



Written by [Charles Scaliger](#) on August 22, 2016

Published in the August 22, 2016 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 32, No. 16

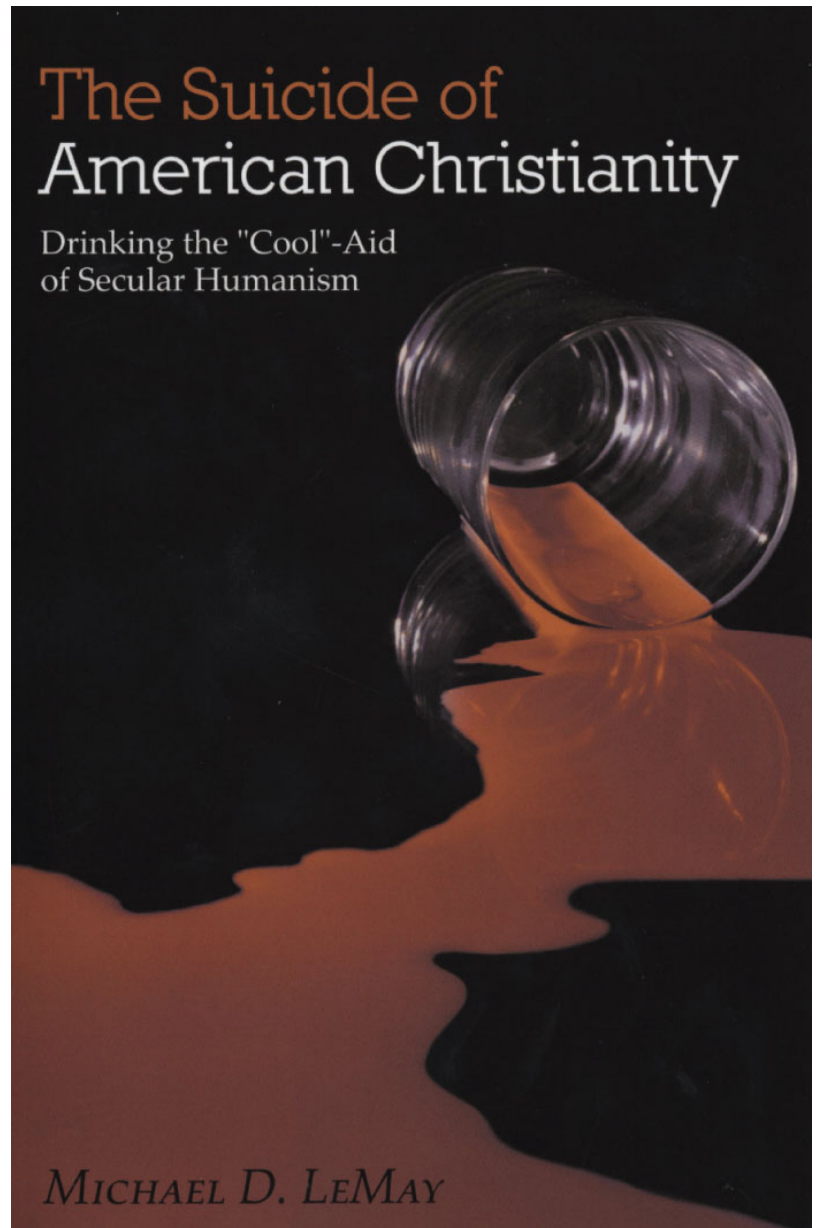
Be Like Me

The Almost Nearly Perfect People: The Truth About the Nordic Miracle, by Michael Booth, London: Jonathan Cape (a division of Random House Group, Ltd.), 2014, 406 pages, paperback.

In the age of Bernie Sanders, the myth of Scandinavian Utopia has yet again tickled America's collective fancy. If we could all just be more like the Norwegians, Swedes, and Danes, goes the refrain, our problems would be, if not solved outright, at least considerably alleviated. After all, Scandinavia is the Place That Makes Socialism Work, eloquent testimony to the desirability of Big Government, if only it's run by the right people. Scandinavian countries have for decades enjoyed among the world's highest standards of living, education, and overall quality of life, sustaining peaceful, prosperous, orderly societies in which violent crime is almost nonexistent and people work to live, and not the other way around, spending their copious leisure time traveling the world and drinking one another's health. Such, at least, are the fashionable clichés.

However, British author Michael Booth's new tour de force, *The Almost Nearly Perfect People: The Truth About the Nordic Miracle*, gives a sobering look at the sociopolitical realities in Scandinavia (including Iceland and Finland, which are more properly included with Sweden, Denmark, and Norway under the label "Nordic countries"), an honest appraisal that will have Americans suffering from Stockholm Syndrome or Danish Delusion giving a second thought to relocating to Bergen, Malmö, or Helsinki.

Booth is married to a Dane and has spent more than a decade living in Denmark. He speaks Danish and





Written by [Charles Scaliger](#) on August 22, 2016

Published in the August 22, 2016 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 32, No. 16

a smattering of other Nordic tongues, and has traveled all over Western Europe's Great White North. While his book is travel literature (sort of), his knowledge of Nordic history, culture, and quirks is unparalleled. Moreover, despite its ominous subtitle, the book is intended as a sort of apologia for Scandinavia, a confirmation that, indeed, the Nordic countries, while not as Edenic as their most breathless apologists abroad may claim, are nonetheless the closest thing to perfect societies ever devised by fallen man.

Scandinavians, in their supposed enlightenment, regard their mode of government (democratic socialism) simply as more modern and advanced than the old-fashioned, fatally flawed systems found elsewhere in the West. In his rapturous epilogue, Booth makes no secret of his preference for the Scandinavian way:

Right now, the West is looking for an alternative to the rampant capitalism that has ravaged our economies, a system that might avoid the extremes of Soviet socialism or American deregulated neoliberalism.... There is only one place to look for the economic and societal role model of the future, and it is not Brazil, Russia, or China. The Nordic countries have the answer.... Up here, even when they get it wrong, they soon figure out how to get it right without any blood being spilled.

In other words, if there is any hope for human salvation, we all need to become Scandinavians. Case closed.

Well, not quite. His panegyric conclusion notwithstanding, Booth's book is in fact a searing indictment of the Scandinavian model, for, as they say, the devil is in the details.

Sweden, the largest and most populous of the Nordic countries, has in the 20th century erected a system Booth terms "benign totalitarianism." Sweden, it is seldom pointed out, was second only to the Nazis in its early and mid-century program of racial purification, forcibly sterilizing tens of thousands of women.

Beginning in the 1920s, the Swedish Institute for Racial Biology sought to cleanse society of genetic and racial undesirables since, as a Swedish politician of the day, Arthur Engberrg, wrote, "We have the good fortune to belong to a race that is so far relatively unspoiled, a race that is the bearer of very high and very good qualities." In 1934, Sweden legalized the forcible sterilization of "genetically inferior" women and juvenile delinquents, a practice that continued until 1976, resulting in the forced sterilization of roughly 60,000 Swedish women. Curiously, Sweden's institutionalized racism never gets any mention by the same American leftists who routinely excoriate the United States for racial discrimination.

Also noteworthy during the same period were the vast numbers of children taken by the Swedish government from their parents on a wide array of ideological grounds (i.e., parents were not properly indoctrinating them to conform to government norms of behavior and belief). In fact, Sweden's government took more children from their parents during the '60s and '70s than any other government on Earth, in a state characterized by Swedish expat (and heiress) Sigrd Rausing as "a repressive machinery where individual rights were sacrificed to powerful social norms." And Booth weighs in revealingly:

Everything I read about the Swedish Social Democratic government of the last century suggested an organization that was driven by one single, overarching goal: to sever the traditional, some would say natural, ties between its citizens, be they those that bound children to their parents, workers to their



Written by [Charles Scaliger](#) on August 22, 2016

Published in the August 22, 2016 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 32, No. 16

employers, wives to their husbands, or the elderly to their families. Instead, individuals were encouraged — mostly by financial incentive or disincentive, but also through legislation, propaganda, and social pressure — to “take their place in the collective,” as one commentator rather ominously put it, and become dependent on the government.

Elsewhere, Booth was more specific:

There were few aspects of the Swedes’ lives that their government did not strive to control, including their pay, how they raised their children, how much they drank, what they watched on TV, how much holiday they took, and their views on the Vietnam War. And the Swedes, it seems, were the most willing of puppets, “world record-holders in docility,” as [German author Hans Magnus] Enzensberger puts it.

This same Enzensberger, it should be noted, observed back in the 1980s, in his book *Europe, Europe: Forays Into a Continent*, that the Swedish state controlled “the affairs of individuals to a degree unparalleled in other free countries.”

Other authors have similarly characterized Sweden and the Swedish. Wrote Roland Huntford in his 1971 book *The New Totalitarians*: “Modern Sweden has fulfilled Huxley’s specifications for the new totalitarianism. A centralized administration rules people who love their servitude.”

For the last several years, Sweden has managed to loosen the yoke of the Social Democrats’ “benign totalitarianism” — a little. A reformist government has temporarily replaced the Social Democrats’ 80-year stranglehold on political power. But for Sweden, taxes are still the world’s second-highest (after Denmark’s), and most of the soft totalitarianism for a people who “love their servitude” remains in place.

Not only that, Sweden’s government has long been at the forefront of “cultural Marxism,” foisting on its citizens sex education, legalized pornography and perversion, abortion on demand, and radical feminism far in advance of most other Western nations. As a consequence, Booth points out, Swedish men have a reputation worldwide for effeminacy, and the Swedes as a whole for unbridled hedonism, exceptional even by post-Christian European standards.

Much the same can be said of the Swedes’ southern neighbors, the Danes, and — *mutatis mutandis* — of the Norwegians and Finns as well. To be sure, Finland is freer than its neighbors, and holds especial contempt for the sissified Swedes (the Finns, after all, have the world’s third-highest rate of firearms ownership, and take great pride in *sisu* [masculinity], as exemplified by their heroic resistance to the Soviet Russian invaders during the Winter War).

But despite these and many other considerations, socialist Scandinavia continues to enjoy a burnished image as an “almost nearly perfect” society of peaceful, prosperous, beautiful people — because of their exceptional economic performance over the past 50 years or so.

Sweden in WWII remained free from invading armies and the burdens of a wartime economy. It emerged at the end of the ruinous war as the strongest economy in Europe, which was converted into postwar economic momentum, while Norway, Finland, and the rest of Europe labored under crushing postwar debts and the need for massive spending to rebuild their shattered infrastructures. Sweden, therefore, began the postwar era with a huge advantage over most of the rest of Europe, an advantage that has allowed it more leeway for tax-and-spend socialism than the rest of the West.

The salvation of Norway has been its enormous reserves of offshore oil. As the “Dubai of the north,”



Written by [Charles Scaliger](#) on August 22, 2016

Published in the August 22, 2016 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 32, No. 16

Norway has been able to use its enormous oil revenues to subsidize government programs on a scale that would have long since bankrupted most other countries.

But even leaving such factors aside, the myth of socialist prosperity in Scandinavia is not supported by the facts. Booth's descriptions of Scandinavia (other than Norway) are of mostly cheerless people living in nearly deserted, lifeless cities surrounded by crumbling, monochromatic slums full of impoverished immigrants. Finland, the land of northern romance embodied by the music of Sibelius and Tove Jansson's "Moomintroll" fairy tales, is not only sparsely inhabited but rather backward, especially in rural areas. Sweden is a land of introverted xenophobes, while Denmark is one large, impersonal city surrounded mostly by Rust Belt-like swaths of crumbling industrial towns. Denmark and its Scandinavian siblings are frequently at or near the top of lists purporting to measure the world's happiest people, highest standards of living, etc., yet Booth's description of a typical day in Copenhagen belies such images:

I thought back to the previous day's soul-sapping adventures in my new home. In the morning there had been the usual dispiriting encounter with the sullen checkout girl at the local supermarket who, as was her habit, had rung up the cost of my prohibitively expensive, low-grade produce without acknowledging my existence. Outside, other pedestrians had tutted audibly when I'd crossed the street on a red light; there was no traffic, but in Denmark preempting the green man is a provocative breach of social etiquette. I had cycled home through the drizzle to find a tax bill relieving me of an alarming proportion of that month's income.... The evening's entertainment had consisted of ... a twenty-year-old episode of *Murder, She Wrote*, and then *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* — its titular, life-altering rhetoric somewhat undermined by the fact that a million kroner are worth only around \$180,000, which in Denmark is just enough to buy you a meal out with change for the cinema.

Exaggerated for effect, but telling, especially given that the author professes to love Scandinavia and has made Denmark his home. And there's more, much more: horror stories of waiting for hours in medical clinics only to be denied service by Denmark's government-run healthcare system, visiting an exuberantly pornographic "art exhibit" in one of Sweden's national museums, soulless government housing and crumbling infrastructures, and a general belief among Scandinavians (especially Swedes and Danes) that their countries are no place for those who wish to excel. Booth's portrait is of a set of countries whose peoples have largely accepted the yoke of stifling sameness and malaise inflicted by generations of socialism.

Yet despite all of the downside, the fact remains that Scandinavia is not the Soviet Union, Pol Pot's Cambodia, or even Mugabe's Zimbabwe. While backward in many respects, Scandinavia has given the world Nokia, Saab, Volvo, and many other modern corporations, making everything from some of the world's most reliable household appliances and automobiles, to chainsaws.

According to Booth, many of the cultural traits that have allowed the Nordic countries to embrace socialism without paying the sort of price (yet) that the Russians, Chinese, North Koreans, and others have paid (and are still paying) were in evidence long before the modern era: their aversion to risk, their extreme emphasis on conformity, and their adoration of state authority (Norway, Denmark, and Sweden all retain and adore their monarchies). In other words, they had become culturally predisposed to bear socialism's yoke cheerfully long before it was laid on their collective shoulders.

In recent years, even Scandinavia has begun to buckle under the weight of heavy taxation and near-



Written by [Charles Scaliger](#) on August 22, 2016

Published in the August 22, 2016 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 32, No. 16

total government control over most aspects of business. Iceland, the first of the European dominoes to fall during the Great Recession, went spectacularly bankrupt after years of speculative fervor, and is unlikely to ever fully recover its former financial vitality, such as it was. Sweden's economy has been in the doldrums for years, with the new coalition government in Stockholm trying to chart a new way — meaning less of the same old socialism, with hopes for better results. And Sweden and Denmark both are reeling under the waves of new immigrants pouring into Europe from the Middle East.

Despite their stunning natural beauty and rich cultural heritage, the Scandinavian countries are mournful examples of once-proud nations that have become husks of their former selves, completely hollowed out by generations of both cultural and economic socialism. For America to become like Sweden or Denmark, she would have to renounce her cultural love of diversity, risk, and high achievement to slough off all remaining constitutional restraints on limited government; to abandon her Christian heritage; and to adopt an attitude of egalitarian apathy coupled with activist sympathy for Big Brother — an unlikely outcome. Yet if we fail to turn aside from our current Gadarene rush into socialism, our future might look less like Russia or China and more like Sweden.



Written by [Charles Scaliger](#) on August 22, 2016

Published in the August 22, 2016 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 32, No. 16

Subscribe to the New American

Get exclusive digital access to the most informative, non-partisan truthful news source for patriotic Americans!

Discover a refreshing blend of time-honored values, principles and insightful perspectives within the pages of "The New American" magazine. Delve into a world where tradition is the foundation, and exploration knows no bounds.

From politics and finance to foreign affairs, environment, culture, and technology, we bring you an unparalleled array of topics that matter most.



[Subscribe](#)

What's Included?

- 24 Issues Per Year
- Optional Print Edition
- Digital Edition Access
- Exclusive Subscriber Content
- Audio provided for all articles
- Unlimited access to past issues
- Coming Soon! Ad FREE
- 60-Day money back guarantee!
- Cancel anytime.