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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

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Evangelical ideas first reached Scandinavia around 1520. At this time, this vast and sparsely populated region was of only marginal political and religious significance in Europe. The Reformation of the Nordic countries which followed was largely a by-product of Luther's Reformation. The Nordic countries still remained of little importance for the Reformation in general, when, in 1555, the Peace of Augsburg guaranteed the survival of European Protestantism for the immediate future. However, by the early seventeenth century and the Thirty Years War, it was the political and military intervention of Lutheran Scandinavia, together with militant Calvinism in south and southwest Germany, which eventually secured the survival of Protestantism at the peace negotiations in Münster and Osnabrück.¹ The importance of Scandinavia to European Protestantism less than a century after Luther's death was, in other words, paramount. Even if the interventions of Christian IV of Denmark and Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden in the Thirty Years War were dictated as much by political as by religious ambitions, their decisions to take up arms for the Protestant cause would hardly have been imaginable without their Lutheran upbringing and power bases, as kings of strongly Lutheran states. With regard to Gustavus Adolphus, it is probably more telling that the king chose to wear a black breast plate in battle which proclaimed him to be the champion of God, i.e. Protestantism, than his constant reassurances to the German princes and the emperor that his reasons for intervening in the war were purely political.² Gustavus Adolphus undoubtedly believed that he acted as God's instrument, chosen to defend all Protestants, Calvinists, as well as Lutherans.³

¹ See, for instance, H. A. Oberman, *Luther. Man between God and Devil*, London 1989, 10–12.

² For this breast plate with Jehovah written in capital letters across it, see H. Langer, *The Thirty Years War*, Dorset 1978, plate 110; for an emphasis on the political motives of Gustavus Adolphus, often to the exclusion of any religious motivation, see G. Parker, *The Thirty Years War*, London 1984, 121–2.

³ M. Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus. A History of Sweden*, II, London 1958, 788.

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In Scandinavia, as well as in Germany, the new evangelical ideas benefited from the social and political upheavals which had begun in the late Middle Ages. The defeudalisation process saw a growing confrontation between lay and ecclesiastical aristocracy, peasants, burghers and the crown in the Nordic countries during this period. As in Germany, the political centre came under ever greater pressure from the periphery. Whereas in Germany, by 1520, Luther had already, willingly or unwillingly, become a pawn in the political struggle between the territorial princes and the emperor, the Reformation in Scandinavia became intrinsically linked to the weakening of the political centre, and helped to accelerate the dissolution of the Scandinavian Union, which had been created in 1397, into territorial/national states.⁴

The attempts of the Danish king, Christian II, to secure and expand his control over the Union of the Scandinavian Kingdoms through increasingly absolutist policies only served to antagonise the lay and ecclesiastical nobility in his realms. His harsh repression of those who wanted greater Swedish independence led to the massacre of more than eighty members of the Swedish lay and ecclesiastical aristocracy in Stockholm in November 1520. This sparked a revolt under the leadership of Gustav Vasa, whose father had been among those executed in Stockholm, which eventually saw Sweden re-established as an independent kingdom in 1521. By April 1523, royal policies which sought to restrict the political influence of the Danish aristocracy forced Christian II to seek refuge in the Netherlands after he had been deposed by the Danish Council (*Rigsrådet*). The Council immediately proceeded to elect their ally, and Christian II's uncle, Duke Frederik of Schleswig and Holstein, as king. Thus by the summer of 1523 two usurpers, Gustav Vasa and Frederik I had succeeded to the thrones of Sweden/Finland and Denmark/Norway and the Union of the Scandinavian Kingdoms had collapsed. Both monarchs were positively inclined towards the new evangelical ideas and wanted to establish some form of national church under royal control.⁵ They appear, however, to have differed significantly in religious commitment. Where Gustav Vasa's interest in Protestantism was predominantly determined by political and economic

⁴ For Germany, see W. Borth, *Die Luthersache (causa Lutherani), 1517–1524*, Lübeck and Hamburg 1970, 75–7 and 106–14; see also P. Blickle, 'Social Protest and Reformation Theology', in P. Blickle (ed.), *Religion, Politics and Social Protest*, London 1984, 1–23. For Scandinavia, see O. P. Grell, 'Scandinavia', in A. Pettegree (ed.), *The Early Reformation in Europe*, Cambridge 1992, 94–119.

⁵ See chapters 2 and 3.

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considerations, Frederik I's, and later his son, Christian III's, views were dictated as much by religious, as by political priorities.

Until the danger, which the deposed king, Christian II, and his Habsburg family continued to present for the new Scandinavian rulers, eventually disappeared during the 1530s, some hesitant, political cooperation existed between Gustav Vasa and Frederik I. Gustav Vasa, however, always doubted the political sincerity of Frederik I and later, even more so, that of his son, Christian III who, he was convinced, nurtured secret ambitions of re-establishing the Union under Danish hegemony. Yet, it has to be borne in mind that Gustav Vasa's position remained exposed, at least until the 1540s, facing, as he did, constant internal revolts, and lack of external recognition of the legitimacy of his rule. Frederik I and later his son, Christian III, never encountered similar domestic problems and, while their legitimacy could also be questioned, they, at least, belonged to the royal family and were next in the line of succession to Christian II. These circumstances undoubtedly helped to make their rule internationally more acceptable in an early modern Europe, which was increasingly dominated by dynastic ideas.⁶

Both Gustav Vasa and Frederik I were seriously in debt by the time they succeeded to the throne; Gustav more so than Frederik because of the protracted military campaign necessary to oust the supporters of Christian II; but even Frederik I's largely unopposed military advance through Denmark to Copenhagen proved costly. In Sweden, as well as in Denmark, this caused serious fiscal problems for years to come. These difficulties were further aggravated by the need for constant extra defence expenditure during the 1520s because of the threat of an invasion by Christian II.⁷ Furthermore, the many rebellions in Sweden by a dissatisfied, predominantly conservative and Catholic population, not to mention the civil war in Denmark (*Grevens Fejde*) of 1534–6, which followed the death of Frederik I and eventually saw Christian III enter Copenhagen victoriously, added to the economic woes of the countries. Economic necessity alone would have dictated some form of intervention against a wealthy Catholic church in both countries, simply in order to foot the bills.⁸ Thus, both governments had sound financial reasons for supporting the evangelical movement. Consequently, the

⁶ Grell, 'Scandinavia', 117; for the growing European dynasticism, see R. Bonney, *The European Dynastic States 1494–1660*, Oxford 1991.

⁷ For Sweden, see M. Roberts, *The Early Vasas. A History of Sweden 1523–1611*, Cambridge 1968, 92–3; for Denmark, see T. Lyby, *Vi Evangeliske. Studier over Samspillet mellem Udenrigspolitik og Kirkepolitik på Frederik I's Tid*, Aarhus 1993, 33–4.

⁸ See chapters 2, 3 and 4.

leaders of the Catholic church in Scandinavia already found themselves on the defensive for economic and political reasons, before the evangelical movement undermined their position further.⁹

Popular support for the Reformation was undoubtedly strongest in Denmark, where, by the second decade of the sixteenth century, Catholicism seems to have been unable to generate much grass-roots support, as opposed to Sweden. Furthermore, only in Denmark does anti-clericalism appear to have been a significant phenomenon. This is to some extent explained by the fact that Denmark was the most urbanised of the Nordic countries. More than 10 per cent of the population lived in towns here, several of which such as Copenhagen, Malmø, Elsinore, Odense, Aalborg, Aarhus and Ribe ranged in size from 2,000 to 8,000 inhabitants. In Sweden less than 5 per cent of the population lived in towns and only Stockholm, which had between 4,000 and 6,000 inhabitants, could lay any real claim to urban status, while most other Swedish towns were little more than large villages.¹⁰ Norway and Finland were even more rural in character. As in Germany, it was in the urban environment that evangelical ideas first took root and spread. Thus Denmark, with its relations with the German urban centres much closer than the other Scandinavian countries, provided social conditions which proved particularly conducive to Protestantism. Further proof that popular support for Protestantism was much stronger in Denmark than in Sweden can be found in the evangelical literature published in the two countries. The Danish literature is doctrinally more diverse than the Swedish, even if the confessional significance of these differences have often been over-emphasised by modern church historians. The variations in emphasis and doctrine of these works, however, can be seen to confirm the relative strength of popular support for the Reformation in Denmark, whereas the uniformity of the Swedish literature is indicative of an evangelical movement which, apart from developments in Stockholm, depended primarily on princely initiatives.¹¹

Consequently Denmark witnessed a full Reformation well before the other Nordic countries and became the first country in Scandinavia to receive a Protestant Church Order in 1537/9, written under the

⁹ See chapter 4.

¹⁰ For the urbanisation of Sweden, see Roberts, *The Early Vasas*, 28–30; for Denmark, see E. Ladewig Petersen, *Dansk Social Historie*, III, Copenhagen 1980, 47 and 199–202; A. E. Christensen et al. (eds.), *Gyldealders Danmarkshistorie*, II, Copenhagen 1980, 376–7. See also O. P. Grell, *The Emergence of Two Cities: The Reformation in Malmö and Copenhagen*, in L. Grane and K. Hørby (eds.), *Die dänische Reformation vor ihrem Internationalen Hintergrund*, Göttingen 1990, 129–45.

¹¹ For Sweden, see chapter 3.

supervision of Luther's colleague and friend, Johannes Bugenhagen. The new Lutheran church in Denmark closely followed the Wittenberg model. It was a church fully controlled by the crown, where the ministers and superintendents/bishops were loyal servants of the government, swearing allegiance to the king. In the Request of 1536, the evangelical preachers wanted the new church to be given control over spiritual affairs, ecclesiastical appointments, and to be allowed an archbishop/head superintendent. This was ignored by Christian III. The king, who saw himself as *custos utriusque tabulae* (keeper of the two tablets of the Law of Moses), often deliberately ignored the advice of his clergy and personally intervened in ecclesiastical affairs.¹²

The route of the Reformation in Sweden was far more tortuous and much slower than in Denmark. The country did not receive a Church Order until 1571 and then only in a confessionally vague form. It was not until the Uppsala Assembly of 1593 that it finally opted for Lutheranism.¹³ Consequently, Sweden became the most heterodox of the Scandinavian countries, dithering between Lutheranism, Calvinism and Catholicism throughout most of the second half of the sixteenth century. This was in many ways a bequest from the reign of Gustav Vasa (1521–60). During the last twenty years of his reign, Gustav Vasa had been firmly in control of all ecclesiastical matters in his realm, but he had avoided making any final decisions with regard to ecclesiastical organisation and confessional matters. That he chose Calvinist tutors, such as Dionysius Beurres and Jan van Herboville, for his sons Erik, later King Erik XIV, and Karl, later King Karl IX, is yet another sign that Gustav Vasa was less concerned about confessional orthodoxy than his royal counterparts in Denmark.¹⁴ The result was that the Swedish church did not, either legally, or in practice, become part of the state. Instead it continued to be led by the archbishop of Uppsala. Given the right political and ecclesiastical circumstances, this guaranteed that the Swedish church would pursue its own church policy, as it did in the reigns of Gustav Vasa's three sons, Erik XIV (1560–8), Johan III (1568–92), and Karl IX (1599–1611).

Similarly, the lack of proper institutionalisation of the Reformation in the country made the Swedish church susceptible to greater changes in royal church policy. Following the death of Gustav Vasa, Reformed or

¹² M. Schwarz Lausten, *Christian den 3. og Kirken 1537–1559*, Copenhagen 1987, 109–10, and 215–16.

¹³ See chapter 6.

¹⁴ For Beurres, see *Svensk Biografisk Lexikon* (Swedish Dictionary of National Biography), henceforth *SBL*.

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Calvinist ideas appear to have gained ground during the first years of the reign of Erik XIV, not least via his influential Huguenot tutor and advisor, Dionysius Beurreus. Eventually, Beurreus and his followers, many of whom were immigrants from East Friesland who had been encouraged to settle in Sweden during the last years of Gustav Vasa's reign, were confronted by Archbishop Laurentius Petri and the predominantly Lutheran hierarchy of the Swedish church, forcing Erik XIV to halt the propagation of Reformed doctrine in the country. Calvinist teachings were declared false, but the Reformed immigrants were guaranteed freedom of conscience.¹⁵

Later in the 1570s, after the accession of Johan III, the crown sought to bring the Swedish church closer to Catholicism, via amendments to the Church Order of 1571, the *Nova Ordinantia*, and a new liturgy, the so-called Red Book.¹⁶ Even if Johan III probably never intended a full return to the Catholic fold, he encouraged secret Jesuit attempts to introduce the Counter Reformation in Sweden. Thus the Norwegian Jesuit, Laurentius Nicolai ('Klosterlasse'), who arrived in Stockholm in 1576, proved an immediate success with Johan, who allowed him to open a theological college in the former Franciscan monastery in the city. As could be expected from a good Jesuit, Laurentius Nicolai had quickly identified one of the major weaknesses of the Swedish Reformation: the shortage of evangelical secondary and tertiary education in the country. The University of Uppsala had been closed since 1516 and, in spite of attempts by both Erik XIV and Johan III to invigorate it, there was nowhere that the Swedish clergy could be properly educated. During the two years he was active in Sweden, Laurentius Nicolai's Jesuit academy in Stockholm proved highly successful, until riots, which followed Nicolai's admission of being a Jesuit, forced Johan III to close the college. It was not until the Uppsala Assembly in 1593, which finally confirmed the Swedish church as Lutheran, that a decision was taken to re-open the University of Uppsala. The official opening of the university took place in 1595 on the initiative of Duke Karl, the later King Karl IX.¹⁷

If anything, the Jesuit attempt to infiltrate Sweden served only to undermine the reign of Johan's son, the Catholic King Sigismund of Poland, who was deposed in 1598/9 after only six years on the throne.

¹⁵ G. Annell, *Erik XIV:s Etiska föreställningar och deras inflytande på hans politik*, Uppsala 1945, 182–202.

¹⁶ See chapter 6.

¹⁷ For Laurentius Nicolai's activities in Sweden, see V. Helk, *Laurentius Nicolai Norvegius*, Copenhagen 1966, 80–153; for the deplorable state of evangelical education in Sweden, see S. Lindroth, *Svensk Lärdomshistoria. Medeltiden. Reformationstiden*, Stockholm 1975, 208–22 and 340–6. See also C. Annerstedt, *Uppsala Universitets Historia*, 1, Uppsala 1877.

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The Protestant opposition to the crypto-Catholic policies of Johan and Sigismund had been openly encouraged by Duke Karl. Several leading members of the Swedish Church had sought refuge in Karl's duchy from where they emerged during the 1590s. Karl, however, found that when he became ruler of Sweden many of the Lutheran theologians to whom he had offered protection against Johan and Sigismund turned out to be his most ardent antagonists. Not only did they outspokenly defend the independence of the church, but they also accused him of crypto-Calvinism. They obstructed all his attempts to impose royal supremacy on the church and resented his, in their eyes, heterodox doctrinal views.¹⁸

Karl, however, appears to have supported a scheme for the unification of the Protestant churches, faced as they were with resurgent Catholicism. In 1608 he ordered a religious dispute to take place between the Scottish Reformed minister, John Forbes, who had arrived in Stockholm, and his Lutheran archbishop, Olaus Martini. Karl appears to have been interested in a unification scheme until at least 1610, when John Forbes, who later became minister to the English Reformed church in Middleburg in the United Provinces, made a second visit to Sweden.¹⁹ The Swedish government retained its interest in unifying the different Protestant denominations in the reign of Gustavus Adolphus. Not only the king, but also his closest advisors, Axel Oxenstierna and Johan Skytte, actively promoted John Dury's well-known plan for the unification of the Protestant churches and later invited Amos Comenius to Sweden. This was all done in spite of strong opposition from the Lutheran leadership of the Swedish church.²⁰

Denmark witnessed no such changes in church policy. The Church Order of 1537 provided the foundation for a flexible anti-doctrinal Lutheranism which, seen from the government's perspective, remained unchanged throughout this period, even if the dominant theology of the church gradually moved in a more liberal, Philippist, crypto-Calvinist direction, as can be seen from the example of Niels Hemmingsen.²¹ Christian III and his son, Frederik II, actively discouraged religious debate, and not until the second decade of the seventeenth century, in the reign of Christian IV, as a reaction to Counter Reformation

¹⁸ See H. Block, *Karl IX som teolog och religiös personlighet*, Uppsala 1918.

¹⁹ For John Forbes's visits to Sweden, see *SBL*; for Forbes's career, see also *Dictionary of National Biography*.

²⁰ See S. Lindroth, *Svensk Lärdomshistoria. Stormaktstiden*, Stockholm 1975, 168–70.

²¹ See chapter 5.

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Catholicism on one hand, and Calvinism on the other, did the Danish church witness a struggle over doctrine. Then, however, the outcome was a foregone conclusion. Bishop Hans Poulsen Resen's drive for Lutheran uniformity constituted an integral part of the government's absolutist policies. In many ways it was a policy which had much more in common with that of Archbishop William Laud in England in the 1630s, than the move towards a narrow Lutheran orthodoxy which took place in a number of German territorial states in the same period.

Furthermore, Denmark benefited from an extended period of internal peace and stability, which made it possible for the government gradually to put a new Lutheran ecclesiastical administration in place, and to build up a network of evangelical Latin schools.²² The University of Copenhagen which had been closed since 1531 was re-opened in 1537, remodelled on the Lutheran University of Wittenberg. This evangelical preoccupation with the creation of an educational and ecclesiastical framework for the new Lutheran church was only temporarily halted by the Seven Years War with Sweden from 1563 to 1570. Following the peace of Stettin in 1570, however, the efforts to improve both secondary and tertiary education, as well as the economic conditions for the new church, such as minister's salaries, gathered pace in Denmark.²³

Some of the differences between the Lutheran Reformations in Denmark/Norway and Sweden/Finland are illustrated by the countries' contrasting reactions to the growing number of Protestant refugees who sought a safe haven in the second half of the sixteenth century. Already in 1553 fear of Anabaptists and 'Sacramentarians' (Reformed) made the Danish government issue an injunction against foreigners settling in the country without prior proof of their orthodoxy. The arrival in Copenhagen of Johannes a Lasco with approximately 200 Reformed refugees from London, who had fled England after the accession of the Catholic Queen Mary, in July 1553, provoked an immediate government response. Not only were the refugees expelled from Denmark/Norway and the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein after having refused to accept the Order and doctrines of the Lutheran church,²⁴ but the affair probably encouraged the government to re-issue the Injunction of 1553 with

²² See L. Grane, 'Teaching the People – the Education of the Clergy and the Institution of the People in the Danish Reformation Church', in Grane and Hørby (eds.), *Die dänische Reformation*, 164–84.

²³ See chapter 5; see also O. P. Grell, 'Scandinavia', in R. W. Scribner, R. Porter and M. Teich (eds.), *The Reformation in National Context*, Cambridge 1994, 111–32.

²⁴ For the arrival in Denmark of Johannes a Lasco and the Reformed refugees from London, see M. Schwarz Lausten, *Biskop Peder Palladius og Kirken 1537–1560*, Copenhagen 1987, 206–24.

the added threat of capital punishment for offenders. Later, in 1569, the growing number of heterodox Protestant refugees from the Netherlands who sought shelter from the persecution of the Duke of Alva in Denmark caused the government to issue the Strangers' Articles which obliged immigrants to accept the Augsburg Confession and the Danish Church Order.²⁵ Evidently the government had no intention of accepting Protestant refugees, who, even if their economic benefit to the country would be considerable, might destabilise the religious equilibrium.

The Swedish government's approach to such immigrants was totally different. Gustav Vasa invited Calvinist exiles from the Netherlands to settle in Sweden in 1559. This policy was continued by Erik XIV who asked Dionysius Beurreus, who then served as Swedish ambassador to Queen Elizabeth of England, to recruit Reformed refugee craftsmen in London, promising them that they would be allowed to profess their faith openly, while enjoying full civil rights on a par with the king's subjects, if they were to settle in Sweden. The charter Erik XIV issued on 5 March 1561 inviting those who had been exiled 'for the sake of devotion and truth' to emigrate to Sweden, if they would 'live in peace according to the gospel and the true religion of God' and, of course, 'conduct themselves as pious Christians, and swear and preserve allegiance to us and our kingdom', in effect offered religious toleration for Reformed Protestants in Sweden.²⁶ However, Archbishop Laurentius Petri's intervention against Calvinism in 1565 caused Erik XIV to halt this initiative.

This policy was eventually resurrected by his brother, Karl IX, in the 1590s. In spite of the antagonism towards Calvinism espoused by the leading Lutheran theologians in Sweden during his reign, the demands of the Lutheran church were largely subordinated to the mercantilist policies of the crown. Thus, one of the leading Dutch entrepreneurs, Willem de Bessche, who managed to improve Swedish weapon production and obtained a virtual monopoly on Swedish iron production, settled in the country in 1595 on the invitation of Karl. De Bessche, however, was only the most successful of the many, primarily Reformed, craftsmen and entrepreneurs whom Karl IX encouraged to settle in Sweden.²⁷ Gustavus Adolphus continued his father's mercantilist policy, inviting Reformed immigrants to Sweden, and in 1627 the Reformed

²⁵ See chapter 6.

²⁶ O. P. Grell, 'Huguenot and Walloon Contributions to Sweden's Emergence as a European Power, 1560–1648', in *Proceedings of the Huguenot Society*, 25, 4 (1992), 378–9.

²⁷ K. Kilbom, *Vallonerna. Valloninvandringen. Stormaktsvældet och den svenska Järphanteringen*, Stockholm 1958, 168–85.

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merchant and entrepreneur, Louis de Geer, made Sweden his home. It was thanks to de Geer that the military–industrial complex was established in Sweden which made it possible to supply the Swedish armies during the Thirty Years War. In this connection it proved important that Gustavus Adolphus, on his accession in 1611, managed to secure some measure of toleration for the Reformed, even if they were not allowed their own church and were excluded from government jobs. This limited religious liberty was later confirmed in 1615.²⁸ In practice, however, the toleration granted the Reformed immigrants was considerably greater and the government connived at the existence of Reformed congregations and services in Stockholm and Gothenburg. In November 1627, a low point for the Protestant cause in the Thirty Years War, Gustavus Adolphus even issued a proclamation offering all persecuted German Protestants refuge in Sweden.²⁹

During the early part of Christian IV's reign a similar toleration for Calvinist immigrants, dictated by mercantilist policies, appears to have been considered by the Danish government. Thus, in 1607 when the government dispatched the diplomat, Jonas Charisius, to the United Provinces, to recruit Reformed craftsmen and merchants, these prospective immigrants were promised religious freedom.³⁰ However, the prospect of toleration quickly evaporated when the Strangers' Articles of 1569 were re-issued as part of the series of laws which the government issued from 1617 onwards, in order to enhance uniformity in state and church. Thus, no similar promises appear to have been offered when, in the early 1620s, new attempts were made to encourage Dutch merchants and craftsmen to settle in Denmark and Norway.

In spite of these major differences in pace and impact between the Reformations in Denmark/Norway and Sweden/Finland, they shared a number of identical difficulties, especially concerning the problems their governments and churches faced when trying to convert the population to the new evangelical faith. It proved difficult to eradicate Catholic traditions and superstition. The Lutheran clergy in Scandinavia had to fight a constant battle against the adoration of images, and the worship of saints and relics throughout the sixteenth century. In some cases such beliefs and superstitions continued well into the seventeenth century.³¹ It

²⁸ Grell, 'Huguenot and Walloon Contributions to Sweden', 375–84.

²⁹ M. Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus*, 1, London 1953, 370.

³⁰ Ladewig Petersen, *Dansk Social Historie*, III, 299 and S. Ellehøj, *Politikens Danmarks Historie*, VII, Copenhagen 1970, 224.

³¹ See chapter 7; see also H. J. Frederiksen, 'Reformationens Betydning for den Kirkelige Kunst i Danmark', in *Reformationsperspektiver, Acta Jutlandica*, 62, 3, Aarhus 1987, 100–26.