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Talking in private – and keeping it private: Protecting conversations from exposure in Swedish Pietism investigations, 1723–1728

Johannes Ljungberg

From private talk to public investigation

At a wedding reception in Stockholm, in June 1723, a clergyman and a state secretary began to argue about the translation of the recent edition of the Swedish bible, which dated from 1703.¹ A series of judicial documents about their conversation, recorded in a royal commission from the following year, provides us with more details about the issues at stake.² The documents also inform us as to why their conversation would be reported to and discussed within the context of a state commission. First, one of the parties, the clergyman Jonas Alroth, referred to this specific dialogue as a clear example of how the other party, the state secretary Elias von Wolker (1660–1733), had been talking ‘against the pure doctrine’.³ Secondly, Wolker accused Alroth of ‘shouting out’ a distorted version of their conversation ‘from a public pulpit’.⁴ The further investigation revealed that Alroth had indeed mentioned the conversation with Wolker in one of his sermons, citing it as an alarming example of how Pietist ideas were circulating in the Swedish capital. As one of the first townsmen in Stockholm who had opened up his home for spiritual gatherings inspired by German Pietists, Wolker stated that the clergyman, out of aversion for such spiritual practices, exaggerated what he had heard Wolker say at the wedding reception. Both accusations were examined carefully by the seven appointed committee members, comprising three public officials and four clergymen, of whom two sympathized with Pietism while the other two were openly critical of Pietism.⁵

This example illustrates how specific face-to-face conversations were raised as topics of discussion and given significance in the context of one of the three royal commissions set up to investigate so-called ‘Pietist activities’ in Sweden between 1723 and 1728. These commissions functioned in Swedish political culture as a tool for communication between state and subject. By talking to a commission, the people concerned had an opportunity to communicate directly to representatives of the state.⁶ The first two commissions targeted Pietist activities in cities of a rather different

character: urban Stockholm and Umeå, with an almost rural character. These two cities had become hotspots for Pietist activity during the first two decades of the eighteenth century. The third commission investigated the circle around a particular minister in Stockholm, Erik Tollstadius (1693–1759). Apart from these royal commissions, conflicts related to Pietism were handled in one of Stockholm's lower city courts (*Stockholms norra kämnärsrätt*), in the ecclesiastical consistories of the concerned dioceses, in the deliberations at the *riksdag* and in censorship cases at the royal chancellery. The records of these investigations amount to an extensive documentation consisting of thousands of handwritten pages, kept in the National Archive, Stockholm.⁷ The investigations were not solely directed against suspected sympathizers of Pietism, but also against their fervent opponents who channelled their criticism in their sermons, literature and social interactions.⁸

In this article, sources from the Swedish Pietism investigations are used to illustrate the different ways in which private conversations were protected from public exposure and thereby expressed what we may understand as claims of privacy. 'Conversations' here are understood in a general sense, in line with the first definition provided by the Cambridge online dictionary: '[a] talk between two or more people in which thoughts, feelings, and ideas are expressed, questions are asked and answered, or news and information is exchanged.'⁹ The protection of an individual's right to conduct interpersonal exchanges free from outside intervention is a key element in several contemporary laws and theories about privacy. A recurring point of reference is Alan Westin's magistral book *Privacy and Freedom* (1967), in which four types of privacy are stipulated: solitude, intimacy, anonymity and reserve. Among these types, intimacy includes the right to share confidential communication with selected others.¹⁰ The issue of protecting communication in terms of privacy has later been developed by scholars within information science, i.e. Helen Nissenbaum, who has successfully influenced various privacy policies with her concept of 'contextual integrity', which provides a formal language for evaluating privacy matters by taking into account the parties and the principles of transmission in any specific case of information flow.¹¹ Such a terminology was not yet available to people of eighteenth-century Europe, at least not as a right to invoke when defending private life.¹² However, this article will demonstrate the ways in which conversations were protected by looking at how individuals used language that explicitly referred to the 'private'. Moreover, I will argue that we can detect further arguments in favour of the protection of interpersonal exchanges by observing the social and spatial demarcations in the stories told to the investigations. This approach is inspired by research on the private and the public in the early modern period, which argues that these entities can hardly be studied as different spheres, but should rather be viewed as the products of spatial practices and social interaction.¹³ The examples used here consist of specific conversations that were caught up in the investigative processes of the authorities, and were subsequently at risk of public exposure. Although it is not surprising that the accused persons defended themselves, their motivations for so doing can offer us an understanding of the circumstances under which conversations would be perceived as private matters, thus pertinent to discuss as potential notions of privacy.

There are good reasons to choose the Swedish Pietism investigations as a case study by which to explore the protection of conversations as private. To begin with, these sources are rich with various terminological references to the private. Both the adjective '*privat*' (private) and the adverb '*privatim*' (privately), spelled out in a Latinized form, recur throughout the material. These terms lead us towards the consideration of three issues, the first of which comprised the gatherings held in private houses that were referred to as '*privata conventicula*'.¹⁴ The emergence of such meetings, bringing together men and women across household hierarchies to pray, sing and discuss the Sunday sermon, constituted a new element in the religious landscape of the time. Moreover, state authorities considered such activities a matter of spatial disorder.¹⁵ Prior to 1700, religious activities designated as 'private' comprised either private devotion, or religious services undertaken in noblemen's private chapels or non-Lutheran foreigners' houses.¹⁶ Second, the investigations worked on the suspicion that Pietist ministers expressed something different in their 'private teaching' from what they proclaimed in their public sermons delivered from the pulpit.¹⁷ This is, for example, illustrated by a document handed to the commission by several colleagues of Tollstadius, which demanded that he reject the 'heresies' he was accused of 'in his parish, *publice* and *privatim*, in conversations and in the company of others, especially the erring people'.¹⁸ Third, anxieties were expressed that the gatherings would risk generating supposedly dangerous 'private interpretations' of Bible verses.¹⁹ The background was that Lutheran orthodox theologians generally criticized Pietists for making their private piety the centre of faith, instead of the clergy's public teaching. This criticism was, for example, presented by the Gießen theologian Philip Ludwig Hanneken (1637–1706).²⁰ Hanneken's pamphlet against Pietism was translated into Swedish and printed in 1723, next to an authoritative text by Martin Luther about 'Winckel-Predikanten'.²¹ The commissions' worries about private meetings, teaching and interpretations each articulated a threat that was clothed in the terminology of the 'private'. A significant part of the threatening aura around Pietist activities came from the fact they took place beyond the pale of public places, or outside of official channels of communication.

The wide usage of the word 'private' in the context of the Pietism investigations is especially remarkable considering that the dictionaries in the Swedish language of the time did not yet include this term. Archbishop Haquin Spegel's dictionary from 1712 contained no entries at all with the root *priv-*, while clergyman Jesper Swedberg's *Swensk ordabok* from 1716 contained only one word, and that was *privet*, meaning latrine.²² Interestingly, both Spegel and Swedberg were by that time already significantly involved in the conflicts over Pietism – i.e. those conflicts in which the term 'private' acquired significance. Only one year after his dictionary was published, Spegel issued the pamphlet 'Short but mature thoughts about *privatis conventiculis*' (1713) in which he criticized the Pietist practice of gathering in private.²³ This pamphlet was followed by a steady stream of anti-Pietist literature condemning the concept of 'private conventicles', a smear word for the pious gatherings. Swedberg adopted a more moderate approach than Spegel. He personally visited the earlier mentioned Wolker's weekly gathering while he was attending the *riksdag* in 1723. In the deliberations of the clerical estate, he praised the participants for their piety, but complained about their lack of hierarchical order.²⁴ The contrast between the absence of references to the

private in the dictionaries of the 1710s and the wide use of this word in the Pietism conflicts of the 1720s indicates a shift towards the explicit use of language that referred to the private. This potential linguistic shift calls for a closer examination, especially since these conflicts predate the establishment in Sweden of what international research generally points to as the catalyzing institutions and arenas for new ways of referring to the private, such as coffee houses, a periodical press and political party struggles, all of which first developed in Stockholm only in the 1730s.²⁵

Besides the terminological scope, the present focus on conversations aims to add nuance to a widely adopted view whereby early modern society is thought to lack privacy in its social practices of communication. This is, for example, demonstrated by the literary historian Patricia Meyer Spacks in her monograph *Privacy: Concealing the Eighteenth-Century Self* (2003), in which it is suggested that representations of conversations in eighteenth-century literature 'constituted a mode of public display', whereas in the nineteenth century, they 'clearly belonged to the sphere of a private relationship'.²⁶ Indeed, this normative shift observed in fictional worlds echoes the explicit argument made for the very first introduction of legal right to privacy in Samuel D. Warren's and Louis Brandeis' paradigmatic article from 1890, which concerned the right to be protected from exposure in the boulevard press.²⁷ For what concerns the other side of the shift, research within cultural history has, since the 1970s and following in the wake of the *annaliste* historian Philippe Ariès, depicted early modern societies as existing in a state of permanent publicity, exemplified with how intimate episodes such as baths and deaths took place in public, in sight of others.²⁸ Furthermore, scholars have pointed to the fact that punishments related to speech offences were frequently delivered not only for blasphemy, swearing and cursing, but also for gossip, slander and defamation.²⁹ Similarly, a steady stream of Nordic research from the 1990s has depicted early modern society as one with no private spheres, nor with spaces for private actions free from possible social repercussions; instead, it has been argued that any such spaces served as a forum for the public protection of personal honour.³⁰ Indeed, in the course of the eighteenth century, Scandinavian courts handled more cases about defamation than cases concerning physical violence.³¹ This understanding of an apparent permanent publicity has led researchers to suggest that information in this culture could hardly be defended as private once it was formulated aloud. It has been suggested in international research that 'open' and 'hidden', and other terms signifying notions of visibility or transparency, correspond to contemporary notions of the public and the private.³² With this background, it is understandable that these social conditions acted as an impetus for the stricter codification of conversations. Often inspired by Norbert Elias's thesis on the civilizing process in early modern Europe, several studies have discussed how handbooks regarding etiquette rules, conversation topics and sophisticated formulations responded to the pitfalls of oral exchange; this development subsequently raised barriers between a staged, superficial and hypocritical public appearance, and a more relaxing and permissive private environment for social life.³³ The role played by private circles as a temporary refuge from this dangerous public scene has been widely noted by scholars.³⁴

However, even though communication in early modern society in general seems to have been deeply affected by an extensive notion of publicity, this does not mean

that people had no need to talk in private. The issue at stake in this article centres precisely on how it was possible to protect conversations from public exposure. Using eighteenth-century sources to localize conversations considered as private is typically a complex pursuit of subtle references. Luckily, as often is the case with Scandinavian court records of the time, the encounter between subject and authorities is relatively well preserved in the Pietism investigations, including the defence of the person accused.³⁵ It could rightly be questioned to what extent the stories told in judicial investigations such as these were adapted to certain models of 'forensic rhetoric'. However, this is beside the core question, which is: how were conversations of various kinds examined, classified and defended by conceptual, social and spatial demarcations?

Within the field of cultural history, stories noted in court records have often served the purpose to unveil perceptions of the social practices that were object for investigation.³⁶ Historians who have researched privacy in historical and contemporary societies, such as Barrington Moore Jr and David Vincent, have argued that intrusions into people's lives form an excellent starting point for researching claims of privacy, since such an intervention may typically trigger the process of explaining and protecting any given situation as a private matter.³⁷ Similarly, the legal scholar Daniel J. Solove has argued that 'privacy should be conceptualized from the bottom up rather than the top down, from particular contexts rather than in the abstract'.³⁸ With the aim to formulate a functional approach to study privacy across cultural borders, Solove has postulated that 'privacy invasion interferes with the integrity of certain activities and even destroys or inhibits some activities', encouraging researchers to map out 'specific types of disruption'.³⁹

In accordance with Solove's approach, I shall present a number of examples from the various Pietism investigations in which exposure of a private conversation was at stake. The examples display three different situations, along with their respective dynamics. The first category constitutes the most formalized context: the confidential talk between clergyman and layman, as stipulated in the Church Law of 1686. The second group of examples demonstrates how the terminology of 'private' and 'public' could be used to justify the denunciation of private talks before public investigations, including objections against such denunciations in the first place.⁴⁰ Finally, in the third section, two examples serve to illustrate different ways of protecting less formal conversations from being exposed, without referring to the as yet unavailable terminology of the right to privacy. Together, these three categories provide indications about how publicly exposed conversations were discussed within judicial processes during a time in Swedish history when the terminology referring to the private was more frequently adopted. Before moving on to those examples, however, the emergence of Pietism in eighteenth-century Scandinavia needs to be more fully discussed.

Pietism and the private

What does it mean to search for notions of private conversations in the context of Pietism? The word 'Pietist' was first formulated to label participants of the so-called '*collegia pietatis*', which were arranged in private houses after churchgoing in 1670s Frankfurt by the Lutheran minister Jacob Philip Spener (1635–1705). Similar social

practices were performed in England and the Netherlands, in some cases without the presence of the local clergyman. In addition to the organizational form, Spener initiated a spiritual reform programme focusing on moral improvement for individual, state and church.⁴¹ In the 1680s, the *collegia pietatis* and the reform program spread to Saxony, particularly to the network around August Hermann Francke (1663–1727) in Halle. A first major conflict with Lutheran orthodox theologians broke out in Leipzig in 1689–1690, in which the term ‘*Pietistery*’ appeared as a mere accusation of heresy.⁴²

Pietist ideas and practices reached Scandinavia in several ways. Recurring gatherings modelled on the Pietist concept of *collegia pietatis* emerged in Copenhagen from 1701 and in Stockholm from at least 1702. Both Danish and Swedish authorities reacted by prohibiting people from taking part in these meetings.⁴³ Spener’s and Francke’s books were widely accessible, and students staying at northern German universities forged personal bonds with Pietist sympathizers. One of these students was Nils Grubb (1681–1724), a vicar in Umeå by the time of the commission’s investigation. During the Great Nordic War (1700–1721), several officers and soldiers in the Swedish army took an interest in Pietist ideas, and exchanged correspondence with Francke and his personal circle in Halle.⁴⁴ On the initiative of the superintendent in Swedish Pomerania, Johan Friedrich Mayer (1650–1712), ‘secret conventicles’ were forbidden by a royal letter in 1694, a prohibition that was repeated in 1713 and 1721.⁴⁵

The scepticism towards Pietism was rooted in a combination of theology and particular visions of the proper social order. A central issue for the investigations was to discover what was taught during the sessions, by whom and to whom. Lutheran household ideology allowed for the housefather to gather his household at a *husandakt* (household prayer), but the Pietist version of this legitimate practice was considered to be a complicated matter in that both women and servants from various households tended to be present, and because they tended to have speaking roles that were normally reserved for the minister or the housefather.⁴⁶ Although Spener and Francke supported the idea of social hierarchies, their emphasis on the Lutheran doctrine of a priesthood of all believers, as well as a focus on the morals of everyday life instead of dogmatic matters, permitted a broader spectrum of people to speak up.⁴⁷ Compared to the refined conversations in noble circles, Pietist gatherings were a less formalized context. Leading Pietists condemned the focus on scholarly dispute, and called instead for a more upright and thorough exchange of ideas.⁴⁸ Furthermore, the early Swedish Pietist Olof Ekman (1639–1713), whose main book was widely disseminated and well known in Pietist circles, stressed that confession could be made to a Christian layperson, and that all Christians should admonish and instruct each other.⁴⁹ This principle practically challenged the public office of the local clergyman. As we shall see, it also affected the perception of private conversations.

In contrast to public services in church buildings, the Pietist gatherings took place in private.⁵⁰ As stated in one of the commissions, the congregation was drawn ‘out of the church for explanation in private houses, in the name of brotherly love.’⁵¹ Accordingly, the Pietist circles have often been depicted as a parallel or alternative sociability to other expanding arenas that were flourishing in a private context during the eighteenth century, such as clubs, societies and coffee houses. They have also been depicted as a parallel to other spiritualities, such as similar movements in the Netherlands and

England, or the Jansenist branch of the Catholic Church.⁵² On a theoretical level, and from a perspective of modernization, Pietist gatherings have been integrated into Jürgen Habermas's famous theory about how public spheres grew out of private spaces, and thus constituted a new type of public space.⁵³ In addition to the forms of sociability, there are strong ties between the Pietists and the expanding book market. A large number of the new book titles in early eighteenth-century Sweden were either Pietist literature, or comprised of books typically read by Pietists.⁵⁴

It is not, however, the spiritual dimensions, nor practices of sociability, that make conflicts over Pietism a valuable example for studying notions of private conversation as understood in this article, or at least not directly. Rather than connecting the Pietist movement to processes of modernization à la Habermas, the ambition of this article is to follow the dynamics of how private conversations were under threat by public exposure, and to try to understand the arguments individuals made in attempts to keep those conversations private, or to expose private talks to a public investigation.

Following the frameworks of the Church Law

The confidential talk between clergyman and layman was a formally defined category of conversation that should be kept private. Even though the medieval concept of private confession was not considered a sacrament according to Lutheran doctrine, and the equivalent ritual was instead performed collectively and in public (*allmänt skriftermål*), confidential conversations between a priest and a layman were nevertheless still encouraged in Sweden's Church Law of 1686, especially in cases where someone had committed an 'evident and publicly known sin' (*'uppenbar och allom witterlig synd'*).⁵⁵ In such cases, the law stipulated that the clergyman should try to 'correct' the sinner 'in seclusion' (*uti enslighet*)⁵⁶ as a first step towards reconciliation. If that did not have the desired effect, the law then prescribed that he should talk to the person 'accompanied by two or three pious and wise men of the parish'.⁵⁷ As a final step, the clergyman was required to perform a so-called 'public correction': this meant to spell out a ban from the pulpit, and thereby ritually remove the person from the congregation.⁵⁸ This process, which was rooted in the monastic tradition and formulated already in Benedict's rule (516), illustrates both the importance of keeping secluded talks private, and the act of shaming a recalcitrant individual in public.⁵⁹ While the shame punishment served as a deterrent for others, the efforts to avoid making a public scene, as long as it was not publicly known, were motivated by the desire to avoid scandal (*scandalum*) or uproar (*förargelse*), which were terms denoting the social risks involved in making knowledge of the sin public.⁶⁰ The Stockholm commission of 1723 expressed this principle, for example, when the committee member Herman Schröder (1676–1744) stated in a memorandum that the chances were far better to correct someone if the teacher 'speaks with such souls' rather than 'publicly thunders' against them.⁶¹

The instruction that it was preferable to talk with sinners in seclusion provided a useful tool to those clergymen who were questioned by the commissions. By referring to this instruction, some of them effectively claimed that previous conversations should be kept private. The vicar Nils Grubb, who was the main target of the Umeå commission

in 1723, faced accusations of not having done enough to stop the illegitimate gatherings in his parish. Although Grubb in general defended the Pietist activities in Umeå, he nevertheless agreed that some of the gatherings could be considered as a form of misbehaviour. However, in his defence regarding those cases, he stated that he 'had not neglected to punish such things during the sermons, if the *Gradus admonitionis* [degree of admonition] is observed',⁶² with explicit reference to the paragraph in the 1686 Church Law, as explained above. Later in the same interrogation, he also stressed that he had abstained from 'public correction' (*offentlig correction*) since that would have caused uproar (*förargelse*).⁶³ This line of reasoning was accepted by the commission, and when the affair was discussed in the Council of the Realm, it was simply declared that he had performed his pastoral duties well.⁶⁴

A similar pattern can also be detected when critics of Pietism were questioned. No fewer than five clergymen in Stockholm were called to the commission in the autumn of 1723 to clarify why they had preached publicly against Pietism and, explicitly or implicitly, identified certain individuals as Pietists. They were each requested to present evidence to support their accusations.⁶⁵ More precisely, the commission wanted to know which specific gatherings they had referred to, and requested the names of the people involved. But all of the five clergymen focused on justifying why they could not do this, probably because giving names would have practically meant making accusations, which was very risky in a society that punished defamation severely. In this situation, the court chaplain Nils Barchius (1676–1733), who was called to justify a sermon he had delivered two years earlier, presented the most convincing explanation. He started by stating that the gatherings in question were no longer held, and were therefore not worthy of mention. Then followed his key argument: his office as a clergyman prescribed that a person who, on his instruction, had been led in on 'the right path' should not be reported, since 'such things concern the conscience'.⁶⁶ Barchius thus referred to his official duty as a minister and the secluded or confidential – i.e. non-public – character of the conversation in question. With this argument, Barchius managed to convince the commission that the situation had changed during the two intervening years between his sermon and the interrogation. An external lawyer from the Royal Court of Appeal (*Justitierevisionen*) commented on this particular case, and confirmed that those who had stopped committing sins because of Barchius's instructions should not be denounced by him. On the other hand, Wester stated that if these people had not been successfully 'corrected ... [then this fact] must not be silenced even though some years have passed'.⁶⁷ This claim corresponded to what the Church Law prescribed for 'secret confession' (*secret skriftermål*): when the sin is so 'secret' (*hemlig*) that only God and the sinner are aware of it, then it should remain secret.⁶⁸ Barchius's claim was not discussed any further, which is understandable given that clergymen possessed a certain right to judge in disciplinary matters, including in cases concerning heresy.⁶⁹ Indeed, the silence over the concrete proceedings in specific disciplinary matters has been noted by previous scholars.⁷⁰

The strength of Barchius's reference to the privileged position of secluded talk in his capacity as a clergyman emerges clearly when one considers the fact that none of his four colleagues who were also interrogated by the commission over the same matter ended up escaping criticism, even though they presented apparently reasonable

arguments in their defence. A second minister, Johannes Cröll, referred to the various letters and edicts that had warned against Pietism, and declared that it was his official duty to warn his congregation of such things.⁷¹ A third minister, Jonas Alroth, who had the exchange with Wolker at the wedding, was defended by his vicar who stated that Alroth had not said anything that was more ‘intolerable’ than what other clergymen had uttered without further notice.⁷² A fourth minister, Jonas Stricker, tried to convince the consistory about his knowledge of the Pietist ‘heresy’; he recounted that he had devoted much time to his assiduous studies in the matter, including attending lectures as a student in Uppsala and extensive discussions with a Pietist in Königsberg.⁷³ However, none of these explanations were sufficient for the commission; in the concluding text of the protocol, they were all condemned by name for having ‘publicly shouted out [denounced] innocent people as heretics.’⁷⁴ Barchius’s name, however, was not included in the commission’s condemnation. His explanation had obviously convinced the commission. To refer to secluded talk was evidentially superior to other arguments advanced to justify anti-Pietist utterings from the public pulpit.

These different examples demonstrate how clergymen, with different attitudes to Pietism, could refer successfully to the roles and responsibilities of their office to justify keeping conversations private – or to justify making them public. On the one hand, this indicates the relationship between one’s ability to declare a conversation as private and one’s position within a social hierarchy. To have confidential conversations formed part of the clergyman’s public office, but as Charlotte Christensen-Nugues shows in her contribution to this volume, housefathers were likewise encouraged to admonish privately their servants who swore.⁷⁵ On the other hand, the sources also indicate that this privilege came with certain expectations. For example, Umeå’s local judge (*häradsbörjding*), Marcus Bostadius (1662–1728), accused the local vicar Grubb of having told the commission that he (Bostadius) had not treated his daughter well, and had forced her into marriage. He phrased his complaint by stating that such an accusation would be difficult even to hear from ‘a private person ... in a private room’, but far more difficult to hear ‘from one’s own soul carer in front of a royal commission.’⁷⁶ This comment suggests that secluded talk not only provided a useful tool for clergymen when attempting to keep conversations private, but that they also had a responsibility to keep those conversations private in the first place.

Accessing a fluid terminology

While the references to confidential talk as stipulated in the 1686 Church Law were not questioned, all other efforts to keep private conversations from being repeated to the court elicited greater discussion and numerous counterclaims. This is, first and foremost, reflected in the disputes over whether the proceedings should be held *privatim* or *publice*. These were judicial distinctions, but they also reflected the different levels of private and public correction as mentioned in the Church Law, ranging from secluded confession to public shaming. The conflict involving the clergyman Erik Tollstadius illustrates well the issue of conflicting claims about the appropriateness

of these different levels. Tollstadius was accused of heretical teaching in a series of interrogations from the 1720s onwards. His case was first handled by the consistory of Stockholm in 1722. The preserved protocol presents the situation by stating that the members of the consistory were ready to 'confer with him as clerical brothers, in full confidentiality'. Tollstadius replied that the consistory should assure that a 'brotherly conference' was held '*privatim*, and not *publice in Consistorio*'.⁷⁷ The chairman of the consistory meant, however, that they could speak '*publice* as well as *privatim*'.⁷⁸ The matter came to an end, this time, when Tollstadius successfully kept his mouth shut concerning the deviant doctrines of which he was accused of teaching.

Five years later, when he was called to the commission that was now set up to investigate both him and his potential adherents, the protocol presents a series of examples in chronological order demonstrating how Tollstadius had been warned first in private, then in public. First, four 'honourable men' (mentioned by name) had 'talked with him *privatim*' against teaching deviant doctrines. A fifth person had also sent a written warning.⁷⁹ After this, Tollstadius was interrogated by the Consistory in 1722.⁸⁰ The protocol counted three public admonitions, two from the consistory and one from the Royal Court of Appeal.⁸¹ Then came the new information: several of Tollstadius's fellow clergymen, who were also known as sympathizers of Pietism, had testified to the commission that their colleague had been teaching heresies.⁸² They told the commission about how they had tried to convince Tollstadius 'private conversations', but without success.⁸³ What is interesting here is not so much what the colleagues perceived of as heresy – to follow up on that would be a totally different matter – but their *modus operandi* to 'correct' Tollstadius, which was in considerable detail by some of them.

Tollstadius's colleague Jonas Hellman offered the most extensive account. He recounted that he had visited Tollstadius several times in his home to speak with him about the deviant doctrines, but had done so for a long time without success. One evening, however, when they were sitting in Tollstadius's chamber discussing the upcoming Sunday sermon, Tollstadius had revealed his 'heretical' opinion.⁸⁴ The description of the secluded and intimate setting in the domestic context stands out when compared to the confidential talks between clergymen and laymen discussed above, where such details were left unspecified. According to Hellman, Tollstadius only reacted angrily to his efforts to discuss the issue with him.⁸⁵ Despite this failure, Hellman did not report his colleague to the consistory until many years later. His reason for so doing was that he had considered his colleague to be in '*statu tentationis*', which means he was in need of pastoral care and direction, rather than judicial procedure. Hellman's attitude had obviously changed by the time he recounted the whole story before the royal commission.⁸⁶

Another intriguing example of how the same distinctions were at play can be found in a censorship case that gained wider notice among the higher clergy, centring on a manuscript that had been placed at the censor's desk at the royal chancellery in 1725, and thereby made public. The case involved the already mentioned ministers Barchius and Schröder. Since both were clergymen, as well as active writers, it was perfectly legitimate for them to read about and to discuss what was considered as heresy or as 'difficult' theological matters. Their different attitudes to Pietism

would, however, lead to conflict. It all started with Barchius letting Schröder read a manuscript that was critical against some of the doctrines of Pietism. Displeased with the reading, Schröder left the manuscript on the censor's desk. The text was consequently criticized during the censoring process. When called upon to defend the text, Barchius claimed that he had handed over the document to Schröder '*privatim*', and not '*publico nomine*', and therefore it should not have been object of investigation in the first place.⁸⁷ Moreover, Barchius stated that it would have been preferable to handle the disagreement by 'private conference', instead of through a 'public deduction'.⁸⁸ Schröder did not object to this distinction, but pointed to the fact that he thought that the text was meant for the censorship office. The morally defensible position was clearly to claim that the other party had made the conflict public, and was therefore responsible for causing it, regardless of the content that lay beneath the conflict. For our present purposes, it is highly significant that both Barchius and Schröder made use of the distinction between private and public discussion. Even though Schröder and Barchius had completely opposite attitudes towards Pietism, both parties counted with the need to have the opportunity to discuss matters in private.⁸⁹

Indeed, Barchius had good reason to expect tactfulness from Schröder. As research on censorship in Sweden has indicated, the person who was tasked with reading (and censoring) a manuscript was sometimes crucial for the outcome of the censorship process, and it was therefore common practice for individuals to steer the entire censorship process by searching for a potential censor.⁹⁰ The existence of this institutional practice implies that Schröder crossed an important line when, according to Barchius, he ceased acting as an informal contact who looked at the manuscript, and instead became a figure instrumental in the publication process of that manuscript. As research on early eighteenth-century printing practices has indicated, the publication process of manuscripts applied similar norms as those concerning oral messages. Therefore, it seems right to state that Schröder's launch of the censorship process constituted a transition from private to public conversation.⁹¹

Both of the above cases demonstrate how the application of terminology aimed at declaring a situation to be 'private' came into play. The way in which Tollstadius was handled followed the prescriptions of the Church Law, beginning with private admonitions and ending with public denunciation. In Hellman's case, this public/private terminology was associated with detailed descriptions of social and spatial demarcations. In both cases, the dividing line between a 'private' discussion and the process of making such a discussion public knowledge seems rather less clear when compared to the examples involving confidential talks as regulated by the Church Law. All persons involved were grasping after a fluid terminology. Because of Hellman, the efforts to 'correct' Tollstadius in private should be considered as warnings prior to the display of his views in public. Schröder also had reason for acting the way he did. Allegedly, he read the manuscript according to the normal publication process of manuscripts delivered for print. On the whole, in what started off as internal ecclesiastical affairs, the actors involved ended up articulating claims that sought to declare certain situations as conceptually 'private'.

Protecting informal conversations

Finally, let us have a closer look at two particularly intriguing efforts to formulate the grounds for protecting specific conversations from public exposure. In contrast to the previous examples, the following cases centre on laymen. The first of these concerns a military officer named Carl Gustaf Österling (1673–1732), one of the men from the Swedish army who had developed a preference for Pietist spirituality during the Great Nordic War. His plea to keep conversations private was formulated as an accusation against Tollstadius. Similar to Hellman, he stated that he had met Tollstadius in his own home, to which he arrived alone, and in this context witnessed him confess twice and ‘from his own mouth’ to the ‘heresies’ of which he was suspected.⁹² In order to bolster his report in which he emphasized that Tollstadius should be considered a public danger, he stated that Tollstadius had wrongly divulged information concerning what people had done in private:

[H]e [Tollstadius] must consider that the errors of weakness that one could commit in *private* under difficult temptations, which in fact do not cause public damage and impending danger, is something totally different. Such errors should not be declared in public; not by a proper Christian, and even less by a proper Teacher, and certainly not in an abominable manner.⁹³

Österling’s distinction reveals something important about the perception of what should rightly be kept private: a person’s sinful nature. As demonstrated above, Hellman had also highlighted that the state of temptation was worthy of protection from public exposure. Österling further specified that Tollstadius denounced people who normally lived a pious life, but who had been led to temptation and committed ‘errors out of weakness.’⁹⁴ Such a moralistic attitude was typical for Pietist spirituality, and something that caused irritation among people.⁹⁵ However, Österling did not criticize this attitude as such, but more precisely the fact that Tollstadius made people’s sins public. Österling’s criticism may also be seen as an expression of the expectations placed upon the clergy in these matters, similar to what we saw in the example of the local judge in Umeå. But most of all, the idea that Tollstadius had denounced the errors that people had committed in private reveals a key element in Christian anthropology: the sinful human nature. Consequently, some conversations ought to be kept private, especially in a society with a high sensitivity for the publicly spoken word. Interestingly, such a perspective brings the condition of the individual under consideration, and broadens our understanding that there may have been an intrinsic value to private conversations, and concerns over private conversations extended beyond the apparent danger of spreading one’s words to others. It indicates some kind of interest for the protection of one’s inner life. Perhaps this reference to normal weakness, dressed in the normative theological language for the time, indicates that there was a cultural understanding that conversations of a more informal kind be kept private.

This hypothesis brings us back to the conversation between Alroth and Wolker at the wedding reception, which opened this article, and which was discussed extensively in the royal commission. On the one hand, that conversation can hardly be described

as one of a totally informal nature. Alroth was a clergyman, Wolker was a well-known sympathizer of Pietist spirituality, and they were speaking about theological issues at a well-attended event. On the other hand, the wedding reception seems to have been a far less formal context than the various efforts taken to admonish Tollstadius. During the commission's interrogation of Wolker, he claimed that he had not expected that his words would be scrutinized in such detail:

Speaking of the accusations, I cannot possibly remember further what was said at the wedding after this long time, than what I have already indicated in my letter to the honorable consistory, as I have not thought much about it since then, as I could not imagine that someone unknown would be so malicious that he would distort and make use of the discussion the way he did.⁹⁶

Wolker's comment is multilayered. As mentioned earlier, he complained both that his counterpart had distorted his words, and that he had repeated them in public. More precisely, Alroth's announcement had been made from the pulpit, i.e. the place where he performed his authority as a clergyman. Additionally, the language in the commission's protocol is far from grammatically coherent – which is perhaps more visible in the Swedish original, making it hard to translate – suggesting that Wolker struggled with formulating his claim. This struggle indicates an absence of a clear terminology that could be used to declare that the conversation had been a private one. Yet it seems that this was precisely what Wolker was trying to say by stating that he could not remember his exact words: his rationale was that he thought it so unlikely that someone would mention such a small chat at a wedding reception beyond that particular context. To be sure, he assured the commission that it did not matter what exactly he had said, since it could not possibly have differed substantially from what he had told them.

How should we interpret Wolker's statement? Was he really surprised that someone would recall his exact words when it concerned the translation of Bible verses, the holiest letters on earth to a Lutheran mind? Did he mean that the conversation was of such a nature that it should not be the object of a public investigation? Did his complaint intimate his own expectations that a clergyman like Alroth should not repeat things that he had heard in private? What we do know is that Alroth eventually lost the case. By the end of the commission's protocol, he was mentioned by name as one of the clergymen who was guilty of identifying Pietists from a public pulpit.⁹⁷

Concluding remarks

Although early modern Scandinavia has often been described as a highly public society, this study has demonstrated various ways in which individuals attempted to protect what we may identify as the private nature of some of their conversations. Terminology that referred to the private was used in various ways, and with different implications. A first way of protecting the private nature of certain conversations was by referring to confidentiality between the parties. Clergymen enjoyed a privileged

ability to declare conversations as private, according to the regulation in the Church Law, but this privilege also came with certain expectations. If a problem had been solved privately, it should be kept private. The exposure of the private conversations that took place between Erik Tollstadius and his colleagues was motivated precisely because of the assumption that the practice of correcting him in private had failed. Thus, they had crossed a conceptual dividing line whereby those conversations were no longer able to be classified and protected as private.

Contrary to contemporary definitions of privacy, the context of the private admonitions discussed here indicates that such conversations were not protected simply because they were a part of private life.⁹⁸ Instead, there were multiple factors underlying the desire to protect private conversations. These included the avoidance of spreading knowledge of sin, the avoidance of causing public shame and the maintenance of private honour. However, one reason for keeping these conversations private that came to the surface in the sources investigated here is especially noteworthy: a specific understanding of the sinful human being who is a victim of temptations. Given that this anthropological notion was widely shared in the culture, it is likely that it resonated more widely amongst people as a good reason for keeping not only disciplinary conversations, but also conversations of more informal nature, private. Indeed, both the practice of talking in private and the tendency to correct private moral were typical for Pietists.

The censorship case displays another way to protect conversations – here in the form of more informal discussions – as private. It shows how two learned clergymen each defended the legitimacy of their private discussion about a handwritten manuscript. The demarcation between private and public conversation was, in this case, clear in the censorship process itself, and in the subsequent publication of the manuscript. The situation has similarities with the case of private discussions between Tollstadius and his colleagues, which were eventually reported to the authorities. Both cases suggest that it was possible to protect conversations as private by describing the situation once the private conversation had crossed certain lines. Additionally, some of the examples discussed above indicate that not all discussions made sense to be made public. On the whole, this seems not too far from what prevails in contemporary theories about the right to have a free exchange, even though this was far from being normative or explicitly and fully articulated in early modern Scandinavia.

To conclude, these various examples demonstrate that it is possible to nuance the widely accepted view of early modern Scandinavian society as a predominantly public one. Admittedly, the examples analysed in this article all display the threat of public exposure. However, as demonstrated here, it is also a fruitful approach to start from the other end and notice various efforts to protect conversations as private. By shifting our perspective, other norms emerge concerning the regulation of confidentiality and of various moments of private exchange between people engaged in formal, informal and intimate conversations, although still related to the social roles between the men of the higher social strata that figure in these examples. Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, this article has demonstrated the possibility to explore how people struggled to keep conversations private, as it became an object of scrutiny afterwards.

Notes

- 1 Research funded by the Danish National Research Foundation (DNRF 138).
- 2 Swedish National Archive (hereafter SNA), Äldre kommitéer (hereafter ÄK) 190, acta, 577–83.
- 3 ‘Som han menar wara stridande emot vår rena Evangeliska lära’, SNA, ÄK 190, acta, 577. Alroth’s years of birth and death are not to be found in the collection of biographies of the Swedish clergy (*herdaminnen*).
- 4 ‘På offentlig predikostohl’, in *ibid.*, 578.
- 5 The civil servants were Olof Nordenstråle (1683–1742), Johan Rosenadler (1664–1743) and David Silvius (1663–1732). The clergymen who sympathized with Pietism were Anders Båld (1679–1751) and Herman Schröder (1676–1744). The clergymen who were openly critical against Pietism were Sven Caméen (1667–1729) and Jöran Nordberg (1677–1744).
- 6 See Lennersand 1999, 31–7.
- 7 SNA, ÄK vol. 189–91.
- 8 Ljungberg 2021.
- 9 Cambridge Dictionary, A1: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/conversation> (visited 9 January 2020).
- 10 Westin 1967, 31–2. For a further discussion of this aspect of privacy, see Inness 1992, 96–112.
- 11 Nissenbaum 2010.
- 12 See the introduction to this volume by Sari Nauman and Helle Vogt.
- 13 Cf. Kilian 1998; Rau 2004.
- 14 Norberg 1982, 509.
- 15 Ljungberg 2017, 79–124.
- 16 See Charlotte Nuges-Christensen’s contribution to this volume, as well as the introduction.
- 17 ‘Frågandes om Magister Tollstadius ej allenast uthi sina predikningar, uthan och som man förmoda will särdeles wid dess *privates* underwisningar sökt, att uthur Gudz Ord grundeligen förelägga dem, som af Dippels skrifter till större eller mindre dehl smitta fått’, SNA, ÄK 191, acta, 108; ‘Hwartill Ulander swarade, det han av prosten Grupp både *publice* och *privatim* lärt, hwad en rätt husfaders plikt är”, in SNA, ÄK 190, protocol, 123.
- 18 ‘Så *publice* som *privatim* i samtal och umgänge med andra, besynnerligen med de willfarande’, SNA, ÄK 191, acta, p.43. See also SNA, ÄK 189, protocol, 123: ‘hwartill Ulander swarade, det han av prosten Grupp både *publice* och *privatim* lärt, hwad en rätt husfaders plikt är’.
- 19 ‘Prosten Wallerius yttrade sig att *scriptura sacra non est private interpretationis*’, *Ibid.*, 120.
- 20 Matthias 2015, 34–5.
- 21 Hanneken 1723.
- 22 See Charlotte Nuges-Christensen’s contribution to this volume.
- 23 Spegel 1713.
- 24 Lenhammar 2000, 53–7; Swedberg 1960.
- 25 Forselius 2015; Ågren 2006; Nilzén 1971.
- 26 Meyer Spacks 2003, 115.
- 27 Warren and Brandeis 1890.

- 28 Ariès 1977, 1986.
- 29 Bardsley 2006; Cressy 2010; Horodowich 2012; Cohen 2012; Malmstedt 2012; Juster 2014.
- 30 Sandmo 1999, 132; Collstedt 2007, 86–8.
- 31 Ylikangas et al. 2000, 79.
- 32 Freise 2004, 19.
- 33 Burke 1993, 95–118, 126–7; Meyer Sparks 2003, 116–23; Fauster 1991; Adam 1997; Horodowich 2008; Snyder 2009; Bishop 2017, 208–20; Arnold 2016, 345–7; Halsey and Slinn 2008. Scudéry 1682 has been a source of inspiration for many studies.
- 34 This distinction connects to Jürgen Habermas's concepts of 'repräsentative Öffentlichkeit' and 'bürgerliche Öffentlichkeit', see Habermas 1990 [1962].
- 35 Österberg and Sandmo 2000, 22–3.
- 36 Cf. Davis 1987, 7–76; Cohen and Cohen 1993, 159–87; Kermode and Walker 1994, 4–5; Lindstedt Cronberg 1997; Hansen 2006.
- 37 Moore jr. 1983, ix; Vincent 2016, viii. See also van der Geest 2018.
- 38 Solove 2008, 9.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 This ties into Pierre Bourdieu's theory of 'officializing strategy', see Bourdieu 1990 [1980], 109.
- 41 Lehmann 2017.
- 42 Wallmann 2005, 22; Mori 2014, 204–10.
- 43 Jakubowski-Tiessen 1995, 446–71; Montgomery 1995, 490–522.
- 44 On the importance of correspondence in Pietist networks, see Gleixner 2014, 448–51, 458–9.
- 45 Lenhammar 2000, 22–31; Ljungberg 2017, 48–55.
- 46 Gleixner 2016, 423–5.
- 47 Van Horn Melton 2001, 300–01; Matthias 2015; Nordbäck 2004.
- 48 Claesson 2015.
- 49 Ibid., 88–90, 108–9.
- 50 Nordbäck 2006, 224.
- 51 'Hwar igenom menigheten skal dragas utur kyrkian in uti private hus til ordets förklaring, under namn af den broderliga kärleken', SNA, ÅK 190, protocol, 119.
- 52 Brecht 1997, 261–73; Gierl 2014, 363–5; Van Horn Melton 2001, 308–9; Van Kley 1996.
- 53 Habermas 1990 [1961]; Van Horn Melton 2001, 315–27.
- 54 Nordstrandh 1951.
- 55 *1686 års kyrkolag*, Kap.10, § I–II; cf. Claesson 2015, 151–5, 224.
- 56 Ibid., § II.
- 57 Ibid.
- 58 Ibid.
- 59 Naess and Österberg 2000, 149. In the section on excommunication in Benedict's rule it is stipulated that disobedient brothers 'should be warned twice privately by the seniors in accord with our Lord's injunction [...] If he does not amend, he must be rebuked publicly in the presence of everyone', *The Rule of St. Benedict*, § xxiii, see Fry 1865.
- 60 Lindberg 1992, 419–42.
- 61 'Om läraren istället för ett sådant publique dundrande wänligen och christeligen tahlte med sådana siälar', SNA, ÅK 190, protocol, 504.
- 62 'Refererar Pastoren det han ei underlätit, at straffa sådant under predikningarna, om *Gradus admonitionis* derwid är observerade', SNA, ÅK 189, protocol, 70–1.

- 63 'Offentel.Corrrection', in *ibid.*, 77. Concerning 'förargelse', see Lindberg 1992, 419–42.
- 64 SNA, K 23:1138, 8–9.
- 65 SNA, ÅK 190, protocol, 350–1, 360–6.
- 66 'Blifwit på rätta vägen ford ... hälst sådant rörer samwetet', *ibid.*, 361.
- 67 'Så woro det en uppenbar förargelse, some ey får ned tystas, för det, at några åhr sedermera skola förflutit', *ibid.*, 361–2.
- 68 *1686 års kyrkolag*, Kap.7, § 2.
- 69 Claesson 2015, 151–72.
- 70 Oja 2000, 58–9.
- 71 SNA, ÅK 190, protocol, 205–6.
- 72 *Ibid.*, acta, 555.
- 73 *Ibid.*, protocol, 250–8.
- 74 'Offentligen utropat oskyldigt folck för kättare och swärmare', *ibid.*, protocol, 821.
- 75 See Charlotte Nugues-Christensen's contribution to this volume.
- 76 'Som för svårt vore av en privat person obevisligen att höra på privat rum, fast mera av sin egen själasörjare inför en kunglig kommission', SNA, ÅK 189, acta, 105–6.
- 77 'Tollstadius tackade för en borderlig *conference*, men som den bör anställas *privatim*, ock icke *publice* i *Consistorio*', SNA, ÅK 191, acta, p.7.
- 78 '*Publice* som *privatim*', *ibid.*, 8.
- 79 '*Privatim* talt med', *ibid.*, 30–6.
- 80 *Ibid.*
- 81 *Ibid.*
- 82 *Ibid.*, 100.
- 83 'I private discourser', *ibid.*, 104.
- 84 *Ibid.*, 102.
- 85 In another publication, I have suggested that the distinction between temptation and malicious intent was considered important for discerning seditious Pietists from people who were expected to be temporarily seduced and thereby soon recover, see Ljungberg 2021.
- 86 'Intolerabel', SNA, ÅK 191, acta, 108. This uttering is taken from the protocol of the Royal Court of Appeal, which was attached to the commission's files.
- 87 SNA, E XII: 30.59, 61.
- 88 *Ibid.*, 27.
- 89 For Schröder's comment, see SNA, E XII: 30, 66.
- 90 Öhrberg 2011, 112–32. A similar distinction between manuscript meant for 'private' usage versus printed book can be found in Jakobsen 2011, 29.
- 91 Bellingradt 2012, 237–8; Forselius 2015, 16.
- 92 'Vad själva huvudsaken angår, att Tollstadius varit besmittad av Dippels lära, så haver jag det själv hört av hans egen mun och bekännelse då han ensam varit hos mig, och det även två gånger', SNA, ÅK 191, acta, 153.
- 93 'Men han måste besinna, det wore af ganska olika beskaffenhet, hwad en privat kan begå för swaghets felachtigheter under swära frestelser, de der i sielfwa wärket icke angå någon *publici* skada och förestående fara, hwilka fehl också af ingen rätt christen, mindre af någon rättsinnig Lärare kunna eller böra til hans nästas förklaring, och hälst på at allom wederstyggeligit wis, *publice* utgifwa', *ibid.*, 261–2.
- 94 'Då han således uppenbarliga röjer och utropar de swaghets fehl, som några Personer, hwilka eljest, uti almänt, ombeflita sig om en stilla och gudelig wandel, under anfächtning varit frestade till', *ibid.*, 261.
- 95 Ljungberg 2017, 139–43.

- 96 'Hwad nu sielfwa beskyllningarna widkommer, så ehuruwäl iag nu så långt efter omögeligen kan widare minnas, huru talat ock discourserne på brölloppet fallit, än ofwannemde mitt memoral till Ven: Consistorium wid handen gifwer, som iag ock sedermera så mycket mindre der uppå tänkt, som iag aldrig kunnat förmoda någon förewarande så illa sinnad finnas, at han hwad då *discourse*na taltes på ett så obeskiadeligt sätt förwända ock åtföra skulle', SNA, ÄK 190, acta, 573.
- 97 SNA, ÄK 190, protocol, 821.
- 98 Rössler 2005 [2001], 18.