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Dag Hammarskjöld's Spirituality Revisited

A Critique of W.H. Auden's Understanding and Translation of *Markings*

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Introduction¹

When *Markings* (*Vägmärken*), the personal diary of legendary Swedish Secretary-General of the United Nations Dag Hammarskjöld (1905-1961), was first published in 1963/1964(ET)², the world discovered that the sophisticated and intellectually astute UN secretary in fact had been a devout Christian. The manuscript of *Markings* (*Vägmärken*) was found in Dag Hammarskjöld's New York home after his tragic death.³ Attached

to the manuscript was a note addressed to Leif Belfrage, Swedish Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs. In this short letter Hammarskjöld explains that he had not originally intended his diary to be for any other eyes than his own.⁴ He goes on saying that with regard to "all that has been said and written about me, the situation has changed" and that "these entries [in my diary] provide the only true 'profile' that can be drawn."⁵ He ends the letter by saying:

¹ I would like to thank James Peterson, Michael P. Knowles, Samuel Byrskog and K.G. Hammar for their helpful comments and suggestions for improvements of the manuscript.

² Dag Hammarskjöld, *Vägmärken* (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag, 1963)/Dag Hammarskjöld, *Markings* (trans. Leif Sjöberg and W.H. Auden; London: Faber and Faber, 1964).

³ Hammarskjöld's death in a plane crash 18 September 1961 in North Rhodesia (today's Zambia) was followed by many speculations about foul play. The two parallel investigative commissions considered twelve possible causes for the crash, but nothing conclusive could be asserted. Only one man, Sergeant Julien, survived, but died within a short time. According to the judgment of the UN Commission, he would have survived — and the mystery of the crash would have been solved — if only the Ndola Airport authori-

ties had taken proper action according to protocol. The plane was not found until fifteen hours after the crash although it was only nine miles from the Ndola Airport, where it should have landed (Rajeshwar Dayal, *Mission for Hammarskjöld: The Congo Crisis* [London: Oxford University Press, 1976], 278-80; Arthur L. Gavshon, *The Mysterious Death of Dag Hammarskjöld* [New York: Walker and Company, 1962], 214-22). Susan Williams's recently published full-sized monograph (*Who killed Hammarskjöld?: the UN, the Cold War and White Supremacy in Africa* [London: Hurst & Company, 2011]) provides a full account of the circumstances around the death of Hammarskjöld.

⁴ W.H. Auden, foreword to *Markings*, by Dag Hammarskjöld (trans. Leif Sjöberg and W.H. Auden; London: Faber and Faber, 1964), 7.

⁵ Hammarskjöld, *Markings*, 7.

If you find them worth publishing, you have my permission to do so—as a sort of ‘White Book’ concerning my negotiations with myself—and with God.⁶

It has been remarked with regard to *Markings* that “everyone owns Dag Hammarskjöld’s *Markings*. Few have read it. Few of these have understood it.”⁷ Even a cursory comparison of the original version with the English translation reveals translational flaws. This article, starting with a brief look into Hammarskjöld’s background and spiritual development, and a discussion of responses to *Markings*, argues that W.H. Auden’s foreword to and translation of *Markings* into English are misleading and have presented to the English-speaking world a skewed picture of Dag Hammarskjöld and his inner world. This tainted picture has been duplicated in many of the works on Dag Hammarskjöld that base their analysis of Dag Hammarskjöld’s spirituality on Auden’s translation and are influenced by his introduction.

In *Markings* Hammarskjöld addresses his personal weaknesses and struggles in the context of God and accounts for his experience of the redeeming power of Christ. Hammarskjöld’s diary is appealing because it makes faith in God highly relevant to life in a very practical sense, on any level in modern society. This inquiry approaches Dag Hammarskjöld’s spirituality—following Richard Foster—as an expression within the incarnational tradition of

Christian life and faith [that] focuses upon making present and visible the realm of the invisible spirit[;] this sacramental way of living addresses the crying need to experience God as truly manifest and notoriously active in daily life.⁸

This investigation seeks to present a spiritual portrait on the basis of a fresh reading of the Swedish original.

A Short Biography

In 1905, Dag Hammarskjöld was born into one of Sweden’s oldest aristocratic families, a family of civil servants and officers. Characteristic traits of the Hammarskjöld family were said to be: “seriousness, conscientiousness and dauntless energy.”⁹ Dag Hammarskjöld’s father, Hjalmar Hammarskjöld, was likely the most distinguished in the Hammarskjöld family. It has been said about him that “few of his countrymen have held so many high offices, and discharged their duties with such responsibility.”¹⁰ Among other things Hjalmar Hammarskjöld held the office of Prime Minister between 1914 and 1917 and was also for a long time Governor of Uppland. In many respects Hjalmar Hammarskjöld anticipated the crucial role that Dag Hammarskjöld would play on the scene of world politics.¹¹ Ideals that Hjalmar Hammarskjöld transferred to his son can be summarized in the words duty, righteousness and self-less service.¹² Agnes Hammarskjöld, Dag’s mother, was very different from her husband. She had a warm, generous attitude towards friends and strangers alike, and combined intellectualism with a strong emotional side. In a thank you note that Dag Hammarskjöld sent to a friend of the family on the day when Agnes Hammarskjöld died, he wrote about his mother: “My mother ended her life today. She had the qualities I admire the most: she was courageous and good.”¹³

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Statement made by a senior bishop of the American Episcopal Church (Henry P. Van Dusen, *Dag Hammarskjöld: The Statesman and his Faith* (New York, Evanston, London: Harper & Row, 1964), ix).

⁸ Richard J. Foster, *Streams of Living Water: Essential Practices from the Six Great Traditions of Christian Faith* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1998), 237.

⁹ Henry P. Van Dusen, *Dag Hammarskjöld: A Biographical Interpretation of Markings* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), 13.

¹⁰ Sten Söderberg, *Hammarskjöld: A Pictorial Biography* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 1962), 24.

¹¹ Van Dusen, *Dag Hammarskjöld: A Biographical Interpretation*, 14.

¹² Gustaf Aulén, *Dag Hammarskjöld’s White Book: An analysis of Markings* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969) 14.

¹³ Van Dusen, *Dag Hammarskjöld: A Biographical Interpretation*, 16, 18.

Dag Hammarskjöld was born on 29 July in 1905 in Jönköping in southern Sweden. As Hjalmar Hammarskjöld became the Governor of Uppland, the family moved into the Castle of Uppsala, at which time Dag was two years old. Here the family would stay for a quarter of a century. Located down below and next to the Castle was the great Cathedral as well as the Archbishop's Palace, where Nathan Söderblom and his family, close friends of the Hammarskjölds, resided.¹⁴ All through school Dag was a brilliant student. At the age of seventeen he completed a B.A. in literature, philosophy, French and political economy. In connection to the tricentenary of the 'nation'¹⁵ of Uppland, Dag was chosen First Curator and held his first major speech. During his student days he also developed his love for the Swedish countryside and mountaineering in particular, a passion that would last all his life.¹⁶ In his continued studies Hammarskjöld studied law and economics at Uppsala and Stockholm Universities. From 1933-36 he taught political economy at Stockholm University. He then became permanent undersecretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He was appointed chairman of Sweden's delegation to the UN General Assembly in 1952. On the 10th of April, 1953, Hammarskjöld was elected to be the Secretary-General of the United Nations. He was elected for a five-year term, which was renewed in 1957.

Responses to *Markings*

When *Markings* was first published in 1963 and 1964 (English), a few years after Hammarskjöld's tragic death, many readers were surprised regarding his spirituality. The Swedish Secretary-General had not in his lifetime first of all been associated with Christianity, but rather with the involvement in numerous events and crises on the international scene of world affairs. However, Hammarskjöld's Christian faith was not a secret. In a radio speech in 1954, Ham-

marskjöld made the following statement with the title "Old Creeds in a New World":¹⁷

The world in which I grew up was dominated by principles and ideals of a time far from ours and, as it may seem, far removed from the problems facing a man of the middle of the twentieth century. However, my way has not meant a departure from those ideals. On the contrary, I have been led to an understanding of their validity also for our world of today. Thus, a never abandoned effort frankly and squarely to build up a personal belief in the light of experience and honest thinking has led me in a circle; I now recognize and endorse, unreservedly, those very beliefs which were once handed down to me.

From generations of soldiers and government officials on my father's side I inherited a belief that no life was more satisfactory than one of selfless service to your country – or humanity. This service required a sacrifice of all personal interests, but likewise the courage to stand up unflinchingly for your convictions. From scholars and clergymen on my mother's side I inherited a belief that, in the very radical sense of the Gospels, all men were equals as children of God, and should be met and treated by us as our masters in God.

Faith is a state of the mind and the soul. In this sense we can understand the words of the Spanish mystic, St. John of the Cross: 'Faith is the union of God with the soul.' The language of religion is a set of formulas which register a basic spiritual experience. It must not be regarded as describing, in terms to be defined by philosophy, the reality which is accessible to our senses and which we can analyse with the tools of logic. I was late in understanding what this meant. When I finally reached that point, the beliefs in which I was once brought up and which, in fact, had given my life direction even while my intellect still challenged their validity, were recognized by me as mine in their own right and by my free choice. I feel that I can endorse those convictions without any compromise with the demands of that intellectual honesty which is the very key to maturity of mind.¹⁸

¹⁴ Ibid., 20-22.

¹⁵ Roughly the equivalent of American fraternities.

¹⁶ Van Dusen, *Dag Hammarskjöld: A Biographical Interpretation*, 23-24.

¹⁷ Speech by Dag Hammarskjöld in Edward R. Murrow's radio program *This I Believe* in 1954.

¹⁸ Dag Hammarskjöld, *Servant of Peace: A Selection of the Speech and Statements of Dag Hammarskjöld, Secretary-General of the United Nations 1953-1961*

In a speech addressed to the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches on August 20 in 1954, Hammarskjöld said:

The Cross is that place at the center of the world's history . . . Where all men and all nations without exception stand revealed as beloved of God, precious in God's sight . . . So understood, the Cross although it is the unique fact on which the Christian Churches base their hope, should not separate those of Christian faith from others but should instead be that element in their lives which enables them to stretch out their hands to peoples of other creeds in the feeling of universal brotherhood which we hope one day to see reflected in a world of nations truly united.¹⁹

Upon the publishing of *Markings*, an animated debate followed in Scandinavia.²⁰ Among the first responses to *Markings* in secular Sweden was a review article, "Hammarskjöld, Jesus och sanningen" (Hammarskjöld, Jesus and the Truth) by Olof Lagercrantz, editor-in-chief of *Dagens Nyheter*.²¹ Lagercrantz, though making a few insightful observations along the way, mocks Hammarskjöld for his faith in God. Lagercrantz correctly notes the influence from mediaeval mystics in Hammarskjöld's strong sense of identification with Christ, but fails to note that this identification with Christ and the cross as well as the concept of 'God and/or Christ in me/us' are not only present in mediaeval mystics but in fact saturate the entire gospel tradition as well as Pauline theology. The imitation of Christ, both in thinking and action, for which Lagercrantz criticizes Hammarskjöld, is consistent with New Testament thought. At a certain point in his analysis, Lagercrantz abandons the role of the reviewer and steps into the unfitting role of secular priesthood, stipulating that the concept of ab-

solute truth derived from God is an "absurdity"²² — "It seems as if Hammarskjöld has not clarified this to himself".²³ The fact that Hammarskjöld had reached impressive results in his role as General Secretary does not seem to matter — because the *means* are reprehensible; Lagercrantz, both naïve and horrified at the same time, is offended by the possible connection between Hammarskjöld's Christian thought and the public life and action of the Secretary General of the United Nations.²⁴ Lagercrantz then offers a condensed version of his own theology, scolding Hammarskjöld for "forgetting" that all that we think and do is merely a social and cultural construction — and that God is beyond reach.²⁵ What upsets Lagercrantz more than anything seems to be that Christianity for Hammarskjöld made an actual difference in his execution of his public service as Secretary General of the UN. Lagercrantz ends by stating the blissfulness of Hammarskjöld's early death "before the Christ-dream removed him even further away from reality."²⁶

Another response came from one of Hammarskjöld's colleagues, Henrik Klackenberg, who was a member of the Supreme Administrative Court. Klackenberg questions that Hammarskjöld was a Christian, that he "expressed any need for divine worship" or even attended church. He concludes that Hammarskjöld "had deviated considerably from the pure evangelical-Lutheran doctrine."²⁷ Klackenberg is obviously not aware of the fact that Hammarskjöld even publicly had confirmed the Christian—and Lutheran—convictions that he had been brought up with:

I feel that I can endorse those [Christian] convictions without any compromise with the demands of that intellectual honesty which is the very key to maturity of mind.

(ed. Wilder Foote; New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1977) 23-24.

¹⁹ Hammarskjöld, *Servant of Peace*, 61.

²⁰ Paul R. Nelson, *Courage of Faith: Dag Hammarskjöld's Way in Quest of Negotiated Peace, Reconciliation and Meaning* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2007), 18.

²¹ Olof Lagercrantz, "Hammarskjöld, Jesus och sanningen" in *Vårt sekel är reserverat åt lögnen: Artiklar 1938-1993 med några anslutande dagsboksanteckningar* (Stockholm: Karneval Förlag, 2007).

²² All quotes of Lagercrantz are my translations from Swedish.

²³ Lagercrantz, 176.

²⁴ Lagercrantz, 175, 176, 178.

²⁵ Lagercrantz, 177.

²⁶ Lagercrantz, 178.

²⁷ Sven Stolpe, *Dag Hammarskjöld: A Spiritual Portrait* (trans. Naomi Walford; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), 99-100.

Other comments came from Eyvind Bartels, Danish ambassador, who made some insightful observations, but also made a number of erroneous statements in his article.²⁸ Bartels accuses Hammarskjöld of believing that “he has been chosen by God to be the sacrificial lamb.” He also finds it disturbing that Hammarskjöld believes “that he has been singled out.” In addition, Bartels argues that Hammarskjöld sought to build up a myth around his person. Bartels even suggests that Hammarskjöld sought and himself brought about his death, i.e. caused the plane to crash.²⁹ These accusations are surprising, coming from somebody who views himself as a Christian. Indeed, to be singled out and chosen is a prominent thought both in the Old and New Testaments—and this applies both in the general sense that Christians are chosen by God and in the specific sense of being chosen for a particular task or function. Bartels’s assertion that Hammarskjöld was building up a myth around himself, Aulén finds “ridiculous.”³⁰ With regard to people who claim that Hammarskjöld viewed himself as a sacrifice and a new Redeemer, Andreas Specker comments:

Wer jedoch genauer hinsieht, kann sehr leicht feststellen, dass Hammarskjöld sich sehr bewusst in die Tradition eingeschrieben hat, die die Wirkungen und die Botschaft des Kreuzestodes bis heute weiter trägt. Die Auseinandersetzung mit seiner religiösen Erziehung und seinem Jesusbild führte nicht zu einer Identifikation mit dem Christ Jesus, sondern dazu, dass Hammarskjöld seinen Platz als Jünger und Nachfolger einnahm, indem er sich am Lebensbeispiel Jesu orientierte.³¹

Sundén comments that the “sacrificial lamb motive” is not present in Hammarskjöld’s thought, but is an element that has rather been read into the text by various interpreters. Sundén contin-

ues arguing that Hammarskjöld rather viewed himself as an instrument of God in a political process.³² Moreover, the idea that Dag Hammarskjöld should have caused the plane to crash himself is so preposterous that there is no need for further comments.

Yet other reactions came from John Lindberg, a Swedish diplomat who was at school with Hammarskjöld in Uppsala. His analysis of *Markings* and Hammarskjöld as a person in “The Secret Life of Dag Hammarskjöld”³³ comes forth as strikingly vitriolic and ill-willed, probably with a mix of inability to accurately understand the almost unique genre of *Markings* and a wilful selectiveness in his reading, picking and choosing those passages of text that would seem to prove his thesis that Dag Hammarskjöld was a vicious, self-serving, religious maniac. In *Markings* we see a man whose painfully frank and perspicuous self-observation is almost more than a reader can take. Few of the great and famous are willing — or even capable of — eloquently describing and publically exposing their darkest thoughts. However, Hammarskjöld’s sometimes gruesome self-depictions are likely not to be descriptive but rather expressive of who he was — a man who imposed on himself the high moral standards that is frequently found in other texts in *Markings*. *Markings* is truly his “negotiations with [him]self—and with God,” a confessional and self-exposing text reflecting his intent on self-improvement and on “being what he could”. Other elements that Lindberg do not grasp are the concepts of sacrifice, Christ identification and divine servant-hood.

One of the few voices in support of the Christian legacy of Hammarskjöld’s *Markings* was that of Kerstin Anér, a doctor in literature from the University of Gothenburg, radio journalist and later a member of Parliament.³⁴ Right to the point, in her article “Hammarskjöld as Christian Mystic Must Irritate all our Atheists,” Anér writes:

²⁸ Eyvind Bartels et al., *Dag Hammarskjöld og hans Gud: en diskussion mellem E. Bartels, O. Hartman og S. Stolpe* (Copenhagen: Kristeligt Dagblads Forlag, 1964).

²⁹ Bartels, 105, 109.

³⁰ Aulén, 5.

³¹ Andreas Specker, *Leben als Opfer?: Die geistliche Entwicklung Dag Hammarskjölds auf Grundlage seines Tagebuchfragmentes „Zeichen am Weg“* (Augsburg: Dr. Bernd Wissner, 1999), 137-138.

³² Hjalmar Sundén, *Kristusmeditationer i Dag Hammarskjölds Vägmarken* (Stockholm: Diakonistyrelsens Bokförlag, 1966), 21.

³³ John Lindberg, “The Secret Life of Dag Hammarskjöld”, *Look* (June 30, 1964).

³⁴ Roger Lipsey, *Hammarskjöld: A Life* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2013), 594.

No one understands better than I that it must be utterly annoying to all our atheists when Dag Hammarskjöld proves to be a Christian mystic. You cannot say that he was stupid — you cannot say he was immoral — you cannot say he was confined to a small-town environment and influenced by its narrow-minded values. Instead you choose to say that his own, innermost outlook on life didn't have the slightest bit to do with his lifework ... *Markings* is a book that burns you, a book that has an effect like the antique torso of Apollo in Rilke's poem: ... here there is no place that does not see you. You must change your life.³⁵

The first response to *Markings* from the English-speaking world is the foreword by W.H. Auden, who translated *Markings* into English. Auden levels criticism against the publishing of Hammarskjöld's note to Belfrage and especially the one sentence where Hammarskjöld says: "These entries give the only correct 'profile' that can be drawn." Auden argues that these words are "false and misleading" and that no one can draw his own 'profile.' Instead, he argues, we should allow others to do draw our profile.³⁶ Auden's comment seems unwarranted and not well thought-out. Auden's point of view might apply in a general sense for assessing somebody's external lifework, but certainly not to an exposition of the development of a person's innermost thoughts and spiritual reflections. Auden is also questioning the authenticity of many of the earlier entries in *Markings*, arguing that they probably were rewritten or added at a later time. He remarks that "I simply cannot believe that at the age of twenty, Hammarskjöld thought in exactly the same terms as he was to think thirty years later."³⁷ However, first, many of Hammarskjöld's thoughts are drawn from central tenets of Christian thought, which would account for the continuity that Auden notices in Hammarskjöld's thought, and, second, the fairly recent publication of letters³⁸ that Hammarskjöld wrote in his twenties corroborates the fact that he in-

deed had thoughts at this age of the same kind as those recorded in the early entries of *Markings*.³⁹ Birnbaum writes:

The letters to his two closest friends—in particular some of those to Waldenström—show that the religious issues made up a central aspect of his work with his own personal development through these years (my transl.).⁴⁰

In a letter to Waldenström on 2 August, 1927, at the age of twenty-two, Hammarskjöld writes:

No matter how we struggle with the notions of God and immortality, yet it remains [a fact] that we both have experienced and at this hour are experiencing both (my transl.).⁴¹

On Good Friday, 1928, at the age of twenty-three, Hammarskjöld writes to Waldenström, telling him that he for the first time since his confirmation had participated in a communion service. He comments: "for the first time in my life I experienced this [the participation in the

³⁹ This material reveals, among other things, that already in his twenties, Hammarskjöld had an interest in Meister Eckhart and Thomas a Kempis. On 8 October 1928, at the age of twenty-three, Hammarskjöld writes a letter to his friend Moll, saying that "we have a faith, that even if our reason denied everything, our whole being would however prove a God ...". In another letter to Moll on Good Friday 1929, at the age twenty-four, Hammarskjöld writes about the atoning death of Christ, his forgiveness and his ability to free man from debt (Birnbaum, 15, 50, 52). Against this background Svegfors's suggestion that Hammarskjöld did not recognize the divinity of Christ comes forth as unlikely; his interpretation of Hammarskjöld's use of 'brother' as a downgrading of the nature of Christ is poorly supported, especially since it is in John (20:17) — recognized as the gospel with the highest Christology — that Jesus himself refers to his brotherhood with those believing in him. When Svegfors argues that Hammarskjöld replaces the trinity with a dualism between man and God he errs even more. That mutual abiding of the re-born man in God and God in man is rather nothing but classical Christianity, widely attested in the New Testament. (Mats Svegfors, *Dag Hammarskjöld: den förste moderne svensken* [Stockholm: Norstedts Förlag, 2005], 149-151, 156).

⁴⁰ Birnbaum, 52.

⁴¹ Ibid., 54.

³⁵ Quoted in Lipsey, *Hammarskjöld*, 594-95.

³⁶ Auden, "Foreword," 10-11.

³⁷ Ibid., 15-16.

³⁸ Karl E. Birnbaum, *Den unge Dag Hammarskjölds inre värld — inblickar i en människas tillblivelse* (Ludvika, Sweden: Dualis Förlag AB, 1998).

communion] as the purest expression of my will.” He goes on providing a detailed account of the drama of the Passion, which he re-lived at the communion service, all the way up to Jesus’ death on the cross, which he refers to as “the sacrifice of everything external for the perfection of the internal.”⁴² With regard to Christ’s sacrificial death for mankind, Hammarskjöld concludes:

We who perceive the criteria of our intrinsic value to be based on peoples’ conception of us, should be able to comprehend how great is the faith in life of the one who suffers the death of a criminal in his faithfulness to life. — Once this has taken place—and succeeded—is it then so difficult, in infinitely simpler terms, to walk the same path. (My transl.)⁴³

With regard to Hammarskjöld’s spiritual outlook, Birnbaum concludes that there is a clear basic continuity all through Hammarskjöld’s life, ranging from his early twenties and onwards.⁴⁴

At the beginning of the third section of his foreword, Auden denotes “the conviction that no man can do properly what he is called upon to do in his life unless he can learn to forget his ego and act as an instrument of God” as “highly perilous.” Auden does not seem to know that “to forget [one’s] ego” and to be an “instrument of God” are central notions in New Testament thought.⁴⁵ The same point was made by Leif

Belfrage and his colleagues.⁴⁶ Birnbaum comments that the notion of Christians as the co-workers of God are reflected in Meister Eckhart’s works that Hammarskjöld often cited. Meister Eckhart was condemned as a heretic by the pope for the concept of man as God’s co-worker. However, the co-operative idea between man and God is prevalent in the New Testament, and even the precise wording of “God’s fellow workers” can be found in Paul.⁴⁷ Auden goes on to suggest that Hammarskjöld may have suffered from megalomania. Auden: “The man who says ‘Not I, but God in me’ is always in great danger of imagining that he *is* [italics in original] God.” Again, Auden does not seem to be aware that the “Christ / God in us-concept” is central in the New Testament⁴⁸ and has nothing to do with megalomania, but is rather a humble recognition of utmost dependence on God. Auden redeems himself somewhat when he concludes that Hammarskjöld, nevertheless, in communication with other people did not show any sign of holding himself in too high an esteem, but was rather a humble and considerate person.⁴⁹ Finally, Auden comments that Hammarskjöld did not participate “in the liturgical and sacramental life of a church.”⁵⁰ It is true that Hammarskjöld did not attach himself to a specific church. However, his friend Stolpe, from this student days in Uppsala, confirms that Dag Hammarskjöld did in fact

⁴² Ibid., 55.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 64.

⁴⁵ In Luke 9.23-26 (NRSV) Jesus says: “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it. What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words, of them the Son of Man will be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels”. In 2 Tim 2.21 (NIV) Paul says: “If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work”.

⁴⁶ Lipsey, *Hammarskjöld*, 598.

⁴⁷ 1 Cor 3: 7-9 (NIV): “So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building”. An example of Hammarskjöld’s view of himself as a co-worker of God is exemplified in a letter that he wrote in 1955 when the American airmen had been released out of prison in China: “Today we accomplished something, God and I. That is to say it was God who built while I stood below with the paint pot, shouting” (Stolpe, 35-36).

⁴⁸ Gal 2.19b-20 (NRSV): “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me”.

⁴⁹ Auden, “Foreword.”

⁵⁰ Ibid., 24.

regularly attend church services both in Sweden and New York, alternating between Protestant, Greek Orthodox, and Catholic churches, "but he never talked about it."⁵¹

Auden ends his introduction with a postscript describing the translational procedures that were followed. Auden admits that he does not know any Swedish. When he was asked to undertake the translation, he agreed on the condition that he would be assisted by a Swedish person who knew English good enough to make a literal translation "without trying to do my part of the job as well."⁵² That person was Leif Sjöberg. He also wanted Sjöberg to provide him with a list of alternative words to choose from, when there was not a direct English equivalent. How hazardous this procedure was is not difficult to imagine. From the translation it is clear that when Auden did "[his] part of the job" he elaborated rather freely on the text. However, this is not the only problem with the Auden-Sjöberg translation. Auden operated under the conviction that ambiguous or obscure readings in the original text should be represented with a clear meaning in the target language, which procedure introduced into the English translation an additional interpretive element. The sum of these procedures resulted in a text that in certain cases is far removed from the original Swedish text. Falkman, who has noticed weaknesses in Auden's translation, comments:

The cumulative impression created by Auden's (mis)translations is that he often does not seem to understand the religious and moral dimension of Hammarskjöld's thinking.⁵³

Falkman provides several examples⁵⁴ of Auden's mistranslations and remarks that Auden "inter-

preted his part of the [translation] job most freely."⁵⁵ The weaknesses of Auden's translation have also been observed by Bernhard Erling, who attempted his own, though unpublished, annotated translation of *Markings*.⁵⁶

Responding to Falkman, Davenport-Hines, who has written a biography on Auden,⁵⁷ brings important insights with regard to Auden. First, he points out that Auden had a habit, established in the 1930s, to include "subjective, clandestine self-revelatory comments" from his personal life in neutral works of prose, as a means of communication and "in-joke edification" for his close friends. Second, Davenport-Hines comments that Auden was a homosexual who for many years had shared his life with another man, Chester Kallman, who some time before Auden was asked to translate *Markings* left Auden for other sexual opportunities in Greece, and therefore Auden was probably very grieved at the time.⁵⁸ Davenport-Hines notes that other works by Auden from 1962-63, for instance an edition of Shakespeare's sonnets and an anthology of de la Mare's verse, contained lengthier personal commentaries expressing Auden's ongoing emotional crisis.⁵⁹ Auden's comment on his meeting with Hammarskjöld in his introduction to *Markings*—"Brief and infrequent as our meetings were, I loved the man from the moment I saw him"—was most likely a message to Chester Kallman, who he hoped would read his comment. The same purpose probably applies to a passage in *Markings* where Hammarskjöld writes about friendship, but Auden twice incorrectly translates the Swedish word for friendship, *vänskap*, with the word love. Davenport-Hines: "When Auden wrote the sentence . . . 'perhaps a great love (Hammarskjöld: friendship) is never

in the title *Markings*. Falkman lists a number of other translational mistakes (Falkman, 14).

⁵¹ Ibid., 15.

⁵² Bernard Erling, *A Reader's Guide to Dag Hammarskjöld's Waymarks* (Unpublished/private published: 1982, 1987, 1999).

⁵³ Richard Davenport-Hines, *Auden* (London: Heinemann, 1995).

⁵⁴ Richard Davenport-Hines, "W.H. Auden and Dag Hammarskjöld", *The Times Literary Supplement* (September 24, 1999): 17.

⁵⁵ Davenport-Hines, *Auden*, 308, 311.

⁵¹ Stolpe, 66.

⁵² Auden, "Foreword."

⁵³ Kai Falkman, "Signposts in the Wrong Direction", *The Times Literary Supplement* (September 10, 1999): 14.

⁵⁴ In Hammarskjöld's famous poem from 1961, Auden translates *lyckan* (happiness) with 'fun'; *Svaret - du ska lära det* (The answer - you shall learn it) is translated 'The truth - you shall hold to it'; *bära* (carry) is translated 'endure'. Falkman also notes that the original title, *Vägmärken* (road signs), is not reflected

reciprocated and I only understood much later that his words had hurt so much because my love (friendship) had still a long way to go' - he was surely thinking about Kallman, and expecting his words to be read by Kallman and their more intimate friends."⁶⁰ It follows that Auden's translation of Hammarskjöld's diary is not only flawed because of a number of misconceptions, as reflected in his introduction, such as his presuppositions regarding Hammarskjöld's spirituality and his limited understanding of elementary Christian thought, but also because of faulty translational procedures and because of Auden's abuse of his role as a translator.

Approaching the Text

In the following I try briefly to account for Hammarskjöld's spiritual journey from the viewpoint of some of his personal notes in *Markings* and try to define his inner spirituality as an expression within the incarnational tradition of Christianity,⁶¹ meaning that he was living out his faith in his daily life and work. Foster argues that Hammarskjöld's "political work was sacramental living of the deepest sort."⁶² Texts from Hammarskjöld's *Markings* are provided both in the original, for those who are able to read Swedish, and in English translation for the international readership. I present my own translation of the texts, but I make use of Auden's translation when I find it helpful and accurate. My translations are intended to be as literal as possible without compromising the dynamic equivalence⁶³ between source text and target text. As mentioned in his letter to Belfrage, Hammarskjöld contends that with regard to his own person, *Markings* "provide the only true 'profile' that can be drawn." It is therefore my assumption that the content of *Markings* is a serious attempt on the part of Hammarskjöld to communicate his perspective, thus reflecting his development as a human and a Christian. Another related assumption is that Hammarskjöld is

honest about what he is saying. After all, his notes were originally not meant for publication,⁶⁴ but were rather Hammarskjöld's private reflections.

As to the structure of *Markings*, several suggestions have been made. Except for the obvious chronological sequential structure, a thematic structure is suggested that helps us grasp what *Markings* is all about. The key to the structure of *Markings* is indicated in Hammarskjöld's short letter to Belfrage. Hammarskjöld describes his notes first of all as a White Book. In a way this does not help very much since the definitions of a White Book (or White Paper) are many and varied. *Oxford Dictionaries* says: "a book of rules, standards, or records, especially an official government report, bound in white". Hammarskjöld likely intended his White Book as an exposition and a record of his personal development as a private person and a Christian, and a way to disclose to the world the values that led him to become what he became. I suggest that this is the overarching theme of *Markings*. I think my suggestion is further strengthened by the fact that Hammarskjöld himself states that his White Book is "concerning my negotiations with myself—and with God." These two themes—his negotiations with himself and with God—are prevalent in most entries in *Markings*.

Reading the Text

Markings is divided into chronological sections.⁶⁵ With regard to the distribution of the en-

⁶⁴ At least according to Hammarskjöld himself.

⁶⁵ **1925-1930:** *Thus it was / Så var det*; **1941-1942:** *Middle years / Mellanår*; **1945-1949:** *Towards new shores —? / Mot nya stränder —?*; **1950:** *Soon night is drawing close / Snart stundar natten—*; **1951:** ("Soon night is drawing close" / "Snart stundar natten"); **1952** ("Soon night is drawing close—" / "Snart stundar natten—"); **1953:** ("— soon night is drawing close" / "— snart stundar natten"); **1954** ("— soon night is drawing close" / "— snart stundar natten"); **1955:** November 19-20, 1955 / 19-20.11.55, December 24, 1955 / 24.12.55, December 25, 1955 / 25.12.55; **1956:** March 21, 1956 / 21.3.56, March 29, 1956 / 29.3.56, March 30, 1956 / 30.3.56, April 8, 1956 / 8.4.56, April 22, 1956 / 22.4.56, June 4, 1956 /

⁶⁰ Davenport-Hines, "W.H. Auden and Dag Hammarskjöld", 17.

⁶¹ Foster, 237-272.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 253.

⁶³ See Eugene Nida's translation theory.

tries, it is striking to see that less than one sixth of the entire collection was produced during the first twenty-five years out of a total of 36 years. From 1950 and the following three years one-fourth of the notations were entered into the diary.⁶⁶ Hammarskjöld makes incisive reflections and painfully frank self-observations that are geared towards sanctification and self-improvement through the grace of God. Below passages from *Markings* from different time periods are presented. Auden's translation is commented on when warranted, but when there are less relevant differences these are only mentioned in footnotes. I comment on and discuss

the examples, with particular attention to passages where I think Auden has misunderstood or misinterpreted Hammarskjöld.

Being the first entry of Hammarskjöld's diary, *Thus It Was* is of particular significance. It was written when Hammarskjöld was at the age of twenty, but amazingly sums up a life time in an imaginary vision of the future, where Hammarskjöld envisions himself at the end of his life, accounting for whether he has made the most of the talents he was given—or not.

Thus It Was, 1925-1930

Så var det, 1925-1930⁶⁷

4.6.56, June 10, 1956 / 10.6.56, July 29, 1956 & August 16, 1956 / 29.7.56 & 16.8.56, August 26, 1956 / 26.8.56, August 30, 1956 / 30.8.56, November 1-7, 1956 / 1-7.11.56, November 17, 1956 / 17.11.56, November 25, 1956 / 25.11.56, December 24, 1956 / 24.12.56, December 25, 1956 / 25.12.56, December 26, 1956 / 26.12.56, December 31, 1956 / 31.12.56; **1957**: *Soon night is drawing close* — — / *Snart stundar natten* — —, January 21, 1957 / 21.1.57, February 24, 1957 / 24.2.57, April 7, 1957 / 7.4.56, April 28, 1957 / 28.4.57, May 25, 1957 / 25.5.57, June 20, 1957 / 20.6.57, June 23, 1957 / 23.6.57, July 20, 1957 / 20.7.57, July 28, 1957 / 28.7.57, September 3, 1957 / 3.9.57, September 26, 1957 / 26.9.57, October 1, 1957 / 1.10.57, October 6, 1957 / 6.10.57, December 22, 1957 / 22.12.57; **1958**: February 16, 1958 / 16.2.58, April 10, 1958 / 10.4.58, July 29, 1958 / 29.7.58, October 5, 1958 / 5.10.58, October 12, 1958 / 12.10.58, October 19, 1958 / 19.10.58; **1959**: February 8, 1959 / 8.2.59, February 9, 1959 / 9.2.59, July 29 / 29.7, August 4, 1959 / 4.8.59, August 7, 1959: From Upsala / 7.8.59: Från Upsala, August 9, 1959 / 9.8.59, Summers / Somrar, Far Away / Fjärran, Hudson Valley, September 13, 1959 / 13.9.59, October 25, 1959 / 25.10.59, November 1, 1959 / 1.11.59; **1960**: *Easter 1960* / *Påsk 1960*, *Christmas Eve 1960* / *Julafton 1960*, November 26, 1960 / 26 november 1960, December 2, 1960 / 2 december 1960, December 3, 1960 / 3 december 1960; **1961**: February 13 - March 13, 1961 / 13 februari - 13 mars 1961, *Maundy Thursday 1961* / *Skärtorsdag 1961*, *Whitsunday 1961* / *Pingstdagen 1961*, July 7, 60 - *Spring 61* / 7 juli 60 - *våren 61*, June 8, 61 / 8 juni 61, June 11, 61 / 11 juni 61, June 18, 61 / 18 juni 61, July 6, 61 / 6 juli 61, July 19, 61 / 19 juli 61, July 30, 61 / 30 juli 61, Aug. 6, 61 / 6 aug. 61, Aug. 6, 61 / 6 aug., 61, Aug. 24, 61 / 24 aug. 61.

⁶⁶ Foster, 256.

I am being driven forward,
Vidare drivs jag,
into an unknown land.
in i ett okänt land.
The ground becomes harder,⁶⁸
Marken blir hårdare,
the air colder and sharper.
luften mer eggande kall.
Touched by the wind
Rörda av vinden
from my unknown goal
från mitt okända mål
strings are trembling
skälva strängar
in [their] waiting.⁶⁹
i väntan.

Still having questions
Alltjämt frågande
I will arrive,
skall jag vara framme,
where (the tone of) life dies away —⁷⁰
där livet klingar ut —
a clear simple note
en klar enkel ton
in the silence.
i tystnaden.

⁶⁷ Hammarskjöld, *Vägmärken*, 11-12.

⁶⁸ Auden: "The pass grows steeper"

⁶⁹ Auden: "A wind from my unknown goal stirs the strings of expectation"

⁷⁰ Auden: "Still the question: Shall I ever get there? There where life resounds"

example of sacramental, incarnational Christian thought—and action. In the last stanza, death is imminent; he knows that he will soon meet death, and he will face death with open eyes; death will “thrust his rapier into a man who is awake”. Yet, there are second thoughts, pangs of remorse, regrets that he might not have used his time properly and responsibly—the memory of wasted moments.

The second section in *Markings* is 1941-1942: *Middle years / Mellanår*. I have chosen one entry with a reference to God.

God is a comfortable formula⁷⁴ on the bookshelf of life — always at hand but seldom made use of.⁷⁵ In the whitewashed peace⁷⁶ of moments⁷⁷ of birth he is a jubilation and a fresh wind — whose presence memory does not have the strength to bind. But when we are forced to look ourselves in the face — then he rises up above us in terrifying reality, outside the frame of all discussions and “feeling,” stronger than all protecting⁷⁸ forgetfulness.

Gud är en bekväm formel på livets bokhylla — alltid tillhands men sällan brukad. I födelsestundernas rentvagna lugn är han ett jubel och en frisk vind — vars närhet minnet inte orkar binda. Men när vi tvingas att se oss själva öga mot öga — så reser han sig över oss i fruktansvärd verklighet, bortom ramen för all diskussion och ”känsla”, starkare än all skyddande glömska.⁷⁹

Instead of “comfortable formula” (Sw: *bekväm formel*), Auden⁸⁰ translates “useful work of reference”. “Made use of” (Sw: *brukad*) is translated “consulted”. “Peace” (Sw: *lugn*) in the second sentence is not translated at all. Hammarskjöld contrasts moments of birth, when God is present but does not expect anything from us, with times when we have to face ourselves in the consciousness and responsibilities of adulthood. When Auden translates the last two words as “self-defensive forgetfulness” in-

stead of “protecting forgetfulness” (Sw: *skyddande glömska*), he misses the contrastive point, since the point is not that we did not want to pay attention earlier, but rather that we were not able to pay attention as new-borns.

The fourth section from 1950 is entitled *Soon the Night is Drawing Close/Snart stundar natten*.⁸¹ This year is the first in a series of several years, all of which are introduced with the words “Soon the night is drawing close”. These are words from a hymn by Franzén⁸² that Dag Hammarskjöld's mother read every New Year's Eve. “Night” means death.⁸³ It seems as if Hammarskjöld is going through a three-year process of spiritual development.

God does not die on the day when we no longer believe in a personal deity, but we die on the day when our lives are no longer illuminated by the continually reflected splendour of the wonder from sources beyond all reason.

Gud dör inte den dag vi ej längre tro på en personlig gudom, men vi dör den dag livet för oss ej längre genomlysas av det ständigt återskänkta undrets glans från källor bortom allt förnuft.⁸⁴

Auden translates “no longer believe” (Sw: *ej längre tro*) with “cease to believe”. “Continually reflected splendour” (Sw: *ständigt återskänkta (undrets) glans*) is translated with “steady radiance” by Auden. Hammarskjöld points to the fact that God does not depend on us. He remains forever constant, no matter how we relate to him. Hammarskjöld underlines that we, on the contrary, are utterly dependent on him and that we cannot survive without the glory that radiates from him.

The fifth section is without a heading; only the year 1951 is indicated, partly followed by the words from 1950:

“Soon the night is drawing close—”. So yet another year.

⁷⁴ Auden: *a useful work of reference*.

⁷⁵ Auden: *consulted*.

⁷⁶ Auden does not translate *lugn* (*peace*) at all.

⁷⁷ Auden translates in the singular.

⁷⁸ Auden translates *self-protecting* instead *protecting*.

⁷⁹ Hammarskjöld, *Vägmärken*, 18-19.

⁸⁰ Hammarskjöld, *Markings*, 37.

⁸¹ Hammarskjöld, *Vägmärken*, 33.

⁸² Svegfors, 134.

⁸³ Aulén, 9.

⁸⁴ Hammarskjöld, *Vägmärken*, 48.

”Snart stundar natten—”. Alltså ännu ett år.

The sixth section is also without a heading, except the indication of the year 1952. Night is still in focus in the first words as Hammarskjöld comments on his walk through the night:

“Soon the night is drawing close —.” How long the way is. But the time it has already taken, how well have I not needed it in order to learn what the road passes — by.

“Snart stundar natten —.” Vad vägen är lång. Men den tid den redan tagit, hur väl har jag inte behövt den för att lära mig vad den leder — förbi.

Hammarskjöld recognizes his need for the process that he is going through. Auden translates “needed it” (Sw: *behövt den*) with “needed every second of it”. He also changes “I” (Sw: *jag*) to “you”, which considerably changes the sense of the text. Hammarskjöld is attentive to the long-term perspective; he knows that he is about to pass by something.

When we come to the seventh section, indicated by the year 1953, there is a new tone in the voice of Hammarskjöld:

“— soon the night is drawing close.”

To the past: thank you,

To what is coming: yes!

“— snart stundar natten.”

Mot det förgångna: tack,

Till det kommande: ja!

Hammarskjöld says good-bye to the past and yes to what is coming — and it is an emphatic yes! This is roughly three months before he assumes his position as Secretary-General of the United Nations. He is now looking forward. Auden translates “To the past: thank you” (Sw: *Mot det förgångna: tack*) with “For all that has been— Thanks!” Stolpe, Hammarskjöld’s friend, writes about the radical difference that could be noticed in Dag Hammarskjöld after he received—and accepted—the offer to become Secretary-

General of the United Nations.⁸⁵ All the things that he had struggled with in his personal life suddenly disappear. Though, one could perhaps also see the process that Hammarskjöld went through from the beginning of the dark night in 1950 and onwards as a process of preparation for the position of Secretary-General.

In the fifteenth section, indicated by the year 1961, we find the climax of *Markings* under the heading of *Whitsunday 1961 / Pingstdagen 1961*:

I do not know who — or what — asked the question. I do not know when it was asked. I do not remember answering. But once I answered yes to someone — or something. From that moment derives the certainty that existence is meaningful and that my life, therefore, in subjection, has a goal. From that moment I have known what it is “not to look back”, and “not to worry about tomorrow”⁸⁶. . . On the continuous road I learnt, step-by-step, word-by-word, that behind every clause⁸⁷ by the hero of the gospels stands one man and one man’s experience. Also behind the prayer that the cup might pass from him and the promise to empty it. Also behind every word on the cross.⁸⁸

Jag vet ej vem — eller vad — som ställde frågan. Jag vet ej när den ställdes. Jag minns ej att jag svarade. Men en gång svarade jag ja till någon — eller något. Från den stunden härrör vissheten att tillvaron är meningsfylld och att mit liv därför, i underkastelse, har ett mål. Från den stunden har jag vetat vad det är att ”icke se sig tillbaka”, att ”icke bekymra sig för morgondagen” På den fortsatta vägen lärde jag, steg för steg, ord för ord, att bakom var sats av evangeliets hjälte står en människa och en mans erfarenhet. Också bakom bönen att kalken måtte gå från honom och löftet att tömma den. Också bakom vart ord på korset.⁸⁹

It is a passage packed with biblical references and allusions. Hammarskjöld notes that he once answered yes to somebody—Jesus, we can tell from the context. The vagueness of this state-

⁸⁵ Sven Stolpe, *Profeter och diktare: Från Erik Gustaf Geijer till Dag Hammarskjöld* (Stockholm: Verbum, 1966), 307.

⁸⁶ Auden: ‘to take no thought for the morrow’

⁸⁷ Auden: *saying*.

⁸⁸ Auden: *from the Cross*.

⁸⁹ Hammarskjöld, *Vägmärken*, 165.

ment has been debated and discussed. Van Dusen has suggested that Hammarskjöld does not remember when he said yes, and that this is the reason why he is vague.⁹⁰ Aulén has a more nuanced suggestion. Hammarskjöld simply does not know when in the long process of approaching God he actually said his yes. Aulén: "He could indeed not determine the exact time of his decisive yes."⁹¹ He probably said his yes several times. Hammarskjöld asserts that from the moment that he said yes, his life has been meaningful, with a clearly definable goal. His life after his "yes" is a life "in subjection" (Sw: *i underkastelse*) to whom he said his "yes". Considering that Hammarskjöld speaks about Jesus and the gospels the quotations "*not to look back* [italics in original]" (Sw: *icke se sig tillbaka*) and "*not to worry about tomorrow* [italics in original]" (Sw: *icke bekymra sig för morgondagen*) likely refer to Jesus' words in Luke 9:62: "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God" and in Matthew 6:34a: "So then, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself." In terms of following Christ, Hammarskjöld refers not only to his initial "yes" to Christ but also to completing what he perceived as his mission in life. In this process he identifies with Jesus' agonizing hours of decision-making in Gethsemane. He identifies with Jesus, "the hero of the gospels", the "one" man that stands behind every word in the gospel and on the cross. Auden translates "On the con-

tinuous road" (Sw: *På den fortsatta vägen*) with "As I continued along the Way". Auden capitalizes "Way", possibly to make reference to Jesus, or perhaps to oust Jesus from the context, for he then omits entirely the words "by the hero of the gospels" (Sw: *av evangeliets hjälte*) and by so doing he removes Christ from the center of attention.

Concluding remarks

As demonstrated even in this brief analysis, W.H. Auden's introduction to and translation of *Markings* into English are misleading and flawed. Auden's introduction shows a lack of understanding both of Hammarskjöld as a person and the incarnational Christian spirituality of Hammarskjöld. Auden's translational procedures as well as his habit of letting his personal life be reflected in his publications resulted in a misrepresentation both of Hammarskjöld as a person and of *Markings*, which Hammarskjöld had intended as his spiritual portrait for the posterity.

In 2013 it was fifty years since the Swedish original of *Markings* was published and this year, 2014, it is fifty years since Auden's translation was published. Hopefully a better translation with a new, fuller introduction—especially in view of all the new evidence that since then has become available—will be produced to replace Auden's edition.

Summary

After the tragic death of UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld in 1961 his personal notes, *Vägmärken*, were translated into English and published in 1964 under the title *Markings*. The world was surprised that Hammarskjöld apparently had been a devout Christian. This article, seeking to present a spiritual portrait of Hammarskjöld on the basis of a fresh reading of the Swedish original and other material on and by Hammarskjöld, argues that W.H. Auden's introduction to and translation of *Markings* has presented to the world a skewed picture of Dag Hammarskjöld and his inner world. Auden's foreword demonstrates a lack of understanding both of Hammarskjöld as a person and the incarnational Christian spirituality of Hammarskjöld. Auden's flawed translational procedures as well as his habit of letting his personal life be reflected in his publications resulted in a misrepresentation both of Hammarskjöld as a person and of *Markings*, which Hammarskjöld had intended as his spiritual portrait for the posterity. In 2014, it is now fifty years since the publication of Auden's translation of *Markings*. The shortcomings of Auden's translation and introduction signal the need for a new translation and a new, fuller and more insightful introduction that takes into account all the new evidence that has become available in the 50 years that have gone by since the publication of *Markings*.

⁹⁰ Henry P. Van Dusen, *Dag Hammarskjöld: The Statesman*, 100.

⁹¹ Aulén, 10.