

# Mediator of Modernity: Anders Svedberg as a link between the elite and the peasantry and between tradition and modernity

Th. Dr. Jakob Dahlbacka

Department of Church history, Faculty of Arts, Psychology and Theology,  
Åbo Akademi University, Turku, Finland

[jakob.dahlbacka@abo.fi](mailto:jakob.dahlbacka@abo.fi)

Orcid:

## Abstract

Modernity as a historical category often implicitly suggests a movement – a progression – from the old and antiquated to the new and improved (Wagner 2012, 28). It is seen as the opposite of tradition in a linear continuity where the former breaks with the latter. Hence, while modernity is placed on a par with innovation and progression, traditionalism serves as its “Other”, lacking innovation and opposing change (Mikkola 2009, 39–40).

In the Finnish case, this has manifested itself, for instance, in a more or less pervasive and vigorous belief that modernisation processes spread from above – from urban to rural areas, and from higher to lower estates – and that the changes they lead to were welcomed instantly by all members of society (Stark 2006: 13–16).

Sometimes, in what seems to be an attempt to widen this view, the perspective “from below” has been emphasised to highlight, for instance, the role of the peasantry in carrying through, or at least rendering possible societal changes.

However, as Stark – referring to Giddens – points out (Stark 2006, 14; Giddens 1994, 59–60), it would perhaps be most accurate to describe modernity and modernisation as the result of dialogue between different groups of people. It is also the point made in this article. Under scrutiny is a man called Anders Svedberg (1832–1889), who was born and lived all his life in Munsala – a small town in Ostrobothnia, Finland. His lifetime coincided with the

modernisation and national awakening of Finland, and since he worked as a teacher, a journalist, and a member of the Diet, his lifework to a large extent supported these tendencies.

As will be shown, Svedberg can be said to have belonged neither to the upper class nor the peasantry. Rather, he can be regarded as an intermediary in the dialogue between these two layers of society. This dialogue – facilitated by Svedberg – eventually contributed to the modernisation of the Ostrobothnian peasantry; thus extending the frontiers of modernity.

Keywords: Modernity, Anders Svedberg, Uses of history, Weak and Strong links.