

DEATH PENALTY, EXECUTION AND LITURGY

A PERSPECTIVE FROM SWEDEN AND NORTH EUROPE (18th AND 19th CENTURIES)

Introduction

An execution, the legal killing of a human being, was not long ago something observed by and affecting many. To get a desired effect it could be organised in many ways, but if we look to many parts of Europe, we find a system — we might call it a ritual system — emerging from state and church. It is continuously changing, growing and declining, but still a coherent whole.

The starting point, however, is the execution of capital sentences and the common characters we can find in many national and local practices at and around it and the condemned.

Although knowledge of these practices in Sweden forms a background, this study seeks to grasp a wider area. Closest is the rest of Europe's northern, predominantly Lutheran, part, but much material is also collected further to the south and west, mostly from western Europe north of the Alps and the Pyrenees. The method could with some justification be called global as no particular milieu is studied in its totality and a comparative point of view is used.

This is also a study of liturgy, but liturgy understood in a rather broad sense. In most churches liturgy is largely governed by fixed rituals. Liturgical research however has increasingly focused on the actual services, and has in that process found how limited a strict study of the text is.¹ When it comes to the services related to the condemned and the execution it is also natural to emphasise them as they took place as they often deviated from regulations and rubrics. Thus, this study tries to find and analyse traces of the

¹ Cf for instance Sven-Erik PERNLER, Förord in: Sven HELANDER, Sven-Erik PERNLER, Anders PILTZ och Bengt STOLT, *Mässa i medeltida socken: en studie-bok*, Skellefteå, 1993. p. 10 sq; Christer PAHLMBLAD, *Mässa på svenska. Den reformatoriska mässan i Sverige mot den senmedeltida bakgrunden*, Lund, 1998, p. 12 sqq.