of a *short* vacation. In the following article, Henrik Berg wants to suggest short breaks for gymnastics during the day for those employed in the factories. As he comes with this *suggestion* he also makes sure to criticize those who advocate an eight-hour workday. Ten to twelve hours a day, six days a week is no problem for the working classes; it is even appropriate. According to Selldén, the labour movement and social democracy initially had a just cause in their struggle for improved working conditions, but as the ambition changed to also include more leisure time for the workers, the justness of their cause was lost. By proposing that the overarching goal is to work as little as possible, social democracy degenerated into something as soulless as the worst type of capitalism that only looks at the material gains of work. In Selldén’s view, both social democracy and capitalism had lost all sense of human needs and all higher ideals when work only came to be a matter of money; they forgot that work is a necessity and something that benefits humans. Expressing a Lutheran outlook on work, Selldén stresses its character-building aspects and its connection to righteousness, love and other virtues, thus presenting work as the opposite of the *sin of doing nothing*. This *sin* – following Selldén – breeds all other sins, and to be occupied with work is, from this perspective, beneficial for the workers. It keeps improper wishes and desires under control and leaves little room for unhealthy and immoral ways of life. If it were not for their work, the workers would be lost to drinking and gambling, which in turn would give rise to a host of other problems.  

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**MANLINESS, STRENGTH AND DISCIPLINE**

As scholarly work on muscular Christianity has made clear, gendered norms and ideals are central to understanding the movement’s outlook and basic presumptions on issues such as health and embodiment. This holds true also for the Swedish health magazines. One central aspect of the gendered view of the health magazines is the teaching about the calling, which, from its medieval roots, brought with it a complementary and hierarchic view of men and women into an industrializing Sweden. This view is noticeable in how the magazines deal with issues of health and especially their take on the reasons for health and the importance of work. The gendered perspective should be seen in relation to what we may talk of as a hegemonic middle-class masculinity that shares but also diverges from the ideals of British and American muscular Christianity.
The concept of »hegemonic masculinity« may be used in order to understand gender relations and in particular the relations between different masculinities. As R. W. Connell points out in *Masculinities*, the hegemonic masculinity is »not a fixed character type«, rather, it is »the masculinity that occupies a hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations«. As such, it is always contestable, under change and intertwined with notions of sexuality, race and class and should be seen as an answer to problems of legitimizing a patriarchal structure. The hegemonic masculinity can thus be described as a »crystallisation of dominant ideas of manhood in a given social milieu« that justify men’s power over women and some men’s authority over other men. The characteristics of hegemonic masculinity are not the same today as they were in the context of the health magazines, and most men did not then and do not today live up to all its standards. Some of the most visible bearers of hegemonic masculinity may be fantasy figures as well as individuals with institutional power. Subordinated men and women are understood to lack the qualities these individuals display.

As we have seen previously, the writers stress certain physical and mental dispositions that centre on the ability to discipline emotions, thoughts and desires, embodied and otherwise. The writers ask for moderation in terms of eating and drinking, and they advise that a firm grip be kept on thoughts and emotions in order to maintain overall health. Sports are accepted as long as they are performed to enhance strength and character. The issue is not about the joy of ball games or running, nor about the possibility of finding personal fulfilment in one’s work. What the health magazines ask for are men of character, resembling the male middle-class norm described by historian David Tjeder in his study of Swedish middle class masculinities during the nineteenth century. Fundamental to this norm as it was expressed during the second half of the nineteenth century was moderation and mastery of passions. Character was the final goal for men; it was the key to prosperity and to the ability to become a »self-made man«. But the striving for success also had to be disciplined as it could lead men on the wrong path in life, away from rather than towards a sound masculinity. Wealth and prosperity were fine as long as they were acquired through hard and honest work and as long as they did not infringe on the individual’s willingness to be of use to others.

Hard work, moderation and a willingness to be of service are central features of the masculinity discussed by Tjeder, which is also represented in the studied material. This masculinity should be understood in relation to the Lutheran view of work and society presented above as it stresses both the importance of work and a complementary view of men and women. The view of gender and gender relations is connected to the view of work, as men and women are supposed to work in different
spheres of society, men in the public and women in the private. A great proportion of the work stated as required by the health magazines should, in line with the increasing specialization of what counts as work, be interpreted as paid work, and as such it is men’s work. Being of service through work is partly an issue for men; it is done in the public male sphere and enabled by masculine characteristics. But even more significant is the esteem given to work in a Lutheran culture, and the notion that men in particular are supposed to work in the sweat of their faces, revealing the male bias. This is accompanied by an instrumentalization of the male body and an authorization of men who can handle their bodies in a proper manner. The male body is a vehicle for work, a vehicle to which corporeal enjoyment such as unchecked indulgence in food and drink or the joy of sports is problematic as it decreases the capacity for work or leads men astray from the right use of time.

Unlike the greater part of British muscular Christianity and more in line with the early American version, we can see a hostile attitude towards sports that I would argue reveals the Swedish magazines’ attitudes about more issues than just sports. Sports are generally not seen as a proper way to develop the physical and mental qualities needed for health and service. Most writers who deal with sports are rather unenthusiastic and are more likely to point to their problems rather than their benefits. Suggestive of this attitude is the almost complete lack of attention given to the Olympic games held in Stockholm in 1912, which were covered extensively in other Swedish media. When the Olympic games are mentioned, it is in relation to issues of nutrition and overall physical performance or to warn readers of the dangers of long-distance running. An American writer, Richard Hogner, comments with contempt on marathon running, where the individual’s ambition is given free rein and pushes him to unhealthy and culpable exhaustion. The runner has committed a crime as he has squandered or wasted such an incredible amount of energy because of the empty, ambiguous concept of honour. As the athlete easily becomes a victim of his egoism and ambition, competitive sports, and in particular individual sports, should be avoided. The sports give rise to improper desires to exhaust oneself for the sake of showing off, and they also open up possibilities for a type of corporeal enjoyment that has no benefit outside the person enjoying it.

The hegemonic middle-class masculinity we may talk of centres around work – about one’s willingness and ability to do it. The heroes of the magazines are men who work long hours, or doctors who, through their work, save women. In line with the perspectives discussed by Tjeder, they are not elevated to heroic status because of worldly success, although they are successful. Rather, they represent ethical ideals, examples of men who have incorporated a work ethic in their daily lives,
which seems to centre around work and, most obviously in the case of doctors, service to others. Women, on the other hand, are generally portrayed as in need of the work of others – not least the doctors – or as those who most clearly need the work ethic. The lady in the earlier example illustrates this tendency. She manages to recover from what today we would probably call a depression by living in accordance with the work ethic. This woman is freed from her ailment by accepting and subordinating herself to this ethic when she resolutely forces herself to do the daily chores. In this context, and considering the health magazines’ overall view of women as emotional and unfit for making health-related decisions, this should be seen as subordination under a gendered norm. This norm states that women need an authority, which in this case is the work ethic. Women cannot be left unchecked as they cannot handle autonomy.

The same pattern of subordination is also evident in the ill-concealed contempt directed towards workers and social democracy. Workers cannot be left to their own devices, as, for their own good, they need to work. These men need to be subordinated, to stay in their place in the social hierarchy, as this place provides them with an occupation that leaves little room for immoral and unhealthy behaviour. They should not be allowed much spare time as, due to their inability to discipline themselves, they would only misuse it. The workers are, in Selldén’s view, far from the disciplined male ideal he promotes. This ideal underscores not only willpower and strength to withstand the sin of doing nothing, but also physical strength. For even if rest is a recurrent theme and, for example, one pillar in Selldén’s temple of health, it is either conditioned by or set in relation to work as the inevitable part of life. To earn rest, one must work, and there is little to no patience with people who do not or cannot work.

Muscular Christianity and the Health Magazines

With their emphasis on strength, hard work and masculinity, the majority of the health propagandists were advocates of perspectives similar to those of the body-as-temple theologians discussed by Putney. There are, however, important differences in theological background as the high value placed on physical health by the Americans should be seen in relation to the idea of salvation in this world. Pointing to the evangelical aspects of the social gospel, Matthew Bowman emphasizes the importance of salvation and regeneration to a number of the movement’s more influential persons. According to Bowman, there was really only one crisis: salvation. All other social ills pointed to a collective failure of humanity in its work there. Personal conversion and experience of the Holy Spirit were therefore crucial. The social ills as well as a lack of individual morals
could only be overcome by individual regeneration that in turn was pivotal for the change in social relations. A background to this perspective is the idea of »social sin« – a concept not exclusive to the social gospellers – which made a number of societal problems into theological problems. Following this, the economy was one obvious area for their critique and one example of how social sin penetrated life. »Indeed, the social gospellers did not see a distinction among problems of government and the economy, social division, poverty, murder, and any number of other social ills.«57 Rather, they were all examples of the dearth of gospel and reminders of the need for individual and societal regeneration. To the social gospellers, a fundamental change of society is therefore imperative as it is a means for creating the Kingdom of God.58

This is not the case for the writers of the studied material. The calling to be of service to others and hence the need to discipline oneself is neither a matter of salvation – in this life or a coming one – nor a starting point for a complete regeneration of society. It is a matter of subordination and service as well as trust in God. It is also in relation to this that health, strength and in many cases manliness are important to the Swedish writers. A real man follows a sound path in life and is ready and able to serve his neighbour through work.

Service to one’s neighbour was also an important goal to the muscular Christians, but what we see as well is that this was discussed in another manner, together with problems that the Swedish writers did not approach. In the image presented by Putney, the aims of the muscular Christianity movement were greater and in part related to other problems, often with a background in the perspectives of the social gospel. Fears of feminization of men, Christianity and the church were important problems together with issues relating to urbanization and social ills. The Swedish health magazines sometimes approached the latter issues, but from perspectives that made them into national, Swedish, problems. The former – the threat of feminization – is not at all related to fears of the degeneration of the church; the church is hardly mentioned in relation to health issues. And even more striking is the lack of interest in matters relating to evangelization and mission that, in the American context, played a crucial role. Strength and vigour were important to the Americans as it took real men to take on the challenge of spreading the gospel.59

These differences should be viewed in relation to differences with regard to the material as well as to culture and theology. The Swedish health magazines were not published by Christian organizations and their aim was not to discuss issues relating to, for example, the church and how it could be reinvigorated. Material analysed by scholars such as Putney was mainly produced by various Christian organizations, and this explains
some of the differences. But what we also see is that the Swedish writers take another approach to some health issues, in particular those concerning the individual’s relation to social structures. They are far from the social gospellers’ or the Christian Socialists’ commitment to fighting inequality or the host of problems brought about by urbanization and industrialization. It seems that, to writers such as Henrik Berg or Hjalmar Selldén, the Lutheran tradition was not the most important incentive for changing society. This does not mean that the Lutheran perspective was not an important background for their critical stance, but in contrast to much of the muscular Christian movement, the aim was not to change society or to promote evangelization. The Swedes’ critique tends rather to be levelled at groups in society – such as the workers – or ideas and assumptions about how life should be led. When they take a more Lutheran stand, rather than a nationalistic one, and discuss how things could be changed, changes are generally on an individual level. It is the individual who is supposed to live in another way, more conscious of the needs of others and more eager to work. Social structures are not challenged and it seems that the Lutheran perspective promotes a conservative organic perspective on society in which health receives meaning and value in relation to others. Health is, on the one hand, not important in relation to the individual, it is not to be pursued for the sake of the individual’s own well-being or aims in life, but rather should be pursued for the gain of others. On the other hand, the individual’s health is totally dependent on the good works of others and his or her ability to live in relation to others. The notion of the calling is therefore essential to the view of health, and so is the law as it is made concrete in the calling.

**CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Christian beliefs shaped by the Lutheran tradition were, in Sweden at the turn of the century, important to the moulding of individual and collective outlooks on life, society and, as this article has shown, health. To the authors of the health magazines, health finds meaning through the human relationality that should be understood as grounded in the Lutheran teaching of vocation. The idea that everyone is called to be at the service of one’s neighbour, although in different ways depending on one’s social standing, is an important reason for placing a high value on work, as work is a means of providing service. In relation to these matters, discipline is pivotal for maintaining strength in body and mind. Health and strength are the keys to service and to a state in which the individual can do good. The authors’ emphasis on usefulness, discipline and strength is important as it reveals the gendered bias that, in the end, makes »male« characteristics a prerequisite for service.
and a healthy life. By focusing on the teaching of vocation in relation to understandings of health, this article points on the one hand to theological differences with regard to, in particular American, muscular Christianity. On the other hand it shows how one central Lutheran motif affected discussions on health in secular material and the way religious perspectives were part of and shaped discussions on health.

ENDNOTES

1 Hjalmar Selldén: »Hälsans tempel« in Hälsokällan 1:9 (1910/11), 195.


12 Late in the review process, Martin Nykvist & Alexander Maurits (eds.): *Kyrkan och idrotten under 2000 år. Antika, medeltida och moderna attityder till idrott* (Malmö, 2015) was published. The theme – sports and Christianity with a focus on the Nordic countries – of this interesting anthology is of relevance for this article even if I was not able to include it in neither my overview nor my discussions.


26 Rolf Schenström: »Läkaren, sjukgymnasten (massören) och den lidande mänskligheten« in *Hälsovännen* 27:21 (1912), 327. The same biblical words, although not quoted in exactly the same manner, are also found in N. A. B-m: »Ett begynnelseord i brödfrågan« in *Hälsovindar* 1:1 (1912), 3, and N. A. B-m: »Helbräggdagörelse« in *Hälsovindar* 1:3–4 (1912), 1, and in Richard Hogner: »Olympiska spel och idrott« in *Hälsovännen*
Wilhelm Kardemark, »Health through Work« 26:21 (1911), 331, where Hogner comments: »It is not right not to work, and to work in the sweat of one’s face, and the one who does not work should not eat, a double truth.«

27 Liljequist: »Homeopatiens trosbekännelse«, 6.
29 Wingren: Luthers lära om kallelsen, 189.
31 Richard Hogner: »Olympiska spel och idrott« in Hälsokällan 26:17 (1911), 258.
32 Hogner: »Olympiska spel och idrott« in Hälsokällan 26:20 (1911), 311.
34 Oscar Engström: »Moderna begrepp om gymnastiken och dess uppgift i skolor, här och samhälle« in Hälsokällan 26:21 (1911), 328–329.
35 Oscar Engström: »Moderna begrepp om gymnastiken och dess uppgift i skolor, här och samhälle« in Hälsokällan 26:15 (1911), 237.
36 Hjalmar Sellén: »Hälsans tempele« in Hälsokällan 1:12 (1910/11), 245.
38 Unknown author: »En dyrbar skatte« in Hälsokällan 1:1 (1910/11), 6. The wording is slightly different compared to the words of Selldén: »Hälsans tempele« 1:9, (1910/11), 195. This may be a result of the text being translated into Swedish from Danish by the article’s author.
41 Ebon: »Trädgårdarsarbete och annat arbete i friska luften, ett medel till hälsa« in Hälsokällan 1:5 (1910/11), 140–141.
44 Hammar: »From Fredrika Bremer«, 28.
48 Helmut Gatzen: *Beruf bei Martin Luther und in der Industriellen Gesellschaft* (Münster, 1964), 261; Nahnfeldt: *Kalเหล ti och kön*.


55 Putney: *Muscular Christianity*, 57.


57 Bowman: »Sin, spirituality, and primitivism«, 105.
