

LUTHER AND NORWEGIAN NATION-BUILDING

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Abstract

In most Protestant countries, the Reformation was closely connected to the development of vernacular languages and literatures. In Norway under Danish rule, this was not the case. Only in the 19th century, during the nation-building period of independent Norway, a Norwegian ecclesiastical language was developed. Some authors claim that this completed the Reformation in Norway – a protracted Reformation indeed. Particularly important were the hymns of Magnus Brostrup Landstad and Elias Blix.

This study examines the role of Luther in the Norwegian 19th century national discourse, suggesting a three-phase development: Luther as text, as inspiration, and as argument. The full-blown use of Luther as argument was taken up by proponents of a *nynorsk* ecclesiastical language only during the final years of the Swedish-Norwegian union, just before its dissolution in 1905.

Keywords: Reformation; Luther; Norwegian language; *nynorsk*

Introduction

When Aasen and others started developing a *nynorsk* ecclesiastical language, they did what Luther did in Germany 350 years earlier. I think we can recognize the dimensions of this project by saying that in this way, they completed the Reformation in Norway.¹

This was the bold conclusion of the essay “Da *nynorsk* vart kyrkjemål” (“When *nynorsk* became an ecclesiastical language”, Furre 1996; 1997), published on the occasion of the 1996 centennial commemoration of the death of the linguist and language reformer Ivar Aasen (1813–1896) by the late Berge Furre, a professor of history at the University of Tromsø (now Arctic University of Norway) and of church history at the University of Oslo.

Nynorsk (“new Norwegian”), earlier called *landsmål* (which could be translated both as “language of the country” and as “language of the countryside”) has since 1885 been one of the two officially recognized forms of Norwegian written standard language, the other being *bokmål* (“book tongue”).

In Furre’s view, we may indeed talk about a protracted Reformation in the case of Norway. In this paper, I want to expand Furre’s thesis: I will argue that through the efforts of Aasen and others, Luther is assigned a role in Norwegian nation-building as well. Against the backdrop of the Reformation’s ambiguous role in Norwegian 19th century historiography and public debate, I suggest a three-phase development in this change in the perception of Luther’s role, starting with the encounter with Luther as text, developing

¹ Translations mine, if no other reference is given. Original: “Og da Aasen saman med andre gjekk igang med å utvikla eit *nynorsk* kyrkjemål, gjorde dei det Luther gjorde i Tyskland 350 år før. Eg trur vi ser dimensjonane ved verket om vi seier at dei på denne måten fullførde reformasjonen i Noreg.”

through the discovery of Luther as inspiration, and finally culminating in the invocation of Luther as argument.

“Reformation” and “Nation-Building”

A brief discussion of two key concepts is necessary before unfolding the argument.

First, what does “Reformation” signify in Furre’s dictum? Obviously, he does not refer to the changes in law and church order, from Roman Canon law to a Protestant state church system. This development was implemented already in the 16th century. Theological, ideological and mental changes may have taken longer, of course, but hardly 350 years. The focal point of Furre’s essay is the language, the use of the vernacular in liturgical and pedagogical contexts. For Furre, the Reformation is closely connected to the language controversy of modern Norway. In what follows, I want to trace the background for this, admittedly ideological, argument.

The second concept that may need clarification is “nation-building”, used to characterize certain processes in the formation of modern nation-states. In Norwegian scholarship, this concept is closely associated with the political sociologist Stein Rokkan (Rokkan 2009 [1970]). A key factor is the “identification of culture and territory” by means of standardization of language, culture, education and religion, or, to rephrase the point, the dissemination of a common set of values among the population of a state, including the social and geographical peripheries. A second step is the gradual distribution of civic rights, aiming to mobilize the population in political processes. Nation-building is typically a process driven by elites from the (geographical as well as social and political) centre.

The Lutheran Reformation in Denmark and Norway

The German Reformation found an increasingly popular resonance in Denmark during the politically turbulent 1520s, although the formal establishment of a national Lutheran church in Denmark was part of a coup d’état by Christian III in 1536. In Norway, however, the Reformation was not a matter of popular demand, but rather imposed from above, and from the outside, by the Danish king in Copenhagen, as part of the ultimate incorporation of Norway in the unified kingdom of Denmark-Norway (Bach-Nielsen and Schjørring 2012, 108–129; Berg 2017, 77–93).

Nevertheless, in a few generations, Norwegians were socialized – or disciplined – into the Lutheran form of Christianity – to the extent that, when independent Norway drafted its constitution in 1814, its founding fathers regarded as almost self-evident the first sentence of § 2, “The Evangelical-Lutheran Religion shall be maintained and constitute the official Church of the Kingdom” (Constitution 1814).² “Maintained”, that is, as it was under Danish rule. Lutheranism had become a part of the Norwegian identity. A key factor was the development of a Lutheran education system, with the *Small Catechism* of Luther as a cornerstone and the establishment of public schools in the 18th century as a milestone (Thorkildsen 2017).

Except for a short initial period of religious confusion, the equation “Norwegian = Lutheran” is valid among 19th century Norwegian immigrants to the United States as

² Official translation of 17 May 1814 Constitution. Original: “Den evangelisk-lutherske Religion forbliver Statens offentlige Religion” (Grunnlov 1814).

well. Lutheranism became a Norwegian identity marker. While Swedish immigrants, for example, spread across different denominations, Norwegians remained stubbornly Lutheran. However, the *correct* doctrinal Lutheranism was a matter of contention. By 1876, Norwegians in the US could choose between five different competing Norwegian-language Lutheran church bodies (Granquist 2015, 186).

Luther and Nation-Building

Still, among the cultural and political elites of the 19th century, and in their programs for shaping the identity of the young Norwegian nation-state, the Lutheran Reformation played an ambiguous role. In most Protestant countries, the Reformation was celebrated for its importance in establishing and strengthening national cultures and languages. This is, of course, particularly visible in Germany, especially in the 19th century efforts towards a united German nation-state. A direct line was drawn from Luther to Bismarck, constructing both as national heroes (Treitschke 1897; Purvis 2016).

In Norway, on the other hand, the Reformation was regarded as the deathblow for Norwegian language as a literary language, which was in fact a development that had been underway since the Kalmar union of the 14th century (Hagland 2005, 1235–1237; Halse 2011, 22–26; 2017, 363–365). Moreover, the Reformation was not only associated with the loss of language, but also with the final loss of national independence. As we shall see, even theologians had problems with the standard Protestant view of history, which saw the Reformation as the return to the golden age of the early Church after a long medieval period of decline. The religious heroes of Norwegian nation-building were not the reformers, but rather the medieval Christian kings, above all Olav Haraldsson or St. Olaf (Berg 2017, 17–20).

In some circles, however, a gradual nationalizing of Luther took place. We will now turn to this development.

Luther as Text

Catechism

Every Norwegian 19th century citizen was familiar with Martin Luther through texts, above all through reading and memorizing the *Small Catechism*, the most important textbook of the school curriculum since compulsory elementary school was introduced in 1739. Intimate knowledge of the catechism, as well as its voluminous pietist exposition in Erik Pontoppidan's *Sandhed til Gudfrygtighed* (1737), was a prerequisite for confirmation, which was also the final school exam.

As early as 1800, the politically active farmer Hans Barlien published a translation of the Ten Commandments with Luther's brief explanations, using his own Trøndelag dialect. He did so in a newspaper article, supplied by the following motivation: "Since young persons of peasant background have such difficulties in understanding the Danish language, I thought it might be useful for the Ten Commandments of God in Norwegian to be attached to the Small Catechism of Luther."³ Similar pedagogical reflections

³ Original: "Siden Ungdommen af Bondestanden kan saa vanskelig forstaae det danske Sprog, troer jeg det var nyttigt, at de ti Guds Bud paa Norsk bleve hæftede til Luthers Catechismus." Quoted after Halse 2011, 32.

accompany a number of other catechism translation attempts later in the 19th century. Another translator from Trøndelag, Olav J. Høyem, is the most outspoken example:

And here, in the name of Jesus, the complete Small Catechism of Luther is for the first time presented for its readers in Norway's own tongue, even though the book has been in this country since 1537, i.e. for 337 years! But during this whole time (10 generations, of which 8 under Denmark), she spoke the German-Danish language only, better or worse, to those either yawning or weeping poor children of Norway! (Luther and Høyem 1874, preface).⁴

These and other early attempts at domesticating Luther and the catechism did not receive widespread acclamation, but the pedagogical demand that they raised became an important argument in the debate.

Hymns

Norwegians also knew a certain number of Luther's hymns, but probably without associating the hymns with their author. Until the late 19th century, hymnals did not supply information about authors and composers; hymns were perceived as the common heritage and property of the Church. However, during the first half of the 19th century, the use of Luther's hymns was decreasing, to a great part due to the new Danish hymnals that appeared in the late 18th century. In 1855, three different Danish hymnals were used in parishes of the Church of Norway. The hymnal of Thomas Kingo (1699) included 32 hymns written, translated or edited by Martin Luther. In Ove Høegh Guldberg's 1778 hymnal, the number was reduced to nine, and in *Evangelisk-Christelig Psalmebog* (1798), only four of Luther's hymns were left (Rynning 1967). While the old and orthodox Kingo hymnal was still used in about 40 % of Norwegian parishes, the mildly rationalist *Evangelisk-Christelig* dominated the more populous regions (the diocese of Bergen forming an exception) (Landstad 1855).

Biography

Finally, Norwegian schoolchildren became gradually more familiar with the biographical Martin Luther as the 19th century passed. Church history was not a compulsory part of the curriculum of elementary schools until 1889, but since 1860 an encyclopedical reader (*lesebok* in Norwegian), meant to introduce pupils to literature, geography, history and other "secular" subjects, was part of the normal curriculum. A short "Life of Luther" was part of every 19th century reader. Even before 1860, many pupils had met the biographical Luther through such a reader. In Hans Jacob Grøgaard's *Læsebog for Børn*, the first edition of which appeared as early as 1816, Luther is introduced to children as a role model, not only with regard to faith and theology, but also to virtue: He was "a very learned man of invincible *courage*" (Grøgaard 1843, 138–139, emphasis original). The explanation of concepts is a characteristic of Grøgaard's book, and at this point the reader learns that "a person of *courage* is not afraid when in danger, but overcomes his fear". This image of Luther as a role model can be traced in Norwegian school textbooks until

⁴ Original: "Og her lig då i Jesu namn Luthers litle katekjes heil og halden for første gang på Noregs eigjet tungemål framfor lesarom sine, skjønt bokja har voret her I landet alt ifrå 1537, d.e. i 337 år! Men i al denne tid (10 mansaldrar, derav dei 8 under Danmark) talad ho berre, snart låkare snart likare, tyskdansk mål åt dei enten geispande eller gråtande stakkarom, Noregs born!"

the late 20th century, but its function is more that of character-building and church-building than nation-building.⁵

Luther as Inspiration

Hymnody

A key figure in the transformation of Luther's role in the Norwegian national discourse is the clergyman and hymnodist Magnus Brostrup Landstad (1802–1880) (Elseth 1997). In 1852, Landstad was assigned the task of editing the first official Norwegian hymnal. After a lengthy and complex process, the book was approved for use in the Church of Norway in late 1869. It appeared in print in 1870.

Landstad had a reputation not only as a clergyman and as an author of hymns, but also as a folklorist. During his many years as a parish priest in the Telemark region, he had collected traditional folk tales and songs, the latter published in the volume *Norske Folkeviser* (1853).⁶ During his Telemark years, he also wrote several patriotic poems, such as “17th of May 1837” and “Prayer for Norway at the Reformation Celebration 1837”, the 300th anniversary of the Norwegian Reformation.⁷ Landstad may be firmly placed within the national romantic movement of the mid-19th century.

The Norwegian ecclesiastical authorities do not seem to have had any particular national agenda behind the hymnal project. Its justification seems rather to be the practical and theological demands of parishioners and clergy.⁸ The use of three different hymnals within the same church body was deemed impractical. Kingo's book was regarded as old-fashioned, and the rationalist *Evangelisk-christelig* was judged by its enemies as “neither evangelical nor Christian”. Private initiatives and publications from the revival movements of Hans Nielsen Hauge and of the Moravian Brethren, as well as from individual clergymen, were clear signs of disappointment with the current hymnals. An important contribution to the debate was *Antydninger til et forbedret Psalmeverk for den norske Kirke* – “Suggestions for an improved hymnal for the Church of Norway” – by the philosopher and poet Johan Sebastian Welhaven (1840). Jan Schumacher links Welhaven's demand for a new hymnal with his romantic notion of a new “dawn of Norway”. However, he notes that Welhaven consequently avoids the word “national” in his argumentation regarding the hymnal and asks whether this may be a reflex of the harsh debate following his large-scale poem “Norges Dæmring” a few years earlier, the culmination of a bitter feud between two different strands of the national romantic movement (Schumacher 2009, 223–225).

For Landstad, on the other hand, the hymnal project did indeed have an explicit national agenda. In an “Open letter to a friend” from 1852, published in the newspaper *Christianiaposten*, he says, “Be not astonished, dear friend, that I here use the word

⁵ Original: “en meget lærd Mand med et uovervindeligt Mod. [...] Mod har den, som ikke er bange i Fare, og den, som overvinder sin Frygt.” Cf. Aschim forthcoming.

⁶ Recently re-published as volume 4 of Baklid and Hodne 2012–2017. The three first volumes collect Landstad's other folkloristic publications. A fifth and final volume, that will publish works of the hymnodist and hymnologist Landstad, is scheduled to appear in 2020.

⁷ Original titles: “17de Mai 1837 ved en Fest i Hvideseid” and “Bøn for Norge ved Reformations-Festen 1837”, both published in Landstad 1879.

⁸ There is a rich literature on the history of the Norwegian hymnal project, see e.g. Svendsen 1933; Molland 1979b, 71–85; Schumacher 1993.

national. It is justified, also as part of the demands for a new hymnal” (Landstad 1852a).⁹ The context for this utterance is a critique of Landstad’s main competitor, the Danish-born colleague Wilhelm Andreas Wexels (1797–1866), a curate at the cathedral of the Norwegian capital, whose *Psalmebog* (1849) was being considered for use as a hymnal in this important church. At the end of the day, Landstad, not Wexels, was chosen as editor of the official hymnal.

Enter Luther: The very first result of Landstad’s hymnal project to appear in print was his translation of all of Luther’s hymns and other religious songs, *Martin Luthers aandelige Sange* (1855). Four years later, a second edition appeared, supplied with translations of 25 core hymns from the 16th and 17th century (Luther, Landstad and Lindeman 1859). Interestingly, this was not announced in his project description a few years earlier (Landstad 1852b). In this way, Luther constitutes the starting point for Landstad’s national hymnal project.

However, there are few, if any, explicit signs of a national agenda in this book, neither in the introduction nor in the comments to individual hymns. In the introduction, Landstad rather seems to be influenced by the type of Lutheran restoration theology in which he was educated at the University of Christiania, under the influence of the two theological professors, Svend Hersleb and Stener J. Stenersen (Molland 1979a, 106–111; cf. Hågglund 2007, 362–366), and of the contemporary revitalization of interest in Luther’s hymns in Germany. He says, “To let the voice of Luther sound in the church and be sensed not only in doctrine and preaching of the Word, but also in the hymn singing of the church, is a wish that I think the congregation shares with me” (Luther and Landstad 1855, 1).¹⁰

One aspect that is emphasized in the introduction, however, proved to be a matter of contention for years to come, namely the language. “Hymns in the mother-tongue for ecclesiastical use” was the ideal (Luther and Landstad 1855, 7).¹¹ What “mother-tongue” should mean in a Norwegian context was still far from obvious. Overall, Landstad’s translations are written in a normal Danish idiom. The critique of his Luther translations, however, focused on the limited number of specific Norwegian language markers, standing out as deviant linguistic features in an otherwise Danish text, e.g. writing the common word for “mind” as *Hug* (Norwegian) rather than *Hu* (Danish).

The establishment of a language norm, a Norwegian vernacular separate from the Danish language, was an important aspect of Norwegian nation-building. In the mid-19th century, two competing language experiments were developed. Knud Knudsen (1812–1895) suggested taking Danish as spoken by the Norwegian city bourgeoisie as a starting point, and gradually introducing typical Norwegian words, as well as phonological and morphosyntactic markers. Ivar Aasen, on the other hand, developed the more radical strategy of studying Norwegian spoken dialects, comparing them with Old Norse, and developing a written language from these sources (Haugen 1966, 27–54; Bull 2005). Landstad was in close contact with Aasen and used him as a consultant, but his linguistic practice conformed to the program of Knudsen.

⁹ Original: “Fortørnes ikke kjære Ven, over at jeg her bruger Ordet *national!* det har sin Berettigelse ogsaa i Fordringerne til en Salmebog [...]”.

¹⁰ Original: “At Luthers Røst fremdeles maatte gaa igjennem Kirken og fornemmes ei alene i Læren og Ordets Prædiken, men ogsaa i Kirkens Salmesang, er et Ønske som vistnok Menigheden deler med mig.”

¹¹ Original: “Salmer i Modersmaalet til kirkeligt Brug”.

When Landstad published the complete draft of the new hymnal (Landstad 1861), the language question became acute. Landstad's use of Norwegian linguistic features was heavily criticized, and became a central issue in his own book-length response *Om Salmebogen* – “Concerning the Hymnal” (1862). This is a very interesting text, where Landstad explicitly invokes Luther as inspiration, but at the same time demonstrates the typical Norwegian ambivalence towards the Reformation:

Luther struck with his sharp sword, he broke through the church door with the German language and thus opened the mouth of the people to the praise of God like never before, yes, he opened a stream of ecclesiastical literature that flows steadily and fertilizes the desert until the present day. But we live in a remote place. Latin was expelled [...], but German took its place at the main church, and here in the smaller churches, German-Danish was allowed. But Norwegian, no, that was repugnant. Here, strangely, nobody sang the song of liberated Jerusalem in the vernacular. [...] Through the Hymnal, the Bible translation and the whole literary apparatus connected to the Reformation, the German-Danish entered, and the same way it must be expelled. The Reformation, which elsewhere brought the language of the people to the fore, by us served to displace it. We got Danish priests, Danish-German Bible translations, hymnals, devotional books etc. (Landstad 1862, 110.115).¹²

Landstad's draft went back and forth between the editor and a committee of consultants, resulting in major revisions of the hymnal, in particular the elimination of most of the Norwegian markers, until the final approval in 1869.

Earlier that very year, however, a tiny and anonymous publication had appeared: *Nokre Salmar: Gamle og nye* (“Some hymns: Old and new”). The anonymous author-translator was the 33-year-old theologian Elias Blix (1836–1902), later to become a public figure as a professor of Hebrew language at the Royal Frederik's University of Kristiania (Oslo) and as a politician of the liberal party, serving in the government 1884–1888. Blix came from a typical coastal peasant background in Northern Norway. He was trained as a teacher at Tromsø Normal School, but lived most of his life in the capital Kristiania, where he studied theology and philology while working as a teacher. Though theologically conservative, he became a member of liberal and nationalistic intellectual circles. His close contact with Ivar Aasen and the *landsmål/nynorsk* movement was especially important for his development as a poet. Due to both the quality and the quantity of his hymns and translations, he is still today regarded as the father of Norwegian hymnody, together with Landstad. The fourth edition of *Nokre Salmar* (1891) contained 150 hymns; an additional 50 ones appeared in *Salmar og Songar* (1900). The

¹² Original: ”Luther slog herind med sit skarpe Sværd, brød med Tydsken ind ad Kirkedøren og aabnede derved Folkets Mund til Guds Lovprisning som aldrig før, ja aabnede en kirkelig Literaturstrøm, som til Ørkenens Frugtbargjørelse flyder rigelig indtil denne Dag. Men, vi bo langt borte. Latinen blev fortrængt, [...] men Tydsken indtog dens Plads ved den store Hovedkirke, og her ved Annexerne tillodes Tydsk-Dansk. Men Norsk, nei det var afskyeligt! Og hos os var det ubegribeligvis ingen, som sang det befriede Jerusalems Sang paa Modersmaalet. [...] Gjennem Salmebogen, Bibeloversættelsen og det hele litterære Apparat, som ledsagede Reformationen, er det Tydsk-Danske kommet ind, og samme Vei maa det vises ud. Reformationen, som andre Steder bragte Folkesproget frem, tjente hos os til at fortrænge det. Vi fik danske Præster, dansk-tydsk Bibeloversættelse, Salmebog, Andagtsbøger o. s. v.”

1891 volume was officially approved the following year as an optional hymnal supplement for parishes that wanted the opportunity to sing hymns in *nynorsk* at their regular services (Tømmerberg 1999; Aschim 2008).

Landstad had tried to implement Knudsen's language program in the Church. Blix succeeded in implementing that of Aasen. Interestingly, Luther seems to be a starting point for the hymnody of Blix as well as that of Landstad. Translations of Luther's own hymns and other German hymns from the Reformation period dominated his first attempts. Unlike Landstad, however, Blix wrote no hymnological texts. He did not comment publicly on his own strategies, with a single exception. At a celebration in 1901, he made the following grammatical statement:

My intention in publishing the hymns in *landsmaal* was that I wanted to try bringing the hymns and God's word in general as close as possible to the heart of the multitude of our people who speak dialect, which is closer to *landsmaal* than to *bokmaal*; furthermore, I wanted us to be able to "praise Christ in our own tongue".¹³

Bible Translation

Blix does not explicitly mention Luther or the Reformation in connection with his hymns. However, in the same speech he comments on the first translation of the New Testament into *landsmål/nynorsk*, completed in 1889. At this occasion, he reports, Ivar Aasen stated: "If we had gotten a translation like this during the Reformation, many things would now have been different in Norway, and it would especially have been different at many a deathbed."¹⁴

The Norwegian Bible Society had been founded in 1816, as one of the oldest civil society organizations of independent Norway, with Bible distribution and Bible translation as its main tasks (Holter 1966; Kullerud 2016). During the first phase of Bible translation work on Norwegian soil, it was considered more important to supply an accurate translation than a Norwegian one. The 1873 revision of the New Testament by Johannes N. Skaar was the first hesitant attempt at applying the language program of Knud Knudsen to Norwegian Bible translation (Holter 1991, 90).

The real pioneer work of Norwegian Bible translation, however, was the experimental New Testament translation into *landsmål/nynorsk* that Elias Blix and Ivar Aasen developed during the 1880s, together with Johannes Belsheim (1829–1909) and Matias Skard (1846–1927), resulting in the publication of a complete New Testament in 1889.¹⁵ The project was funded by *Stortinget*, the Norwegian Parliament, through yearly grants on the state budget.

¹³ Speech of Blix, 19 May 1901, quoted in Aschim 2008, 460. Translation adapted from Tømmerberg 1999, 52. Original: "Mi meining med aa giva salmarne ut paa *landsmaal* var den, at eg vilde prøva aa leggja salmarne og Guds ord i det heile rett nær inn til hjartat paa dei mange av vaart folk, som talar eit maalføre, som er langt meir nærskyldt med landsmaalet enn med bokmaalet – eg vilde, at ogso me skulde prøva aa 'lovsyngja Krist paa vaar tunga'."

¹⁴ Translation of Tømmerberg 1999, 84. Original: "Her maa eg faa nemna dei ord, Ivar Aasen sagde, daa me var ferdige med 'Ny Test.': 'Hadde me fengje ei slik umsetjing paa reformationstidi, so hadde mangt vore annarleides i Norig no, og iser vilde det sét annarleides ut ved mang ei daudsseng'."

¹⁵ Actually, the book was not available until early 1890.

By this time, the language question had become an issue of national importance. Support for the *landsmål/nynorsk* strategy was strong within the liberal wing in *Stortinget*. The initiative for the Bible translation project did not come from the Bible Society, but from one of the important organizations of the *landsmål/nynorsk* movement, Det Norske Samlag, which was founded in 1868 and still exists as a publishing house. The initiators and their political supporters proceeded carefully and managed to raise a majority in *Stortinget* for what was considered a controversial project. Even Ivar Aasen himself had thought that conservatism in language matters would be strongest in the religious field, and that language experiments in this field had to wait. The success of the Blix hymns was proof that *landsmål/nynorsk* was indeed a possible medium for religious texts as well, but the Bible itself? The project was explicitly presented as an experiment, in particular for pedagogical purposes, not as a first step towards an official church Bible.¹⁶

The result was celebrated as a milestone in the development of *landsmål/nynorsk*. In retrospect, it seems that the symbolic value of this first translation was more important than its practical value. It was important for the translators, especially for Aasen and Blix, to give a representation of the source text that was as exact as possible, and to create a literary idiom that did not deviate too much from the familiar traditional biblical language. This trait, as well as a number of linguistic features derived from Old Norse roots, was considered antiquarian by many readers. Ten years later, Elias Blix revised the text in a mildly modernizing direction, followed by a second revision by Peter Hognestad in 1908.

If Blix is still considered the *nynorsk* hymn writer *par excellence*, the honour for the development of a classical *nynorsk* Bible style is given to Alexander Seippel (1851–1938). Like Blix, Seippel was a professor of Semitic languages (Lande, Lomheim and Stubseid 2001). During the first third of the 20th century, he translated a number of biblical books from the Old and New Testaments, in a vivid idiom close to the language actually spoken in rural districts. Several authors linked the work of Seippel to the use of Luther as inspiration, among them the would-be bishop Peter Hognestad (1866–1931):

Seippel has fully implemented Luther's idea that the Word of God should move into people's houses and speak entirely in the domestic tongue. A fresh stream of living popular language runs through the old Book of the Bible and makes it alive, so that it has a scent of mountains and woods, but still with a fragrance of the sunny air of the Orient (Hognestad 1914b, 17).¹⁷

Luther as Argument

Some years earlier, Peter Hognestad had even introduced the full-blown use of Luther as argument in the debate on nation-building. In 1904, the year before the dissolution of the Swedish-Norwegian union, Hognestad had given a lecture to the clergy of Kristiania on “Kyrkja og den norske maalreising” – “The Church and the Norwegian language revival”,

¹⁶ A detailed discussion of the history of the New Testament translation, and the early history of *nynorsk* ecclesiastical language in general, is found in Halse 2009; 2011. Cf. also Bondevik 2003.

¹⁷ Original: “Seippel hev gjort fullt aalvor av Luthers tanke at Guds ord skal flytja heim i stova til folk og tala fullt ut paa heimemaalet. Ein frist straum av livande folkemaal renn gjennom den gamle bibelboki og gjer ho livande, so det angar fraa fjell og skog, men likevel med daam fraa Austerlands solfylte luft.” Similarly Fjær 1926, 16–17.

later published in *Luthersk Kirketidende*. This text is one of the most explicit statements in the literature of the synthesis of *norskdom og kristendom* – “Norwegianness and Christendom”, a slogan increasingly in use since the 1890s. This is the point where the *landsmål/nynorsk* language program, the national consciousness and the Protestant Reformation are finally explicitly tied together, reaching a climax in the construction of Luther as a German Ivar Aasen, or of Aasen as a Norwegian Martin Luther:

Wycliffe in England and Huss in Bohemia and *Luther* in Germany were lucky enough to live in times of national revival, which God through them was able to make into religious times of cleansing. [...] We see this especially in *Luther*, for he shared this vision and worked wholeheartedly for a Christian and a national awakening, simultaneously. [...] When Luther was translating the Bible, he wanted to discover the best German *common* language. [...] In 1535, he wrote to a friend in Nuremberg that he should get a boy to collect new German images and rhymes and songs and books and send them to him, because he still wanted to learn good popular German. He collected German proverbs, and he wrote a German book of names. One could almost believe it was an Ivar Aasen (Hognestad 1905, 212–213).¹⁸

Aasen, Blix and Seippel were not the only sources of inspiration for Hognestad. In 1878, the theologian Christopher Bruun (1839-1920) had published the volume *Folkelige Grundtanker*, a revised version of a series of lectures from 1870-1877. Bruun was a pioneer within the folk high school movement, inspired by the Danish theologian, educator, historian and hymnodist N. F. S. Grundtvig (1783-1872). He had a somewhat ambivalent relationship to the Lutheran tradition, especially in its orthodox-pietist interpretation. Nonetheless, in his vision for a Christian revival that should embrace all aspects of human culture, including patriotism and vernacular language, he explicitly invokes the inspiration of Luther (1878, 390-391). And in a seldom-quoted text from 1891, he goes still further in the use of Luther as argument:

When I travel around the country and teach devout Christians that they should make their Christianity go hand in hand with love of their fatherland and of the whole popular and human and cultural progress that our people experiences these days, then I could very well subsume all of what I have to say in this field in a single word: I will try to teach them to be a bit more *Lutheran in their Christian life* than what has hitherto been the case.

There has been a lot of talk about being Lutheran in this country, that you should not depart from “the pure Lutheran doctrine.” [...] However, while both pastors

¹⁸ Original: “Wikliff i England, Huss i Bøhmen, og *Luther* i Tyskland hadde den lukka aa liva i nationale nyreisningstider som Gud gjennom deim fekk gjera til religiøse reisingstider. [...] Me kann sjaa det serleg paa *Luther*, for han hadde syn fyr dette og av fullt hjarta arbeidde fyr ei kristeleg og national uppnying paa same tid. [...] Daa *Luther* umsette Bibelen, vilde han finna fram det beste tyske *folkemaalet*. [...] I 1535 skreiv han til ein ven i Nürnberg, at han maatte lata ein gut samla inn nye tyske bilæte, rim, songar og bøker og senda honom, for han vilde endaa læra seg upp i god folkeleg tysk. Han samla tyske ordtøke og skreiv ei tysk namnebok, so ein skulde mest tru det var ein Ivar Aasen.” A revised version in Hognestad 1914a, 33–34; cf. Halse 2016, 192–193.

and others have eagerly demanded complete accordance with Luther and the Lutheran in the field of *doctrine*, they have been far less scrupulous in the field of *life* (Bruun 1891, 39).¹⁹

Luther Belated

In retrospect, an intriguing question arises: Why does the use of Luther as argument seem to appear so late in the Norwegian national discourse in general, and in the language controversy in particular? In the discussions preparing for the first *landsmål/nynorsk* translation of the New Testament in the 1880s, the proponents apparently avoided this, in many ways quite obvious, line of argumentation. Why not make Luther a Norwegian nation-builder, as well as a German one?

My suggestion is that two parallel processes in the 1890s were necessary for this development to take place: On the one hand, the nationalization of the Church of Norway, on the other, the Christianization of the *landsmål/nynorsk* movement.

The Norwegian clergy – especially that of the capital – was known for its political conservatism, peaking in the infamous pamphlet *Til Christendommens Venner i vort Land* (“Appeal to friends of Christianity in our country”) from 1883, a warning against the liberal political winds of the time (Wisløff 1961). In these circles, one of the most quoted Luther sayings was his explanation of the Fourth Commandment in the *Small Catechism*, where “Honour your father and your mother” is extended to include obedience to all “other authorities”, a phrase that was exploited in the propaganda against all forms of political opposition, including voices arguing for parliamentarism or political as well as cultural nationalism (Thorkildsen 2005, 408–410). Grundtvig-inspired voices like Bruun were marginalized.

The *landsmål/nynorsk* movement was by many associated with political radicalism and “freethinking”, i.e. a critical stance towards religion. The growing popularity of the hymns of Blix indicated that this was far from the whole truth, but the proponents of the experimental Bible translation clearly chose a non-provocative strategy to achieve their aims.

During the 1890s, however, the winds were changing. On the one hand, the political conflict with Sweden and with the king was escalating; on the other hand, the youth movement of the *landsmål/nynorsk* wing was increasingly influenced by religious movements, resulting in the “Christianization” of the movement (Tvinnereim 1973). Towards the dissolution of the Swedish-Norwegian union in 1905, the “Church of Norway became national”, to quote Dag Thorkildsen (2005). As we have seen, this is the point where the full-blown use of Luther as argument appears.

At this point in time, another important factor had appeared: The first generation of clergy using *landsmål/nynorsk* as their linguistic idiom, also from the pulpit (Aure 1924).

¹⁹ Original: “[N]aar jeg reiser rundt her i Landet og taler til vakte Christne om at de skal lære at faa sin Christendom til at gaa Haand i Haand med Kjærlighed til Fædrelandet og til hele det folkelige og menneskelige og culturmæssige Opsving, som i vore Dage gaar igjennem vort Folk, saa kunde jeg for den Sags Skyld gjerne sammenfatte alt det jeg paa dette Omraade har at sige i et eneste Ord: jeg vil søge at lære dem at være lidt mer *lutherske i sit Christenliv*, end de hidtil har været.

Der har været megen Tale om at være luthersk her i Landet, om at man ikke maa vige af fra ”den rene lutherske Lære”. [...] Men paa samme Tid som baade Prester og andre paa *Lærens* Omraade har ivret for den fuldeste Overensstemmelse med Luther og det lutherske, saa har de paa *Livets* Omraade været alt andet end nøieregnende.”

A front figure among them was Peter Hognestad (Halse 2016), who drafted the first official *nynorsk* liturgy (1908), edited the first (unofficial) complete Bible translation into *nynorsk* (1921), and, together with Anders Hovden and Bernt Støylen, edited the officially recognized hymnal *Nynorsk salmebok* (1925). For Furre and others, these are the publications that mark the completion of the protracted Reformation in Norway (Furre 1996; 1997; Halse 2017). To apply Stein Rokkan's categories (2009 [1970]), they are the products of nation-building efforts originating not from the central elites, but from circles from the geographical and social peripheries.

Luther and the Protracted Language Reformation

In the end, is Furre's thesis – that these *nynorsk* pioneers “completed the Reformation in Norway” – justified?

To a certain extent, yes. There is no doubt that the more radical *landsmål/nynorsk* program has influenced the development of *bokmål* too, also as an ecclesiastical language. A clear example is the first complete *bokmål* Bible translation from 1904, where Elias Blix took active part in the final redaction until his death in 1902.

It may, however, be argued that Furre downplays the importance of the efforts on the *bokmål* side, in particular the early work of Landstad. In conclusion, this earlier, but less quoted, utterance of Egil Elseth might be more adequate:

It is to a certain extent justified to say that it was Landstad and Blix who completed the Reformation in Norway. They laid the foundation for an evangelical hymnody that the congregation felt familiar with (Elseth 1989, 97).²⁰

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²⁰ Original: “Med ein viss rett kan ein seie at det var Landstad og Blix som fullførte reformasjonen i Noreg. Dei la grunnlaget for ein evangelisk salmesong som kyrkjelyden kjende seg heime i.”

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