This article discusses how Swedish Salvationists wrote about femininity and masculinity in conversion narratives during the period 1887–1918; the “breakthrough” of modern Sweden. Through their religious conversion female Salvationists adopted a femininity that demanded the same right to participate in religious life as men. In a similar manner, men in the Salvation Army achieved a changed masculinity through conversion, which allowed them to express feelings and cry in public. Doing so, these Salvationists expressed an unconscious or conscious criticism towards the prevailing values about gender in society.

Introduction

At the altar rail, when I came face to face with the living God I felt that my entire heart lay at his feet. Felt the demand: All or nothing and I decided in the sign of the cross to take up the fight, become a victorious woman, Yes, even more so.¹

These words are those of Lydia Pettersson, a twenty-three-year-old woman from the coastal community of Holmsund in the north of Sweden. She tells of her religious experience during her confirmation when she was fifteen years old. The experience made her think about what she would do in the future. Perhaps she would become a school teacher or even a missionary. She considered the question at length but still felt dissatisfied. Some years later Lydia came into contact with the Salvation Army: “There I found all that I as a child had imagined,” she writes. In 1914 when she sat down to write an application to the Salvation Army’s War Academy to become an officer, she knew she had found her calling. She felt that here she could become a “victorious woman.” In the conversion narratives that were attached to applications to the Salvation Army’s War Academy in Sweden, similar expressions were not unusual. Jenny Rydkvist from Norrköping, for example, speaks of herself as a “warrior woman in the army of the Lord.”²

². Jenny Rydkvist, 1888. FFRA.

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epithets both these women gave expression to a new identity. Through their religious conversion they had adopted a “femininity” that demanded the same right to participate in religious life as men. In a similar manner, men in the Salvation Army used other epithets in order to write about a changed “masculinity” through conversion, with epithets such as “God’s warrior” and similar phrases.

This article discusses how Swedish Salvationists wrote about femininity and masculinity in conversion narratives during the period 1887–1918. This was a period of radical changes in society, in financial and political as well as cultural dimensions; the “breakthrough” of modern Sweden. Thus, the aim is to investigate which masculinities and femininities that men and women in the Salvation Army negotiated within, and in the development of, modern Swedish society.3

The Salvation Army and Gender

In 1865 William and Catherine Booth began missionary activities among the poor in the East End of London. The organisation of their “Christian Mission” was reformed in 1878 into an “army,” which rapidly spread through Great Britain and then to the rest of the world.4 “The Salvation Army” changed the conditions and relationships between men and women in its organisation in several different ways. The organisation was also built upon, for its time, a radical idea of equality where both men and women had access to the higher ranks in the Army. New areas of activity were created for women within the Army, which were not allowed outside it. For instance, women were given the right to preach, something reserved only for men in other religious contexts and it was possible for women in the Army to wear a uniform, to play musical instruments in public, and to interact with men and women who were rejected by society.5

International research reveals that the Salvation Army was formed in many different ways depending on local and national contexts.6 What then took place in the meeting between the Salvation Army and Swedish society? Research on

3. This article is a part of the research project Preaching Women and Crying Men — Gender and Religion in the Salvation Army in Sweden 1883–1921, financed by the National Swedish Research Council.
4. H. Gariepy, Christianity in Action: The International History of the Salvation Army (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009)
this subject is almost nonexistent. Anna Jansdotter is one of the few Swedish historians who have considered the Salvation Army from a gender perspective. Interestingly, she shows how the female Salvationists formed their identity in the meetings with the prostitutes they tried to save. The female Salvationist in this context appears strong and respectable. Jansdotter compares the work of female Salvationists with the texts written by prominent female leadership figures in the Salvation Army. Can one see the same pattern in material written by ordinary Salvationists? Which identity formed the male Salvationists?

To approach these questions I have taken my starting point in a theoretical understanding of gender as culturally created and not biologically given. This means that individuals’ opportunities for acting are restricted by culturally formed conceptions of what it involves to be a man or woman, respectively. These conceptions are normative, in other words there are expectations of how a man or woman should act and look in certain situations. Yet conceptions of masculinity and femininity can also be challenged and become a subject for negotiation. With the help of the conversion narratives I will seek traces of such negotiations.

The Swedish Context

During the nineteenth century Swedish society was transformed, as in the rest of Western Europe, in a profound way. This usually is described in terms of capitalism, the commercialisation of farming, the increase in population, proletarianisation, industrialisation, and urbanisation. The social transformation brought new ideals of masculinity and femininity. In the “hegemony” of bourgeois culture the two sexes were regarded as having different but complementary roles and “spheres.” The man was associated with the public sector and citizenship. He should be a “self-made” man and was expected to be in control of his feelings. For example, this meant that crying, which previously had been regarded as a masculine expression, was completely feminised. The woman was associated with the private sphere. She should keep the family together and make the home a sanctuary away from the noise and bustle of the public sector.

Within the nineteenth-century transformation of society, popular movements flourished. The worker, temperance, and religious revival movements came to...
engage many people from all levels of society and have an important influence on people’s everyday lives as well as in political development. Since 1856 a missionary movement called Evangeliska Fosterlandsstiftelsen (EFS) has been a unifying organ for lay religious revival in the country with firm anchorage in the Swedish Lutheran state church. The increase in the internationalisation of trade and volume of migration brought about influences from the British and American religious revival. In 1882 the Salvation Army began its activities in Sweden when the country’s first Commander Hanna Ouchterlony “opened fire” in Stockholm. Ten years later there were over 130 corps in the country, approximately 350 officers, and 10,000 soldiers. To start a Swedish campaign there was a need for more officers and, therefore, a War Academy was established. The archives of the War Academy provide the basis of this study.

The Sources
During the period 1887–1918 about 8,000 applications were sent in to the Salvation Army War Academy. Those applying were young, mainly between 17 and 25, and at least two-thirds were women. For most of them the “conversion” and entering into the Salvation Army as soldiers took place about two or so years earlier. Most of them came from working-class backgrounds. For example, the men worked in a factory or in the forests, and there were some ex-military individuals of lower rank. The women were mainly ex-factory workers, servants and, occasionally, preschool teachers.

In the application form to the military academy the applicant must end by writing a text about his or her conversion and personal experiences thereafter. Conversion is central to the Salvation Army’s theology. In order to be saved an individual must first experience remorse, be convinced that he or she was a sinner who risked ending up in hell and thereafter be willing to give up all sins. According to General Booth, conversion meant that an individual was born anew, that new life was created in the soul. Of the converted it was said that “Previously it was easy for him to do evil and hard to do good: now it is the opposite.”

The religious conversion process can be understood as the learning of an identity. Therefore, a study of conversion narratives should be particularly suitable in order to study this process. Fairly extensive research into conversion exists, but, according to the sociologist of religion Nancy T. Ammerman, there is surprisingly little of it that uses theories of identity formation: what identity

15. FFRA, 1887–1918.
exists is taken for granted to a large extent. Much research has also assumed that gender is irrelevant for understanding conversion. Yet the few studies that have taken this into consideration have been able to show that gender does play a large role in how people express their experiences of conversion.

Approximately 400 conversion narratives were accessed and used in this study. The selection was from the period 1887–1918 and comprises applications that were successful as well as those that were refused. They are, with only a few exceptions, narratives penned by Salvationists at different local corps around the country. To describe their personal religious experiences was nothing new to them. In the Salvation Army it was customary for all who had been “saved” to “witness” their conversion repeatedly at meetings. This meant primarily that the written narrative was preceded by a public oral version. The person who witnessed thereby had the opportunity to develop the narrative in interaction with the audience. Secondly, it meant that the witness had probably heard other testimonies that he or she could be inspired by, regarding the structure of the narrative as well as choice of expressions and vocabulary. The testimonies were to a great extent embossed with the Salvation Army’s theological message and how it was conferred through meetings, manifestations, and texts. It is also important to keep in mind that the written conversion narratives were penned by people who wished to convince Headquarters to accept them as cadets at the military academy. To participate in the group’s discourse was to enter into the social world that the group had constructed.

Conversion involves a changed world view and a different way to regard oneself. The converted individual constructed a narrative that made the previous and the present continuous, understandable, and coherent. Thus, the narrative tells us mostly something of the “retrospective.”

20. Booth, Order och reglementen för fältofficerare, 368.
21. According to Brereton, conversion narratives from nineteenth-century Protestant contexts are remarkably similar in its structure. She also shows that there were great similarities between conversion narratives and contemporary secular novels. Brereton, From Sin to Salvation, 3–40.
telling as a part of a doing, and the narratives as an expression of an ongoing self-making.”

In short, narratives are performative; in the telling, the identity is formed.

The Home and the Family

The historian Pamela J. Walker, in her study of British Salvationists found that conversion not only demanded a change in the individual, it meant different things to men and women. Different experiences of the division of labour between the sexes, salaries, spare time and authority came to be the foundation of men’s and women’s comprehension of sin and conversion. Many of the men’s narratives brought up their considerations of their powers as men. They described their childhood home as something kept together by their beloved Christian mothers, while the fathers introduced them to a masculinity that involved drinking, tobacco, and gambling. Conversion meant that these bad habits were abandoned in an instant.

Many of the Swedish conversion narratives are introduced by an assessment of the subject’s parents’ home. There are a number of different nuances in a scale from narratives where the home is described in positive tones to more negative assessments. Yet there are no decisive differences in men’s and women’s descriptions of the parental home and relationships to close family members. In cases where the mother is named it is not unusual that she, in the same way as in the British narratives, is given the role of the person in the family who safeguards the children’s Christian upbringing. For example, Hugo Nygren recalls his mother speaking of God when he was a little child and taking him to religious meetings. For Maria Malmqvist this upbringing was so deeply rooted that it did not disappear in spite of a lost childhood belief; “My mother’s prayers haunted me,” she writes gratefully afterwards. That mothers in this way are given the role of religious fosterer is typical of the times. During the nineteenth century religious piety came to be successively more feminised. This shift has been explained as the bourgeois discourse of the time making religion into a private issue and that it then was linked to the female sphere. The Salvation Army can be seen as a challenge to this “privatisation.” It is true that the organisation is borne up by women, but by marching and speaking in public, all room is proclaimed as God’s room. Thus, they acted in order to make the public arenas “sacral.”

24. Walker, Pulling the Devil’s Kingdom Down, 64–93.
25. Hugo Nygren, 1918. FFRA.
26. Maria Malmqvist, 1903. FFRA.
Army was rather a challenge towards the bourgeois hegemony than a tool for the middle classes’ interests.\textsuperscript{29}

\textbf{Out in Society Amongst Comrades}

In conversion narratives the world outside the home is described as a dangerous place where young people are lead astray by bad company. Anna Hansson writes: “At the age of fifteen I took a position in service and gained many friends, then I shunned God and began to sin, but every time I came home my parents begged me not to forget Jesus.”\textsuperscript{30}

Gustaf Larsson experienced this in a similar way:

\begin{quote}
On April 14th 1897 I left my dear foster parents’ home to seek my happiness in the world, on my own. The hearty wishes for success and the warm admonitions I received from my beloved foster mother when we parted, also the precious promises I gave her that I would take Jesus along with me, I soon forgot amongst ungodly friends.\textsuperscript{31}
\end{quote}

From Anna’s and Gustaf’s narratives the dichotomy between the private and the public sphere becomes clear. The home is linked to religiousness often mediated by the mother, while the world beyond the home is associated with sin in the company of friends. This pattern is particularly prominent in the women’s narratives. Closely linked to this is the female Salvationists’ unrest about what friends will say about their newly acquired religiousness. Ester Mehr experienced the following: “God had spoken to me on many occasions, but I was too shy in front of friends and comrades to heed his voice […] I thought that the acquaintances who saw me would laugh at me if I bent down at the Salvation Army’s mercy seat.”\textsuperscript{32} Thus, the fear was in the risk of being found embarrassing by being in the Salvation Army. For many this was a hard struggle. Hulda Westberg found it difficult to resist the pressure from her peers: “I was out on Walpurgis Eve for a while and then there was a friend who asked if I was in the army and then that evil voice came and whispered to me to say no and then I defected.”\textsuperscript{33}

The young women’s anxiety that they, by their conversion, would feel an embarrassment in relation to their friends, can be understood as a fear of transgressing against the prevailing hegemonic perception that women were not, and should not be, “independent.” In her study of conversion narratives from the early nineteenth century, America historian Susan Juster has highlighted that the question of independence as central to understanding how conversion involves changed masculinity and femininity. In order to achieve salvation men were expected to give up the idea of themselves as being

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Walker is critical of historians who reduce the engagement of working-class people’s commitment to religion to a question of degree of class consciousness. She believes that the Salvation Army was at least as authentic as any other movement of the working class, Walker, \textit{Pulling the Devil’s Kingdom Down}, 67.
\item Anna Wilhemina Hansson, 1891. FFRA.
\item Gustaf Larsson, 1903. FFRA.
\item Ester Mehr, 1903. FFRA.
\item Hulda Westberg, 1909. FFRA.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
independent, while women were expected to reduce their dependence on family and friends and become more independent. The conversion therefore meant, according to Juster, a closer association between masculinity and femininity. When we regard the young Salvationists conversion in this light, their anxiety is not difficult to understand; they challenged the existing order of things, the keeping the sexes apart in a private and a public sphere.

The Nature of Sin
Two ways of writing about sin emerge in the material. One is more “tangible” — sin in the form of worldly pleasures such as dancing, drinking or keeping bad company. The other is a sin “in the heart” which is only visible to God. Both ways of presenting sin are seen during the entire period of the study, but it is apparent that the emphasis moves from tangible sin to the heartfelt sin, the further forward we find ourselves in the period studied.

Often sin is portrayed by means of worldly sin general vocabulary: “I longed to leave the peace of the family home for the noisy, bustling world,” writes Agnes Hedström and tells how she arrived in a town a few miles from her home and how she threw herself into “a sea of pleasure and amusement.” Her narrative is one of many similar ones where young men and women tell how they broke up from their family home and indulged in sinning. August Storm bears witness of how he destroyed his youthful years in “vices and orgies” and Leopold Boustedt tells of how he arrived in the town of Eskilstuna and lived “a dissipated life serving Satan and sin.” Men as well as women depict sin in general terms without being precise about what it means concretely, but there are differences in how they portray it. Men have a harder tone of voice and speak, as above, of a “dissipated life” and “orgies,” while women often use a milder choice of words such as Agnes Hedström above, who speaks of “pleasure and amusement.” To depict it as having been “serving Satan,” as does Leopold Boustedt, is also a typically masculine expression, which I will to return to later in the section on God’s likeness.

Dancing is found in both the women’s as well as the men’s register of sins. Emma Persson describes how she at the age of seven started to participate in worldly amusements: “My greatest pleasure was when I was allowed to go to the theatre or a dance.” When Olof Persson Brings’ sister lay on her deathbed she asked him if he would promise her to give up dancing, but he dare not to consent to her prayer “as dancing was the dearest thing of all to me.” Dancing was a sin that was specified in other Protestant movements from the nineteenth century, which can explain why it is emphasised even in the Swedish material. Yet there are models closer to home. Sweden’s first commander Hanna

35. Agnes Hedström, 1891. FFRA. Compare Brereton, From Sin to Salvation, 40–1.
36. August Storm, 1887. FFRA.
37. Leopold Boustedt, 1893. FFRA.
38. Emma Mathilda Persson, 1889. FFRA.
39. Olof Persson Bring, 1888. FFRA.
Ouchterlony had had a talent for dancing when young, something which she was forced to give up because of her conversion. 40

Selma Sundin tells of how dancing was something she was more or less forced to take part in:

I was rather advanced in sinful ways. Although very young I tried in all manner of ways to satisfy myself in sinning. Since my parents’ home was open for young people to satisfy their desires for dancing and youthful amusements (almost every evening) this meant that I too must indulge in the vile pleasures of sinning. 41

This narrative breaks away from the typical pattern as sin was present in the home. For Selma there was no other way to get away from sin than to apply to join the Salvation Army.

In some of the men’s narratives sin is described as drunkenness. For Johan Jönsson Ek his drinking became a never-ending evil circle:

Now I was to go and became a smith’s apprentice and here, as everywhere else, it was the custom to offer a welcome drink. That was the first time I drank the devil’s brew, I drank 1/2 a tankard. I soon was fired because of drunkenness. Then I went to an ironmonger’s and it was the same there. 42

Drinking was an important component in the male workers’ culture. 43 Workmates were going to turn the fifteen-year-old Johan into a man and inaugurate him into their fellowship. It seems, however, that the young man found it difficult to handle alcohol, which had disastrous consequences. When Johan found salvation he stopped drinking and could become a conscientious worker on the railway.

It was, above all, women who expressed their sin as being of an inner nature. Lotten Eriksson wrote that she was not engaged in sinning in the eyes of the world, but in God’s eyes she was a lost soul. 44 In a similar manner Hedvig Hellström wrote that she had never been out among worldly amusements or in worldly company. But, even so, her heart was hard and unrelenting towards God’s love. 45 For these young women, sin was an internal feeling that some of them had carried within them since childhood.

The Longing for Happiness
Closely connected to the inner feeling of sin is that the women often describe the time before their conversion as a period of “searching.” Anna Morin tells how she gave up her childhood faith: “I now began to search in entertainments for the serenity that I longed for, but I found none only emptiness.” 46 The women express an internal longing, but did not know how to realise it as it was

40. L. Petri, Hanna Cordelia Ouchterlony (Lund, 1924), 12.
41. Selma Sundin, 1888. FFRA.
42. Johan Jönsson Ek, 1888. FFRA.
44. Lotten Eriksson, 1888. FFRA.
45. Hedvig Hellström, 1891. FFRA.
46. Anna Morin, 1909. FFRA.
something completely different from anything they knew of. This becomes clear when Elin Eriksson describes that she wanted to find out every word the minister read when she was to be confirmed: “I sat many times and both wished and prayed that I could become a minister, but I did not know how.” Then, when she knelt down at the Salvation Army’s platform, “there came a voice from God that told me there you will become a minister.” It was a radical, almost unheard of thought that the eighteen-year-old Elin gave voice to when she wrote her narrative in 1891. Of course there had been women who had made claims to be allowed to preach in Sweden earlier, but the Swedish state church had subdued this with reprimands and sometimes even by internment in a prison or mental hospital. To also, as Elin did, make a claim on the office of minister was to dare to take that idea a step further. It would not be until 1960 that the Swedish state church gained its first female minister.

In the same way Anna Grip saw the Salvation Army as her opportunity to make her dream come true:

I have continuously felt a sort of demand on me, to completely offer myself in the service of the Lord, but as a member of Limhamn’s congregation that was not possible. Freedom for women is strictly limited there. However for the past two years I have been called upon to apply for membership in the Elsaborf foundation, in order to later as a bible woman serve the congregation. At the same time I often went to the Salvation Army meetings and when I compared the activities there with the congregation’s activities and I felt that I must obey God and be blessed and I must say no the congregation’s calling and become a soldier.

Anna Grip describes later how her choice made her happy. The term “happiness” is central and recurrent in the women’s narratives, but is found only one single time in a male narrative. In some narratives the women describe their childhood as a happy time. Hilda Andersson writes that “for a long time I was very happy with the simple faith of a child.” But later she came to share the same experience as Agda Andersson: “The happiness of childhood disappeared with the childhood years.” Happiness is thus linked with religiousness. The lost faith of childhood involves lost happiness. In many narratives the women describe their unsaved situation in sin in terms of being unhappy or as the absence of happiness. “However hard I searched and searched for happiness, I found none,” writes Agnes Hedström.

The feeling of unhappiness is particularly prominent when one is conscious of the possibility of being saved, but have not taken that step. Emma Persson tells of how she started to go where the word of God was preached, but became

47. Elin Eriksson, 1891. FFRA.
49. Anna Grip, 1891. FFRA.
50. Hilda Andersson, 1887. FFRA.
51. Agda Andersson, 1896. FFRA.
52. Agnes Hedström, 1891. FFRA.
more and more unhappy every time, and Alma Kristina Strid writes: “When I at the age of fourteen visited the Salvation Army for the first time I felt how God spoke to me and I went from there unhappy.” The feeling was of such a kind that it had consequences for her sense of well-being. Agnes Hedström tells of her being so unhappy that: “Sorrow began to emaciate both body and soul, I became ill.” Augusta Blom was sometimes very close to becoming saved, but could not take the step.

“Sometimes I was so unhappy that I did not know what I should do, but God knew the solution, I became ill and then He found me.” . . . “I was exhausted and needed rest and I found that only Jesus could give me what I needed.”

The contacts with the Salvation Army are formulated as essential for the transformation of emotions and the Salvation Army soldiers appeared as role models. When “three young girls” from the Salvation Army in Västervik came to Oskarshamn, Anna Nordström was moved. “I saw how happy they were, it gripped me and I began to long to be in the same happy state.”

Conversion involved the feeling of being unhappy disappearing, but for some this was not enough. “I was happy yet not completely satisfied,” wrote Lydia Stillberg. The impression Salvationists made was so strong that one needed to be one of them. Julia Dahlgren writes that: “I became so unhappy when I saw the Salvationists’ happiness.” Thereafter she herself became a soldier and happy.

The historian Anna Nilsson argues that the concept of happiness at the turn of the twentieth century was closely related to femininity in Sweden. Most obvious is the connection between the spheres of love and marriage. The woman was expected to create a happy home for the family, where husband and children would feel love and security. Such a concept found support in the Lutheran view of social order which was deeply rooted in Swedish society. The Lutheran catechism prescribed that the woman’s call should be practised in the household, something that the young women in the Salvation Army challenged. They refined and strengthened the religious connotations that already were present in the concept of happiness. When happiness was so strongly associated with personal conversion it also became charged with a kind of religious individualism that made it possible for them to lay claim to another calling; being soldiers of God.

53. Emma Persson, 1889. FFRA.
54. Alma Strid, 1914. FFRA.
55. Agnes Hedström, 1891. FFRA.
56. Augusta Blom, 1888. FFRA.
57. Anna Nordström, 1889. FFRA.
58. Lydia Stillberg, 1914. FFRA.
59. Julia Dahlgren, 1893. FFRA.
The Conversion
The conversion is the turning point of the conversion narratives: the drama’s peripeteia. In several of the men’s narratives the experience is described as instant. August Storm writes: “The salvation I received was instantaneous and radical.” Characteristic of the men’s narratives is that they, in contrast to the women, are rather brief in their description of the conversion. “I fell to my knees. A stream of tears came forth. I was defeated. The peace that is beyond all understanding opened up my soul,” wrote Olof Persson Bring. It is true that warlike metaphors were used diligently by all in the Salvation Army, however, to describe the conversion itself in terms of being “defeated” is typically masculine. The same applies to the feeling of peace that went beyond all “understanding.” By writing in this manner Olof expresses the fact that he has abandoned a masculinity that involved rationalisation and emotional control. This is strengthened by the fact that he, in a way that was very unmanly for that period of time, started crying.

The women use more space to describe the conversion in their narratives. It is described as a struggle and the play of emotions is more at the forefront. Mabel Ljungström tells of her being tempted to attend the Salvation Army meetings by a friend who stated that there was much song and music there. She went there several times. “I despised and ridiculed the Salvationists but the music attracted me.” But at a so-called sanctification meeting something happened:

The feelings I experienced when I was just about to enter I have never felt before, I wanted to turn and go but was ashamed in front of my companions [...] Some came and spoke to me but I made a joke of everything. The soldiers and the officers were inexhaustible but I was hard as stone. I became moved; I was close to taking the step but, yes, the devil put all his force into play to bring me down in depravity.

A characteristic of the women’s narratives is a description of the moment of conversion as a personal meeting with God, or more often with Jesus: “After a few moments of struggle in my soul Jesus whispered peace,” Amanda Holmström writes. Hilda Johansson expresses this as: Jesus came with His love and spoke of peace to my restless heart.” Just as usual in the description of the conversion is that Jesus spoke to their innermost self and changed the heart in their body. Hilda Larsson wrote: Jesus broke my heart men healed it too.” Lotten Eriksson experienced it as Jesus’ love “renovated” her heart. There are also women who describe conversion as a physical joining with Jesus. Beda

63. August Storm, 1887. FFRA.
64. Olof Persson Bring, 1888. FFRA.
65. Virginia Brereton has shown that women in their conversion stories often express conversion as a battle while men give more concise statements. Brereton, *From Sin to Salvation*, 38.
66. Mabel Ljungström, 1909. FFRA.
67. Amanda Holmström, 1891. FFRA.
68. Hilda Johansson, 1893. FFRA.
69. Lotten Eriksson, 1888. FFRA.
Hagelin could feel the power of Jesus’ blood flowing through her soul. Maria Nilsson writes quite briefly: “Then I became one with Him.”

In the descriptions of the moment of conversion it becomes clear that women to a greater extent than men place the emphasis on the personal meeting with Jesus. This leads us to how male and female Salvationists have an image of God.

The Image of God
The American historian Susan Juster uses conversion narratives to make visible the role of issues of individuality, personal autonomy, and actorship in early nineteenth-century American society. The conversion narratives can, according to Juster, be read as allegorical renderings of current conceptions of gender and authoritarian relationships. In her work it emerges that women in their narratives often perceive God in terms of a family member or dear friend. She says that there are some sensual descriptions of God and the love of God present. In the male narratives, however, God is presented in more legislative terminology: as king and ruler. These different likenesses of God mirror the division of the sexes, with women in the private sphere and men in the public one.

The different likenesses of God, which Juster finds from American men and women, are also present in the Swedish Salvationists’ conversion narratives. The women write more often of God and Jesus as a family member or friend, while the men have a more legislative conception. The women sometimes mention God in terms of a father, something men seldom do. In these contexts it is often the case that one wishes to express thankfulness. “Thank you dear God, He who always has been the same faithful father,” writes Augusta Blom, while Alma Åström writes: “The Lord was not the one who forgot His lost child.” Even more usual is that women speak of God as a friend. “God is a faithful friend,” writes Hilda Johansson, and Lisa Bäcklund writes: “I have found that the Lord is good to have as a friend.” Ellen Blomqvist writes that Jesus is “a friend who does not let you down in your time of need,” while Agda Andersson writes: “I walk hand in hand with Jesus during all the changes in life.” The women often express their love for Jesus: “I love Jesus Christ” writes Anna Karlkvist. Augusta Johansson bears witness to how the loving relationship slowly grew: “I have come closer to Jesus and he has taken my heart.” Gertrud Forsselius expresses this as: “Jesus becomes more precious to me every day. He is sufficient for me.” Many women express a will to give themselves completely to Jesus. Karin Nyreen writes: “Here I am Jesus. Use me for whatever you want.”

70. Beda Hagelin, 1891. FFRA.
71. Maria Nilsson, 1889. FFRA.
73. Augusta Blom, 1888. FFRA.
74. Alma Åström, 1909. FFRA.
75. Hilda Johansson, 1893. FFRA.
76. Ellen Blomqvist, 1888. FFRA.
77. Agda Andersson, 1896. FFRA.
78. Anna Karlkvist, 1906. FFRA.
79. Gertrud Forsselius, 1891. FFRA.
80. Karin Nyreen, 1889. FFRA.
What characterises the men in their descriptions of their relationship with God is their will to submit. “I want to be faithful to God in the place He wishes me to stand in,”81 writes Anders Olsson. Often this is expressed as a willingness to submit, as when Karl Wilhelm Karlsson writes that he is “willing to offer myself for the cause of the Lord.”82 God is thus presented as leader: “I now stand under His leadership,” writes Carl Gustaf Moding.

There is also a tendency for many men write of their relationship with God as a result of a rational deliberation. August Magnusson Linde found that: “It is best to belong to God and do his bidding.”83 Johan Stenström writes that he “decided” to be saved: “God has been very good to me and therefore I want to serve Him in some manner.”84 In Stenström’s case it seems to have been a question of giving and taking, but Karl Arvid Österlund, who wished to go to the mission in India, writes that God is dependent on him: “I feel that God needs me.”85

The men do not mention Jesus as frequently as the women do. It is only in a few cases of a later date that a man has the same emotional expression for what is the norm amongst women. This is when Georg Rolf from Jönköping writes “my beloved Jesus” in 1914.86 This could possibly be regarded as the religious usage of language becoming more and more feminised.

Some conversion narratives tell of how God in a very tangible way has become involved in people’s lives. Sometimes it was through strict warnings as in the case of Johan Anton Lindskoog. He had enlisted in the Wendes artillery regiment and was to become an officer: “God did not want this; therefore my foot was injured when a canon drove over me.”87 In the same way Nils Hammar was convinced that God made him ill so that he had to stop being a shoemaker’s apprentice.88 In the same way Pamela Walker finds in the British material how the men describe warnings from God and near-death experiences in order to dramatise their desperate situation and clarify God’s graciousness.89

In the Swedish conversion narratives there are also a few examples of how God interacts in the women’s lives. Emma Persson did not dare to be saved because she feared her father’s wrath. “But when God saw that my father stood in the way of my soul’s salvation then God took his life away. I loved my father a lot and I wished he had lived and become a Salvation Army soldier.”90 The difference between the men’s and the women’s narratives is that God hinders the men from continuing to live as they have done previously, but takes away any obstacles that prevents the women from living as they wish.

81. Anders Olsson, 1888. FFRA.
82. Carl Moding, 1889. FFRA.
83. August Magnusson Linde, 1906. FFRA.
84. Johan Stenström, 1909. FFRA.
85. Karl Österlund, 1909. FFRA.
86. Bror Rolf, 1914. FFRA.
87. Johan Lindskoog, 1887. FFRA.
88. Nils Hammar, 1891. FFRA.
89. Walker, Pulling the Devil’s Kingdom Down, 81.
90. Emma Persson, 1889. FFRA.
Biblical References

The Swedish conversion narratives are, unlike those of the British Salvationists, more fastidious with direct references to the Bible.91 Biblical words are only used a few times in order to express gratitude as when August Storm writes: “I have had my eyes opened to the truth of David’s words: The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.”92 There are examples, too, of how without directly quoting, there are references to biblical stories. When Anna Pettersson was living for some time in a place that was “dark in the spiritual meaning” she became very unhappy as she dared not stand up for what she believed in: “Instead I did what Peter did.”93 Anna Pettersson imagined that any presumptive reader would know of the story where Peter denies Jesus three times. When Charlotte Nystedt writes that she used the Bible to help in seeking advice, she was content to tell that she looked at Ephesians 1:14, after which she could ascertain that it was God’s will that she should join the Salvation Army.94 In the same way, Maria Malmqvist was convinced when she looked at the first chapter of the prophet Jeremiah. Maria neither quotes nor retells what she read there, but for the officers who received the candidates for the War Academy her claim must have been plain. The first chapter deals with how Jeremiah, who God had appointed as a prophet in his mother’s womb, claims that he is too young to preach:

But the L ORD said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the L ORD. Then the L ORD put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the L ORD said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth. (Jer. 1:7–9, AV)95

Maria establishes a clear parallel between the story of the prophet Jeremiah and hers, and of her own life. After this young women had been to the Salvation Army meetings in her home town of Huskvarna she experienced the following:

I heard how God told me to become a soldier, but at first I did not want to understand that the voice came from above. Then I stood there in an organisation for young women and I thought I could be there, but I could not escape from the voice telling me to become a soldier.96

The interesting point in this context is that Maria tells that she first felt she could be a member of an organisation for young women, but that instead God wanted her to be a Salvation Army soldier. The organisation was certainly a Christian one, but it was a huge step to become a Salvation Army soldier instead. This meant that a changed femininity which was expressed in the way of dressing, speaking, and acting in public.

91. Walker, Pulling the Devil’s Kingdom Down, 68–69.
92. August Storm, 1887. FFRA.
93. Anna Pettersson, 1910. FFRA.
94. Charlotte Nystedt, 1887. FFRA.
95. Maria Malmqvist, 1903. FFRA.
96. Maria Malmqvist, 1903. FFRA.
The women in the Bible are not highlighted as role models by female Salvationists. Catherine Booth, the general’s wife who was the ideologist of the organisation, certainly had highlighted some of the women in the Bible as role models in her argumentation for female preachers. She writes of Mary who gave birth to Jesus without the help of any man and of Mary Magdalene who was first in spreading the message of the resurrected Christ. But Catherine Booth’s main argument dealt with reinterpreting the passages in the Bible that used to be used to motivate the men’s sole right to preach. This can partly explain why the women’s conversion narratives never refer to women in the Bible. Another explanation, which does not rule out the first one, is the fact that Mary Magdalene is spoken of in the Bible as a prostitute. Since the 1850s there have been philanthropic salvation homes in Sweden for prostitutes called Magdalene Homes and the fallen women there who were to be rehabilitated were often called Magdalenas. Therefore the biblical Magdalene was starkly associated with a non-respectable woman, someone who a young, religious woman in her search for respectability could not identify herself with.97

A recurring expression in the women’s conversion narratives is that Jesus “knocked on their hearts.” This can, as Virginia Brereton suggests, be read as an allusion to Revelation 3:20. “See, I stand at the door and knock.98 If anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will go in to him . . .”. Another possible intertextuality, which fits in better with how the women otherwise describe their relationship to Jesus, is found in Song of Songs 5:2: “I sleep, but my heart waketh: It is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled . . .”.

Conclusion
Religion is often described as a restraining factor: an ideology and practice which stands in a contrastive relationship to modernity. While modernity is characterised by perpetual change where identities are not stable but rather flexible and negotiable, religion is presented as synonymous with the keeping of traditional social relations, identities, and hierarchies. According to this point of view, religion places men and women in an “iron cage” which contains a previously established upper class and a subordinate one. But such a perception of religion is a simplistic. Religion can also be regarded as a driving force in modernity where different forms of masculinity and femininity occur through continuous negotiation. In this article I have shown how religion gave young men and women in the Salvation Army the opportunity to negotiate masculinity and femininity in their conversion narratives. Thus they also expressed unconscious or conscious criticism towards the prevailing values in society, rather than their reproducing them.

98. Brereton, From Sin to Salvation, 7.