

ANALECTA ROMANA

INSTITUTI DANICI

XXVIII

«L'ERMA» di BRETSCHNEIDER

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## INSTITUTI DANICI

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# XXVIII

«L'ERMA» di BRETSCHNEIDER

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ROMAE MMI

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# Pope Innocent III and Denmark, Sweden, and Norway

by TORBEN K. NIELSEN

In September 1998 an international conference *Innocenzo III - Urbs et Orbis* was held in Rome – in celebration of the 800th anniversary of the accession of Pope Innocent III. More than 150 scholars from all over Europe and the United States took part. They discussed the historical significance, efforts, and activities of the important medieval pope, Innocent III, who was the undisputed leader of the Christian church in the years from 1198 to 1216. Innocent III has become both famous and disreputable in medieval history. During his pontificate many of the now traditional features of the European Middle Ages came into being. For example, he holds a major position in the history of the crusades. It was under his leadership and by his command that the Fourth Crusade was launched. Whether or not the pope should be blamed for the crusaders' attacks on Christian cities and the sacking of Constantinople in 1204 is still a major bone of contention in modern crusading historiography. Innocent III also launched crusades against both political opponents in the south of Italy and against the heretical Albigensian Cathars in the south of France. Furthermore, he actively supported crusades against the pagan peoples of the Baltic. He played a very active part in the power struggles in the German Empire between Otto IV, Philip of Swabia and the later Frederick II. In modern scholarship the pope is renowned, as he was in his own times, for modernising the papal chancery, for reforming the papal administration, for setting new standards in papal letter-writing, and for further developing ecclesiastical canon law. These were just some of the means he used in a successful campaign to raise the papacy to one of the most powerful institutions of medieval Europe. Even though In-

nocent III is mainly known for his political activities concerning the crusades to the Middle East, concerning the kings of France, Germany and England, he also made his mark on the fringe areas of Europe – apart from the already mentioned Baltic crusades. In particular, the present paper will attempt to provide a short introduction to papal policy towards Denmark, Sweden, and Norway during the pontificate of Innocent III.<sup>1</sup>

These Nordic countries were all in a transitional phase of developing a monarchically controlled state and an ecclesiastical organisation in the period from *c.* 1000-1250. They were moving away from a traditional and often regionally based kingship, whose rulers were chosen locally, and towards a kingship of a more "European" nature. This was a development, which was to establish a completely reformed system of monarchical government in a Nordic context, and lay the foundations for a form of Christian kingship based on new principles of dynasticism and primogeniture, and on a new interpretation of the king's rights and privileges, but also obligations, towards society and the church. Taxation, administration and military organisation were important factors in this development. In the high medieval period, in all three countries, the church for its part was well on the way to achieving its final pre-Reformation structure and status as an important social power. This involved among other features the establishing of bishoprics, the collecting of tithes, the building of churches. It was a development that can justifiably be called a second wave of christianization, following the initial christianizing of these countries by mainly German missionaries in the period from roughly 900-1100.<sup>2</sup> During the

central Middle Ages a further formal but also mental christianization of the Nordic peoples took place. These processes are also documented in the correspondence between Innocent III and the North. Primarily based on the papal correspondence, the present article proposes to give some examples of the relationship between the papacy and the Nordic countries.

#### *Innocent III and Denmark*

In Denmark, two great prelates witnessed Innocent's pontificate from 1198 to 1216. Absalon headed the archdiocese of Lund from 1177 to 1201. Originally elected bishop of Roskilde in 1158, he administered both sees in a strange double-episcopacy from 1177 to 1191,<sup>3</sup> when his younger relative, Peder Sunesen, took over the see of Roskilde. When Absalon died in 1201 Peder's brother, Anders Sunesen, took over as new archbishop of Denmark, papal legate and primate of the Swedish church. Anders Sunesen held his high position until 1223, when he was allowed to resign because of illness.<sup>4</sup> He died in 1228. The largest part of the correspondence between the papacy and the Nordic churches in the pontificate of Innocent III was between the pope himself and Anders Sunesen. Given the Danish archbishop's many papal privileges and his dominant position in the Nordic church province, it will be appropriate to begin with the relationship between Innocent and Denmark.

Contrary to the situation in Sweden and Norway, the relationship between the royal and ecclesiastical powers in Denmark is often characterised as one of harmony.<sup>5</sup> This harmony is often presented as taking the form of a relationship of mutual dependence and support, which had been in effect ever since 1170, when the then archbishop of Denmark, Eskil (1100-1181), at a great festivity, beatified Canute Lavard, the grandfather of the later Danish Kings Canute VI (1182-1202) and Valdemar II the Victorious (1202-1241). The festivities in 1170 marked *inter alia* the end of Danish involvement in the papal schism between Alexander III and Victor IV.<sup>6</sup> On this occasion King Valdemar I the Great (1147-1182) also had his oldest legitimate son, six-year-old Canute VI,<sup>7</sup> crowned as joint-ruler, thus securing new principles of royal, dynastic succession and primo-

geniture. However, in spite of this alleged newfound harmony between church and monarchy during the reigns of Canute VI and his brother Valdemar II the Victorious (Canute died childless), one serious political crisis threatened to destroy it.

With the support of King Valdemar I the Great, a certain Bishop Valdemar of Slesvig (1158-1236) had been installed in the vacant bishopric to the south of Jutland in 1179.<sup>8</sup> His family background made him a potential threat to the royal power.<sup>9</sup> As an infant bishop Valdemar had been raised at the court of King Valdemar I the Great, who had taken steps to ensure that the fatherless child later become an ecclesiastic.<sup>10</sup> During the reign of King Canute VI, Bishop Valdemar furthermore gained the right to govern the duchy of Slesvig, due to the minority of King Canute's brother, the later King Valdemar II the Victorious. When in 1187 King Canute finally transferred the duchy of Slesvig to his younger brother, Bishop Valdemar saw his position as both duke and bishop-elect destroyed.<sup>11</sup> Apparently, Bishop Valdemar felt degraded and reacted accordingly.<sup>12</sup> In 1192, with both Swedish and Norwegian military backing, he tried to invade the northern parts of Jutland, where, in a blatant act of political misjudgement, he proclaimed himself king of Denmark.<sup>13</sup> But he was speedily defeated by a Danish royal army and thrown into prison in 1192.<sup>14</sup>

This was the situation when Innocent became pope in 1198, and of course the Apostolic See could not tolerate the imprisonment of a leading prelate. In 1192 Celestine III had written to the Danish clergy and ordered the Danish bishops to support the papal demand that King Canute VI, under threats of excommunication and interdict, should release Bishop Valdemar.<sup>15</sup> However, doubtless much to the surprise of Celestine, the entire Danish episcopate supported the king's action and protested in a letter to the pope in which they apparently tried to justify their version of the story.<sup>16</sup> Celestine III deferred a ruling on the case, and it was only when Innocent III had become pope in 1198, and Valdemar II had ascended the Danish throne in 1202, that the case was reopened. In 1203 Innocent III wrote an interesting letter

to the new Danish king, Valdemar II the Victorious.<sup>17</sup> Apparently, Innocent III had no difficulty in understanding the Danish arguments for keeping Bishop Valdemar imprisoned, but reaffirmed, all the same, that this was a violation of one of the Lord's anointed. Furthermore, the pope stated in his letter that other rulers in other countries had taken note of the imprisonment, and had in this case found "some kind of defence for their own mistakes and evasions and excuses for their sins" when it came to the suppression of the clergy.<sup>18</sup> In the letter King Valdemar was urged to consider the salvation of his own soul, and earnestly requested to release the bishop. In the papal letter there are no hints, still less threats, of possible papal sanctions, if the Danish king failed to comply with the papal suggestions. That Innocent felt very uneasy and ambivalent about this case is clearly attested by his remarks on Bishop Valdemar in the same letter: "Lo, had he not existed, this man, Valdemar, bishop of Slesvig, he who, disregarding the honour of episcopacy when uniting kingship with sacerdotal office and thereby becoming a monster with many heads, in temerity conspired against the king of the Danes, your brother K, to whom he was bound by oath into a close-knit loyalty".<sup>19</sup> After calling the bishop a deceiving hypocrite, Innocent continued: "Lo, had he only been transformed into a pillar of salt, as he turned and looked back, when withdrawing his hands from the plough and once again letting himself become occupied in worldly affairs". Lot's wife in the Old Testament (*Gen 19:26*) is here pressed into service as a metaphor with which to castigate the bishop, in another display of the rhetorical language of which Innocent III was a master. If only Bishop Valdemar had died by his reprobate actions, he himself would have been the only one to mourn over his own departure, and he would have caused no "tears on the cheeks of the church" ("lacrimas") nor "stains on the office of episcopacy" ("maculas").<sup>20</sup> And later in the same letter the pope declares: "For it would be easier to bear, had he died by his own weapon when he drew the worldly sword, and in this way had fallen into the grave he had prepared, and if he had not with his own capture defiled the hand of the

king and sullied the king's reputation, by being held captive for so long".<sup>21</sup> Once again Innocent gives proof of his mastery of linguistic techniques; here he uses additional biblical metaphors drawn from Matthew 26:52 and Proverbs 26:27. Bishop Valdemar was to be released, the pope ended, and he was to spend the rest of his days in Italy and allow his episcopal see to be governed by a permanent substitute. Finally, in 1206 Bishop Valdemar was released and escorted to Italy.<sup>22</sup>

The case of Bishop Valdemar was the only serious political problem between the papacy and the monarchy in Denmark during the pontificate of Innocent III. However, another highly political issue involved Innocent III and leading sections of the Danish royal house and clergy. In 1193 the sister of King Canute VI, Ingeborg, was married to the king of France, Philippe Auguste. It was a marriage, which was to end in personal tragedy for the Danish princess. On the wedding night Philippe Auguste repudiated Ingeborg. This was the start of a juridical and political process, which was to last for thirty years until the death of Philippe in 1223. The diplomatic manoeuvres involved interdict on the kingdom of France<sup>23</sup> and, at times, vigorous papal support for Ingeborg and for the Danish arguments. Several papal decretals of great juristic importance were only one of the effects of the case. These were decretals in which the pope reaffirmed his own pronounced opinions on the indissolubility of marriage and the prerogatives of papal power.<sup>24</sup> From yet another perspective the marriage case is also significant, in that it produced several interesting papal letters of consolation and, also from a literary point of view, remarkable letters from the queen herself, in which she poignantly described her desperate fate, imprisoned as she was by her own lawful husband.<sup>25</sup>

In this climate of relative harmony, the papal concern for Denmark was expressed in other issues of a more clerical nature. In 1198 Absalon was instructed to further investigate a case from Sweden.<sup>26</sup> Apparently, the former archbishop of Uppsala, Peder, had presided over the investiture of two bishops in their respective sees, even though the bishops had both



been born in unlawful wedlock. Absalon was ordered to depose the bishops and see to it that a new election was held. The pope, in his letter, reports having been told that “although a great many clerics in Sweden are not born in lawful wedlock, and, due to the shame connected with their illegitimate conception, should in no way dare to aspire to the highest ecclesiastical dignity, contrary to the recently and maturely renewed constitutions of the Lateran Council, nevertheless they seek in exceeding shame to gain episcopal dignities”.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, we are told that Absalon had in fact on several occasions threatened offenders of this kind, but that the practice seemed to persist. Perhaps this was because the people of this land were still “beginners in the faith”.<sup>28</sup> Given that traditionally a large proportion of these legal cases, involving persons of illegitimate birth seeking ecclesiastical preferment, actually involved priests’ sons, this letter might give us some idea of the level of non-celibate clergy, at least in parts of Sweden. It might also suggest that the custom of priests actually marrying or living with women in concubinage seems to have been very common.<sup>29</sup> These moral questions were once again touched upon in another letter from Pope Innocent III to Archbishop Anders Sunesen dating to 1203.<sup>30</sup> In this letter, Innocent III expressed his personal satisfaction that the initiatives taken by the Danish archbishop seemed successful, but also remarked that the task of making the clergy lead a “juridically and morally irreproachable” life seemed at the same time to be experiencing some serious setbacks: “You should know that it has come to our knowledge that although you persecute the disgusting vice of fornication and impose purity on the servants of the altar, and even though many, forced and encouraged by you, have extricated themselves from filth and dirt and have promised to serve the Lord with a chaste body and a pure heart, there are still some who wallow in their filth and several who return to their vomit, in that the canons at the cathedrals keep concubines in public and so to say offer them marital affection”.<sup>31</sup> Archbishop Anders Sunesen was told by Innocent III to see to it that these canons, and other clerics like them, were forced by threats of suspension and loss

of their benefices to repudiate their concubines. He was also instructed to “enjoin, urge and even force” the relatives of the concubines to receive these women again.<sup>32</sup>

From these papal letters we must conclude, that Anders Sunesen must in fact have been seriously engaged in trying to impose a celibate life on his clergy. The exact nature of the archiepiscopal efforts in this respect is unknown, but several inferences can be drawn from the wording of the papal letter. Innocent III stated that the clergy had promised Anders Sunesen to “serve the Lord with a chaste body”. This suggests to me that Anders Sunesen had actually demanded written vows from his clergy. Vows of chastity are known at an earlier date to have been an instrument in the ecclesiastical struggle for sexual continence among the clergy.<sup>33</sup> Often, though, with meagre results. We learn in a papal letter of October 1213 that Anders Sunesen had asked the Holy See for advice concerning bigamous priests, priests’ sons and a claim from the Swedish clergy that they actually be allowed to marry.<sup>34</sup> To the first question, Innocent III ruled that priests who had more than one concubine, either at the same time or one after another, did not become liable to the irregularity of bigamy, but were only to be punished by being “branded for simple fornication”: that is, if they made an effort to “live in chastity henceforth”.<sup>35</sup> The legal problem these unchaste priests presented to the Danish archbishop was whether he himself could dispense the clerics from their sins so they could resume their ecclesiastical positions, or whether they were obliged to go to Rome and ask for papal absolution. This would have been the case, if the priests were considered juridically bigamous. Of course, the pope by answering in the way he did, at the same time underscored the church’s position that relationships between a cleric of the major orders and a woman could in no way be considered a marriage. It followed that such clerics could not be considered bigamous, because only lawfully wed people could be termed bigamous – in the canonical sense, that is. The second question from Anders Sunesen was concerned with the offspring of such unchaste, but “non-bigamous” clerics. The question was whether

priests' sons could be promoted to holy orders without any further ado. Innocent III was on safe grounds in his answer to this question. The pope was able to point to older decretals, which claimed that priests' sons were not to be promoted to holy orders unless they lived a virtuous life in either a monastery or a regulated canonry.<sup>36</sup> The last of the archiepiscopal questions is at the same time the one which most directly points to the local, day-to-day problems of the Nordic church: What to do with the Swedish priests, who claimed that an old papal dispensation gave them permission to marry? The only thing Innocent could answer in the letter was that he could make no strict ruling on this matter before he had inspected the papal privilege which the Swedes claimed to possess.<sup>37</sup>

Other than show the keen interest that the archbishop took in the intricacies of canon law, the letter and the questions it addresses also reveal another important question. The letter shows us how deeply the pope and the Danish archbishop were aware of, and also troubled by, the moral laxity of the clergy in the Nordic church province. It is obvious that the questions posed by the archbishop to the pope reflected real problems facing Anders Sunesen in his daily pastoral ministry. They imply that a major problem afflicting the Nordic church province was that of non-celibate or unchaste clergy.

Another way of investigating the relationship between Innocent III and Denmark is by looking into the papal privileges granted to the Danish archbishop. When he was elected archbishop in 1201, Anders Sunesen also became primate of the Swedish realm<sup>38</sup> and eventually he became papal legate in 1204.<sup>39</sup> These dignities had also been held by Anders' predecessors, Eskil and Absalon. Even before the erection of the Norwegian archdiocese at Nidaros/Trondheim in 1152 or 1153 and the Swedish at Uppsala in 1164, the Danish archdiocese in Lund had proved its central position in the Nordic countries. Shortly after the foundation of the Danish archdiocese of Lund in 1104,<sup>40</sup> the first archbishop, Asser, invested Icelandic prelates with their episcopal dignities in ceremonies held in Lund in 1106 and 1118. Further

such investitures were held in 1122, 1134, 1147, and 1152. Unfortunately, for this period we lack the source material to determine whether or not it was the archbishop of Lund who also consecrated the other Nordic bishops of Norway and Sweden. However, considering that we have ample evidence that even the most remotely situated bishoprics in the North were invested from Lund,<sup>41</sup> it seems reasonable to assume that also the Norwegian and Swedish bishoprics had their bishops invested and consecrated by the Danish archbishop in Lund.<sup>42</sup> This situation of Danish ecclesiastical supremacy in the North changed of course when the other Nordic archdioceses were erected in 1152/3 and 1164 respectively. It must have been in connection with, or slightly earlier than, the foundation of the Swedish church province in 1164, that the Danish archbishop received the first papal privilege as primate over the Swedish realm. The privilege of primacy over Sweden granted to the Danish archbishops must have been renewed by every change of either pope or archbishop. However, only two examples of this *privilegium maius* have been preserved. The earliest of these, which might actually furnish the original text upon which all subsequent privileges of primacy to the Danish archbishops were based, was issued by Pope Adrian IV to Archbishop Eskil in January 1157.<sup>43</sup> Papal privileges of primacy granted to Absalon have not been preserved,<sup>44</sup> but, as stated above, the privilege from Innocent III to Anders Sunesen does survive. It prescribes that the archbishop of Denmark shall forever be considered primate of Sweden<sup>45</sup> and shall personally invest every new Swedish archbishop with the archiepiscopal dignities and deliver the pallium to him. The new Swedish archbishop shall swear fidelity and obedience to the church in Lund, *salva fidelitate Romanae ecclesiae*. Upon consecration, the archbishop of Lund shall *in perpetuum* preside over the Swedish archbishop by virtue of his dignity as primate. For his part, the Swedish archbishop, in "humility", shall show his new superior "obedience and reverence".<sup>46</sup> Though the privilege as primate over the Swedish realm has been considered of great importance by several historians,<sup>47</sup> the two papal bulls endorsing it (the first

by Adrian IV, the second by Innocent III) reveal next to nothing as to exactly what rights or obligations, besides presenting the pallium, the Danish archbishops could or should exercise towards their Swedish subordinates. Indeed, one must conclude, in agreement with Niels Skyum-Nielsen, that the “primatial privileges” granted to the Danish archbishops were not of an impressive nature, given the history of the erection of Nordic archdioceses and given the general history of the title of primate.<sup>48</sup>

Like his predecessors, Archbishop Anders Sunesen was granted a title as papal legate – *apostolice sedis legatus*. The papal bull issued to Anders Sunesen is dated 19 November 1204. In the course of the same month Innocent III in fact issued several letters of differing content to the Danish archbishop.<sup>49</sup>

In early 1206 Anders Sunesen received another papal privilege when he was granted the right to hold visitations with the pope’s authority. Of course the right to hold visitations was an integral part of both the episcopal and archiepiscopal rights and duties. However, the extraordinary element in the privilege from Innocent III to Anders Sunesen was that the pope actually expanded Anders Sunesen’s normal archiepiscopal privileges. Henceforth Sunesen was to hold visitations not only in his own archdiocese, but in the whole of his church province, thereby in a sense encroaching upon the rights of his own suffragan bishops.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, Anders Sunesen was permitted to fill vacant offices, a privilege originally reserved for the Holy See.<sup>51</sup> Besides these privileges, Anders Sunesen was allowed to give absolution for sentences of excommunication which came immediately into effect when a lay person assaulted clerics, the so-called *sententia promulgata*. Finally, Anders Sunesen received the right to dismiss appeals to the Holy See, if these appeals were made after the expiry of a time limit which Anders Sunesen himself could fix. A few days earlier, in a papal letter dealing with a specific case, Anders Sunesen had already received the privilege of absolving sinners for their *sententia promulgata* for assaulting clerics. Allegedly, some serfs in Lund had given an ecclesiastic a severe beating. This of course caused some problems because, as explained in the papal

letter, “these serfs failed to go to the Apostolic See, even though they must seek absolution, since their masters argue that they cannot be dispensed with. Under this excuse they mock the ecclesiastical discipline.” The letter also grants Anders Sunesen the right to decide for himself whether the serfs were to be forced to go to Rome or not. The archbishop is instructed to examine whether the serfs had assaulted the prelate “fraudulently in order to evade their masters’ commands”, or whether the masters on the other hand incurred serious losses without being the ones to blame for the incident.<sup>52</sup> It seems as if Innocent were presupposing the existence of Danish serfs well versed in the intricacies of canon law. The pope ends his letter with a pun. Innocent declared that if the crimes were considered very serious, the serfs must go to the “serfs of serfs for absolution”.<sup>53</sup> By punning on the common papal title *Servant of God’s servants*, apparently Innocent wanted to make clear, who was the real serf in this world, when confronted with petty cases like this.

Anders Sunesen in fact received several papal privileges. Some of these were of a rather impressive nature, mainly because of their character, but also because of the papal wording and arguments used in the letters.<sup>54</sup> It is not clear exactly why the Danish archbishop was given these extraordinary papal privileges. It seems that it was not in any way necessary for Innocent to grant them, but he did. In fact, Anders Sunesen was granted the exact same privileges as the archbishop of Sens, Peter of Corbeil, who had taught the pope during Innocent’s educational stays in Paris.<sup>55</sup> Part of the reason why Anders Sunesen was granted these privileges might be because the Dane had been a fellow student or even teacher of Pope Innocent III.<sup>56</sup>

In this article I shall not discuss the Danish crusades to the Baltic, even though these expeditions can be termed a major issue in the relationship between Innocent III and Denmark.<sup>57</sup> Here I shall only point to the fact that Anders Sunesen himself seems to have been the main instigator of a Danish expedition to the Estonian island of Ösel in 1206, which was strongly supported by papal letters. On this occasion, Anders Sunesen was granted the privilege of

ordaining a bishop in a town he had been able to win for Christianity.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, the Danish archbishop was again granted the title of papal legate in 1212, but this time with the specific objective of converting the neighbouring pagans.<sup>59</sup> In 1213 he was granted the privilege of establishing a bishopric in the Estonian regions of Sakkala and Hugenhusen.<sup>60</sup> On more than one occasion the pope requested the Danish King Valdemar to go on crusade to the Baltic<sup>61</sup> – and the king finally did so in 1219.<sup>62</sup>

#### *Innocent III and Sweden*

As previously stated, several of the cases that Innocent III and the Danish archbishop, in his role as primate of both the Danish and the Swedish church, and especially in his capacity as papal legate, had to deal with actually involved Swedish clergy. This testifies first of all to a relatively insecure or unstable Swedish church. Bearing in mind that Sweden had only been properly christianized in relatively recent times and had only established a scattered ecclesiastical structure and organisation as late as around 1100, this is quite understandable.<sup>63</sup> In 1164 Uppsala had been named the Swedish archiepiscopal see as a clearly political manoeuvre during the papal schism between Alexander III and Victor IV.<sup>64</sup> Only a few years later, the Swedish church found itself deeply involved in the royal struggles for power in Sweden.

When King Sverker I died in 1156, a struggle for royal power once again erupted between the two leading families: the family of the late king Sverker and the rival Eric family. The namebearer of this latter, Eric the Holy, was elected king in 1156. His *vita* tells us that he was a deeply religious man, a fervent ascetic, an ardent supporter of the church, a founder of several church buildings, and on the whole a model king.<sup>65</sup> Unfortunately, other than the hagiographic part, which is of questionable value, we know virtually nothing about him. Early in 1160 Eric suffered a violent death, probably at the hands of a Danish prince Magnus Henriksen, but it was not until 1198 that we first hear of Eric's reputation as a holy man.<sup>66</sup> Later, in the thirteenth century, the cult of Eric the Holy gained supporters and was of course ex-

ploited as a political weapon in the struggles for power in Sweden. In 1161 Karl Sverkersson, the son of King Sverker I, became king after defeating the Danish prince, Magnus Henriksen, in a battle at Örebro. Karl Sverkersson tried to strengthen his power in 1163 by marrying Kristina, the daughter of the sister of the Danish King Valdemar I the Great, Margrethe. Karl remained in power until 1167 when he was defeated by the son of the former King Eric I, Knut Ericsson. The result was a fierce struggle for power during which the son of Karl Sverkersson, Sverker II, was taken to Denmark, where he was raised under Danish protection. Meanwhile the sons of Karl Sverkersson's brother, Johan Sverkersson, continued their struggle against Knut Ericsson's seizure of the throne. However, Knut Ericsson had both these sons, Kol and Buleslev, killed in 1172 and, by elevating the bones of his father, Eric the Holy, and securing a local veneration of the "saint", succeeded in repulsing the rival claims of the Sverker family and holding his grip on power until his death.<sup>67</sup> Knut reigned until 1196. Strangely (given the political circumstances of the time) he died of natural causes. In a sense Eric the Holy can be compared to the other "holy" kings in Scandinavia, Olav the Holy in Norway (d. 1030) and Canute the Holy in Denmark (d. 1086).<sup>68</sup> As one might have expected, with Knut Ericsson's death the struggle for power reopened. This time the contestants were King Sverker II Karlsson, with support from Denmark, and Eric II Knutsson, backed by King Sverre of Norway. Sverker II Karlsson actually succeeded in seizing the throne in 1196 and retained a precarious grasp on power until 1210, when he was finally defeated by Eric Knutsson and died of his wounds. Eric Knutsson then ascended the throne and managed to stay in power until 1216, to be followed by his son King Eric III Ericsson. The Sverker family immediately struck back and ruled from 1216 until 1222, when the family became extinct, because King Johan Sverkersson died without any male heirs. This was to bring the Eric family back into power once again – and to bring an end to my interest in Swedish policy in this context.

What I wish to focus on in this part of my pa-

per is the way in which the Swedish church became involved in the ongoing power struggles. The papal correspondence with Sweden in this period seems to have been very limited; at least not much material has survived. What is more, the limited papal correspondence that has survived does not explicitly touch on the political issues of the ongoing struggles for royal power. Still, these issues clearly run just beneath the surface of the papal letters, as we shall see.

In 1207 the Danish archbishop Anders Sunesen asked the pope to dispense a certain Valerius, a candidate for the archbishopric of Uppsala, from a *defectus natalium*.<sup>69</sup> Innocent answered that because the priests in this particular church province “by a depraved custom” were not ashamed of actually marrying women, it would be both “very unsuitable and very unfair” to install an archbishop born in unlawful wedlock.<sup>70</sup> One of the things Innocent wanted to make clear was that the archbishop’s wishes concerning the granting of a dispensation to Valerius could damage his efforts to make the Nordic clergy live in celibacy. In spite of this series of papal objections, the dispensation was actually given and Valerius duly elected as the new archbishop of Uppsala.

There are several interesting aspects in this election of Valerius. One of these is the way in which the dispensation was actually given. In the papal letter it seems as if Anders Sunesen not only acknowledged, but also acted directly upon, the newly developed papal privileges concerning ecclesiastical *causae maiores*, according to which the pope reserved to the papacy alone the final decision not only in cases of bishops’ translations, depositions and renunciations, but also in cases involving “defective” bishop-candidates. In these matters, Innocent developed, in the early years of his pontificate, a special procedure, according to which a “defective” bishop-candidate could become bishop after all but only by papal dispensation. The bishop-candidate with the *defectus* could not be elected to his see by the local chapter and thus could not be installed by the local archbishop. Before the formal election took place, the bishop-candidate had to be postulated to the pope, who would then decide whether or not he would dispense the candidate from the *defectus*

in question and allow for his proper election.<sup>71</sup> If we are to believe Innocent III on this point, it seems that Anders Sunesen has closely followed this procedure, designating Valerius *uocatus* as opposed to *electus*, and asking that Valerius be given a dispensation for his *defectus natalium*. In this, the pope even complimented the Danish archbishop for his fine juridical skills.<sup>72</sup> However, the final papal dispensation was not granted to Valerius. Instead, Anders Sunesen was allowed by papal authority – “*vice nostra*” – to decide for himself whether Valerius should be dispensed or not.<sup>73</sup> This leads, together with the contents of other privileges granted to Anders Sunesen, to the assumption, that the Danish archbishop in fact enjoyed a rather privileged relation with Pope Innocent III.<sup>74</sup>

However, the main aspect of my interest here is more directly connected with the struggles for royal power in Sweden. The papal letter is completely free from biblical imagery and shorn of the similes and metaphors customarily used by the pope. It is stringent in argument, and lucidly clear in its juridical and political observations, even if some of the papal statements on clerical celibacy could easily have produced examples of the well-known papal rhetorical language. Innocent III had been informed about the situation in Sweden by letters from Anders Sunesen himself, from the Swedish king Sverker II Karlsson, from the Swedish bishops, and from the canons at the cathedral at Uppsala. These Swedish interlocutors had apparently asked the pope for the dispensation that would allow Valerius to become the new archbishop in Uppsala. Parts of Innocent III’s response to these letters, addressed to Anders Sunesen in Lund, seem to be a restatement of the arguments of the original Nordic letters and letter bearers. For example, we are told that the reason why the archiepiscopal see in Uppsala had been vacant ever since the death of the former bishop Olof some time in 1206, was because of both Anders Sunesen’s pilgrimage and “the insolence of the region and its people”.<sup>75</sup> In this situation, the dispensation for Valerius was requested. Later on in the letter, we are told that some of the arguments presented by Anders Sunesen were focused on the freedom for the church of Uppsala. Innocent

directly referred to these arguments, in declaring that there was no church in the world so much under the “yoke of servitude” as the Swedish church in Uppsala. This was due – once again – to the “insolence of the people”.<sup>76</sup> Anders Sunesen, furthermore, had apparently submitted another argument – or threat – to the pope. Innocent, in response, delegated to the Danish archbishop the task of evaluating whether an election of Valerius would “make the king and the people favour the church more and preserve its freedom”.<sup>77</sup> It is not clear whether or not this is the same “people” that had severely oppressed the church earlier and put it under the “yoke of servitude”. Much becomes clear, however, when we consider that Valerius, as this papal letter reminds us, was the former chaplain of the Swedish king Sverker II Karlsson.<sup>78</sup> This is important information, because in this way both the papal letter and the succeeding election of Valerius can be interpreted as a display of papal and archiepiscopal support for Sverker II Karlsson’s very insecure position on the Swedish throne. In 1205 King Sverker II Karlsson and his opponent Eric II Knutsson had fought a battle in which three of Eric II Knutsson’s brothers were killed. Two years later, in 1207, the situation in Sweden was one of open war, in which the reigning king, Sverker II Karlsson, had the upper hand for the time being. In this perspective it makes perfect sense why Valerius was running for the archbishopric, despite his *defectus natalium*. With Valerius as new archbishop Sverker II Karlsson would be able to strengthen his royal power by using the administration and structure of the Swedish church to bolster his position. Apart from these political and strategic manoeuvres and explanations, however, Archbishop Anders Sunesen might have had his own very private reasons for supporting King Sverker II Karlsson and Valerius in their wishes: for the wife of the Swedish king, Benedicte, was in fact his niece.<sup>79</sup>

However, the election of Valerius proved of little account in this regard, because a year later in 1208 the situation had dramatically changed once again. Now it was the turn of Sverker II Karlsson to be in serious trouble in his contest against the rival claimant to the

throne, Eric II Knutson. Once again he had to appeal to Denmark for help. But on this occasion the Danish royal power either could not or would not help or even support the unpopular government of King Sverker II Karlsson. In this situation, the king had to rely solely on the relatives of his Danish wife. Accordingly, Anders Sunesen and several of his brothers organised an army and sailed off to Sweden – only to suffer a crushing defeat in the battle at Lena<sup>80</sup>; a battle in which the Danish archbishop lost two of his brothers.<sup>81</sup> The Swedish king and the sorry remnants of his army barely managed to flee back to Denmark, together with Archbishop Valerius. In this situation Innocent wrote to the bishops of Västmanland, Linköping and Skara in Sweden in November 1208.<sup>82</sup> He told them to persuade Eric II Knutsson to reconcile himself with Sverker II Karlsson, and to make Eric surrender Sweden to her rightful king. Innocent’s arguments for supporting Sverker II Karlsson were very imprecise. Innocent III pointed out that Sverker had assured the pope in his letters that his kingdom had been taken from him *contra iustitiam*. This in fact had forced the papacy to act, since it turns out that King Sverker and his kingdom had already been placed under apostolic protection. Besides these arguments, the pope simply stated that because of the “destruction of churches and also the oppression of widows”, the bishops of Sweden had to persuade Eric II Knutsson to make peace and surrender the kingdom.<sup>83</sup>

The stories of the destruction of churches and the oppression of clerics might actually have been true. In January 1206 Innocent had responded to complaints brought before him by Sverker II Karlsson and the then archbishop of Uppsala, Olof.<sup>84</sup> In his letters the pope commanded them both to prevent clerics being put to trial before lay judges; to see to it that lay people did not depose or install priests; and to put a stop to the burning down of clerics’ dwellings.<sup>85</sup> The papal appeal was repeated in March of the same year, and this time the appeal was supplemented by a papal demand that the “foul custom” in Sweden of lay people not being allowed to make legacies to the church, be abandoned.<sup>86</sup>

King Sverker II Karlsson seems to have been dogged by bad luck. For when in 1210 he once again tried to destroy his opponent, he once again lost<sup>87</sup>: and this time also his life. Eric Knutsson ascended the throne, and reigned over Sweden from 1210 until 1216. The new king lost no time in making peace with the Danes by simply marrying the sister of the Danish king Valdemar II the Victorious, Richizza. Archbishop Valerius crowned Eric in 1210. Innocent for his part confirmed the new Swedish king and took the kingdom of Sweden under apostolic protection. Furthermore, the pope granted the Swedish king the right to ordain two new bishops in a region “wrested from the hand of the pagans”.<sup>88</sup> The dioceses in question were probably parts of present-day Finland. When Eric II Knutsson died of illness in 1216. The last of the Sverker family, Johan Sverkersson, succeeded him. Once again Archbishop Valerius showed his political aptitude, when he survived yet another change in the ruling house and made peace with the new king.<sup>89</sup>

#### *Innocent III and Norway*

When Innocent III ascended the papal throne in 1198, Norway was in a state of civil war. This was no novelty, for civil war seems to have been more or less the state of affairs in Norway since 1130 and the death of King Sigurd Jorsalfar (c.1090-1130).<sup>90</sup> A special feature about the Norwegian civil wars in the period from about 1184 until about 1202 was the leading role played in them by the church in Norway.<sup>91</sup> The Norwegian King Sverre (d. 1202)<sup>92</sup> and his so-called *Birkebeiner* party had usurped the royal power by defeating the former kings Erling Skakke in 1179 and Magnus Erlingsson in 1184.<sup>93</sup>

In the following years King Sverre had to deal with several, but all comparatively minor, uprisings against his rule. The years between approximately 1185 and 1193 were to be the most peaceful during his reign. The conflict between King Sverre and the Norwegian church opened in the first years of the last decade of the twelfth century. Apparently in 1190, King Sverre felt himself provoked by the fact that the newly elected archbishop of Norway, Eirik Ivarsson (d. 1205), refused to crown Sverre without approval from the pope.<sup>94</sup> One

of the many reasons for the archbishop’s refusal could also have been that King Sverre denied him his former income from various fines and taxes, levied on the population. In acting thus the king presumably violated an old agreement between the former kings and archbishops. Furthermore, the king had cut down on the archbishop’s retinue: from now on, Eirik Ivarsson was allowed to take not ninety as hitherto, but only thirty people with him on his visitations to the bishoprics of Norway. But behind these comparatively trivial fiscal and administrative disputes lay some more serious problems. King Sverre wanted the church to submit to royal power and allow the king himself to install his own priests. Furthermore, the king did not recognise clerical jurisdiction in cases against clerics and in spiritual matters.<sup>95</sup> In this way, King Sverre violated the statutes of 1153, when Cardinal Nicholas Breakspeare, later Pope Adrian IV, had instituted Norway as an independent church province with Nidaros as archiepiscopal see.<sup>96</sup> Later in 1190, Archbishop Eirik Ivarsson found it more convenient, as well as safer, to go into exile in Denmark. He found refuge at the court of the Danish archbishop Absalon in Lund. Both Archbishop Eirik and King Sverre appealed to the Holy See.<sup>97</sup> However, because of the papal election in 1191<sup>98</sup> it took nearly four years before Celestine III, in a clear and unequivocal letter, took Archbishop Eirik’s part in the struggle.<sup>99</sup> With his newly acquired papal support, Eirik, from his exile in Denmark, excommunicated King Sverre.<sup>100</sup> Later Celestine did the same to the bishops who supported the king.<sup>101</sup> From 1196 onwards the Norwegian church sought directly to oust King Sverre and to install a new, more church-friendly royal government. In these efforts, the church’s hierarchy found massive support among sections of the Norwegian aristocracy disaffected to the king.<sup>102</sup> However, their warlike efforts could not threaten the king seriously, partly because of King Sverre’s legendary skills in warfare, partly because of his effective control over large parts of the country.

At some time between 1196 and 1202 King Sverre wrote his famous *Oration against the Bishops*.<sup>103</sup> In this document Sverre declared himself against the church, because of its nu-

merous alleged attacks on the royal power and its overall corruption. The document is extraordinary in its explicit assertion of the prerogatives of royal power and the relationship between royal and sacerdotal office. Sverre argued that Christ and the church, i.e. the whole of Christendom, was allegorically seen as a body. The king was the heart and chest of this holy body and, accordingly, must assume the role as overseer and guardian of the rest of Christendom. In this anthropomorphic image of Christian society, the different offices in the Church, represented by the various parts of the body, all played subordinate roles: The bishops were the eyes of the body, showing the right way and thus ensuring nobody was led astray. The archdeacons were the nose, the deacons and provosts the ears. The priests were the tongue and lips; as such, the priests ought to be examples of the right teaching and way of life.<sup>104</sup> But, according to the *Oration*, things had changed radically. The eyes of the body of Christendom had begun to squint, the nose could only smell bad odours, and the ears had grown deaf. The bishops, who ought to guard Christendom, had been blinded by avarice, profligacy, greed, pride, and injustice.<sup>105</sup>

In this situation of open war between King Sverre and the pro-church *Bagler* party, actively supported by leading protagonists of the Norwegian church, Innocent III had to act against the Norwegian king – and he did so. In a letter of 6 October 1198 the pope praised Archbishop Eric Ivarsson for his pure faith and constant fervour against King Sverre's persecution and the exiling of the archbishop.<sup>106</sup> The purpose of the letter was to condemn the bishop of Bergen, Martin, for his continued support of the king and to suspend him from office until he showed himself before the pope in Rome; and – if he did not attend – to excommunicate him.<sup>107</sup> On the same day, Innocent III wrote letters to Archbishop Eirik Ivarsson, and to the Danish and Swedish kings.<sup>108</sup> In these letters Innocent accused Sverre of ruling Norway by unjust force and especially of persecuting the church. He also condemned King Sverre for using forged papal letters.<sup>109</sup> Consequently, the pope laid the royally controlled Norwegian regions under interdict.<sup>110</sup>

The civil war and power struggles between King Sverre and the Norwegian church also prompted another papal letter to Archbishop Eirik Ivarsson. On 11 October 1198 Innocent answered several questions of a juridical nature posed by the Norwegian archbishop.<sup>111</sup> We read, among other things, that an altar on which an excommunicated priest had celebrated mass did not have to be re-consecrated, and that the clergy ought not to give communion to an excommunicate, even though the excommunicate promised to comply with the wishes of the church. The sinner could not receive absolution and communion before the penance was actually served.<sup>112</sup> These archiepiscopal questions, and other similar ones answered by Innocent III in the letter, clearly bear the mark of the ongoing conflict between church and state. So does the final question answered by the pope in his letter. Innocent III affirmed that: "Because clerics, who command ships in battle, and those who fight themselves and those who incite others to fight, commit an enormous sin, we conclude that according to the rigour of the law they must be deposed from office".<sup>113</sup> In yet another letter dating to August 1200,<sup>114</sup> Eirik Ivarsson had asked Innocent for further advice, and was told that excommunicated persons were not allowed to be buried together with true believers. The corpses of the excommunicated were to be exhumed and thrown outside the churchyard – if it was at all possible to discern which bones belonged to the excommunicated and which did not.<sup>115</sup>

That the warfare was not limited to the continental parts of the Norwegian realm is attested in a letter from the bishop of Orkney dating to 1202.<sup>116</sup> Apparently the bearer of the letter, the layman Lumberd, had committed a grave sin during a military expedition to Caithness in Scotland. Obeying a command from his superior, the Earl of Orkney, Lumberd had cut out the tongue of the bishop of Caithness, John.<sup>117</sup> With the papal letter Lumberd was absolved, provided that he would meet the (stiff) requirements of penance listed in the letter. Lumberd was to return at once to his own country and walk in front of all people barefooted and dressed only in a short, sleeveless shirt of wool



in his home area and in the land where the bishop had been dishonoured. In these places he was to do penance for fifteen days. The penance is vividly described: Lumberd was ordered to visit the churches in his woollen tunic and with a string round his tongue and tied to his neck, in such a way that his tongue was sticking out of his mouth. At the churches he was to stop outside, for he was not allowed to enter, prostrate himself on the ground and let himself be whipped with a birch of his own.<sup>118</sup> When the fifteen days were over, Lumberd was to make a journey to the Holy Land where he was to serve three years' hard labour for our Saviour – "and he shall never again take up weapons against Christians". For eleven years, moreover, he was to fast on water and bread every Friday.<sup>119</sup>

King Sverre had tried to strengthen the foundation of the Norwegian royal power by organising and incorporating parts of the Norwegian aristocracy under his personal command, thereby applying European political ideas of kingship to his own regime. But throughout almost his entire reign he remained at odds with the Norwegian church and had to crush several uprisings against his royal power. However, many of the problems in Norway seemed to go away, when King Sverre suddenly fell ill and died during the siege of the city of Bergen on 8 March 1202. Perhaps even Sverre himself saw the untenability of his position, because on his deathbed he is supposed to have urged his son Håkon Sverreson (d. 1204) to make peace with the church. Håkon complied with his father's last wishes,<sup>120</sup> while Archbishop Eirik Ivarsson for his part lifted the ban on King Sverre and his supporters. In a letter to Eirik Innocent III thus expressed his satisfaction that King Sverre had died and that the new king had apparently made peace with the church.<sup>121</sup> However, Innocent would not have been the man he was if he were to have allowed Eirik Ivarsson's slightly too independent action to go unchallenged. He told Eirik in no uncertain terms that the archbishop had no right to lift the ban on his own. The pope and the archbishop both agreed that the ban should be lifted. What was at issue here was not the lifting of the ban itself, but the prerogative for doing so. The archbish-

op had taken action on his own authority, without commission from the Holy See. Accordingly, Innocent accused Eirik of arrogating to himself a power that was not his, and that Eirik, "like the monkey who imitates the actions of man, had wanted to do what he could not and what, according to the laws, he should not do".<sup>122</sup> Though Eirik Ivarsson's lifting of the ban had been illegal, he was told in the papal letter that he could later lift it again, but this time on papal authority.<sup>123</sup>

When in January 1204 King Håkon Sverreson too died, the peace process once again came to a halt. New struggles for royal power erupted, involving *inter alia* an attempt by Denmark to invade the southern parts of Norway in 1204.<sup>124</sup> As a result, Norway was in a state of relative warfare in the period from about 1204 to 1207, when an insecure peace was finally negotiated and royal power divided between two kings, Inge Bårdsson (1185-1217) and Filip Simonsson (d. 1217). Håkon Galen (d. 1214) emerged as the military leader of the *Birkebeiner* party together with Inge. A period of relatively stable, but certainly not secure, political relations lasted until both the remaining kings died in 1217.<sup>125</sup> A new king, Håkon Håkonsson (1204-1263), succeeded them and stayed in power until 1263 without major problems. The high medieval civil wars of Norway had come to an end.

The tense, but still comparatively more peaceful political circumstances in Norway during the double kingship of Inge Bårdsson and Filip Simonsson from about 1207 are reflected in the papal correspondence. We can recognise some new concerns in the papal letters, this time not to do with war and the royal oppression of the church, but rather with financial and moral questions relating to the Norwegian clergy. In February 1206, shortly after his election, the newly installed Archbishop Tore (d. 1214) received a series of papal letters from Innocent III. In these he was among other things ordered to collect Peter's Pence in his church province and to use ecclesiastical sanctions against anyone who hindered the archbishop in this task.<sup>126</sup> However, the papal letters also testify, in their concerns, to the continuing effects of the civil war. In one of them, Arch-

bishop Tore was authorised to absolve lay people from the sentence of excommunication imposed on them for having attacked clerics. Like Anders Sunesen in Denmark, Tore was to decide for himself whether the crimes were so grave, that the sinners had to go to Rome for absolution or not. If the assaults had not resulted in any grave injury to the clerics, Tore was allowed to give the absolution himself.<sup>127</sup> In another letter Archbishop Tore was told that clerics who went to war, and actually shed blood, were to be deposed from office, if they did not desist from this practice.<sup>128</sup> People, who had actually killed priests in battle, were only to be absolved by the pope himself.<sup>129</sup>

Whether the civil wars also were the cause of Innocent's letter of 1st March 1206 is not known. Innocent wrote to tell Archbishop Tore that a christening of infants on the verge of dying, by rubbing spittle or saliva on its head and chest and between its shoulders (due to a lack of water and priests), was not to be considered a proper baptism.<sup>130</sup>

#### *Innocent III and the North*

It seems clear from papal documents and correspondence that Innocent III had his own very developed notions of politics and policy towards great countries as Germany, England and France. But did the pope also follow a distinct policy towards the countries in Scandinavia? Or, on the contrary, did he act on a totally *ad hoc* basis? Did he use his general political instincts, principles and ideas in a quite opportunistic way to address the politically charged cases submitted to his judgement? In this article, I have only discussed some of the political issues in Scandinavia raised in relations with the papacy, and I hasten to say that a proper treatment of them would have to include a far more thorough analysis than has been given in this article. However, the central question to be considered still remains: how did Innocent III think politically towards the Scandinavian region? Were the Northern peoples at all a distinct theme on his political agenda?

The relationship between *regnum et sacerdotium* in Denmark during the pontificate of Innocent III was marked by harmony. In order to further stabilise the royal power in Denmark,

the Danish church even accepted the imprisonment of a leading prelate in the person of Bishop Valdemar. In the vexed question involving the French King Philippe Auguste and the Danish Queen Ingeborg, the Danish church also showed itself able and willing to actively support Danish royal claims. In this harmonious and co-operative atmosphere it was possible for the Danish archbishops to focus mainly on internal ecclesiastical problems, more specifically those concerning unchaste clergy and more generally a pastoral concern for the Danish church and its believers. In a way, the results of the relationship between Innocent III and the Danish church, and especially the activities of the Danish archbishops, can reasonably be termed a "second wave of christianization". Broad notions of pastoral care are known elsewhere to have been one of Innocent III's many political concerns. Whether or not pastoral tendencies also came to the fore in the Danish crusades against Estonia, this article has not touched upon. But pastoral tendencies – or policies – were undoubtedly of some importance in Denmark during the pontificate of Innocent III. Whether the focus on pastoral care should be viewed in light of the comparatively more peaceful circumstances in Denmark is hard to determine. One of the ways to judge in this matter is by way of comparison.

Sweden in this period was characterized by a comparatively weak church. In Sweden the church found itself deeply involved in struggles for royal power. However, the problems for the Swedish church were of a different kind, compared to Denmark and Norway. It seems as if the church in Sweden suffered from the rather massive disaffection and often open opposition of large sections of lay society. Certainly, at times the church had to seek royal support against claims from the lay aristocracy, forbidding the church to receive legacies and, more generally, hampering its independence. On other occasions, the Swedish church was exploited in what looks like a private foreign policy by the Danish Sunesen brothers. Whether the lay disaffection to the Christian church was a specifically Swedish feature, or whether it must be considered a teething trouble in the overall christianisation of the North, is a theme

still worth investigating. It is obvious that the Swedish church in these early years of the thirteenth century was to a far lesser degree a solid and acknowledged driving force and power in society than was the church in Denmark; this was a position that the church in Sweden was still struggling to achieve during this period. During these years of struggling for the very right to exist, there would have been little point in promoting ideals of pastoral care or in inculcating ethical standards in ecclesiastical life. For the Swedish church in these years was fighting for its very means of subsistence; tithes and the right for lay people to make legacies to the Church were major themes in the political struggle for independence, just as was the right to uphold the ecclesiastical *privilegium fori*. In a way, the Swedish church in these years was struggling in an almost "Gregorian" way.

In Norway the situation was in some ways similar, but in other ways quite different. A state of civil war was the normal condition during almost half of the pontificate of Innocent III. It was not until c. 1207, when the peace processes finally came to the fore, that the church in Norway could concentrate on internal problems. Still, the main correspondence between Norway and the Apostolic See focused on problems which were very much like the problems facing the church in Sweden. The main difference was that in Norway, for several years, the main opposition to the church came from the king himself (Sverre). But during periods when the king himself was not posing the direct threat against the church, it is safe to say that the problems facing the Norwegian church

were in a sense directly inherited from the civil wars: namely, how to deal with their unpleasant, but probably unavoidable effects, i.e. the assaults against clerics and the like. In contrast to Sweden, the attacks on the church were not caused by any general disaffection to the Christian faith or by opposition to the church encroaching on hitherto lay rights or the like. Rather, the attacks on the Norwegian church by lay people were a direct effect of the civil wars. In these civil wars, we recall, the Norwegian church itself had played an active military role: large parts of it had been organised, and mobilised, in a militant war party ever since 1196. This is clearly displayed in the papal correspondence and in the Norwegian relations with the Apostolic See.

At times, however, all three countries seemingly enjoyed very good relations with the Apostolic See. In all three countries, furthermore, a secure royal power was being established. In his policy towards the Nordic countries, Innocent III tried actively to bring these countries even closer to Rome. It is equally obvious, that the Scandinavian countries to a very large extent indeed in this period were becoming fully members of a Christian European community. Accordingly, the frequent perception of Scandinavia as a specific dark region in the Middle Ages is not the whole truth. There is more to the picture than this. Denmark, Norway and Sweden were countries that each displayed different, but also similar features in the Middle Ages. The features they shared tell a story of christianization, ecclesiastical structuring and royal state-building.

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