

Dissertations published by the Department of Literature,
History of Ideas, and Religion, University of Gothenburg 30
ISSN 1102-9773, ISBN 978-91-88348-53-1

Södertörn Doctoral Dissertations 74
ISSN 1652-7399, ISBN 978-91-86069-57-5

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Piety, Intimacy and Mobility

A Case Study of Charismatic Christianity
in Present-day Stockholm

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Doctoral Dissertation

Doctoral dissertation in Religious Studies, to be publicly defended, by due permission of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Gothenburg, at Södertörn University, Alfred Nobels Allé, on 15 February 2013 at 13:00, in room MA624.

Faculty Examiner

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Södertörn University
Huddinge 2013


GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET
LITTERATUR, IDÉHISTORIA OCH RELIGION

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Abstract

The aim of this ethnographic study is to examine how affiliates of the multicultural charismatic Christian congregation New Life Church practice religiosity within the context of their personal daily lives, within the framework of the general congregation and in terms of their involvements with other religious organizations in the area of Stockholm.

Beginning with the assumption that the practice of contemporary religiosity and the development of a religious identity are part of an ongoing process of habituation, the study describes how practitioners cultivate a form of charismatic piety characterized by certain embodied orientations, patterns of ritualization and narrative genres. To shed further light on this process, it draws upon a variety of theories concerning ritualization, embodiment, performance, narratives and materiality. Apart from this, the study also constitutes an attempt to explore and measure the impact on the practitioners' religiosity of late modern developments such as urbanization, detraditionalization and global mobility as well as the growing absorption in consumerism, emotional intimacy and the unfolding of the "authentic" inner self.

While pursuing these ends, the study also calls into question previous assumptions about charismatic Christianity in Sweden, most particularly the assumption that today's practitioners remain inclined to be entirely faithful to one given institution and its system of beliefs and practices. Indeed this view is directly challenged herein by the finding that contemporary charismatics are far more inclined to eclectically appropriate elements and models of thoughts from various contexts of origin as well as to affiliate with and/or visit multiple Christian institutions.

This dissertation is based upon fieldwork (observation, participation and interviews) in Stockholm's charismatic milieu between the years 2009 and 2011 that is particularly focused on the organization New Life Church.

Keywords

Charismatic Christianity, Pentecostalism, habituation, learning religion, mobility, ritual-ization, ritual appropriation, religious consumption, commodification, materiality, embodiment, narrative, late modernity, globalization, inward turn, subjective turn, authenticity, intimacy, prayer, worship, music, testimony, urban religion, religious eclecticism.

Language: English

ISSN 1652-7399/1652-7399

ISBN: ISBN 978-91-88348-53-1/978-91-86069-57-5

Number of Pages: 251