

THE PROVINCE'S CONTACT WITH THE CHURCHES IN SWEDEN AND ENGLAND: A REPORT

Introduction

During the 1998 Forward in Faith Assembly in London, I had the opportunity to visit with our orthodox brethren from Sweden and Norway, and an idea began to form in my mind. Our Archbishop of the Anglican Province of Christ the King, the Most Rev. Robert S. Morse, had for decades visited Sweden, to study the situation there. He also went as a pilgrim to the Shrine of St. Bridget in Vadstena, on one occasion to be received as a bishop by the Rt. Rev. Bertil Gartner, then Bishop of Goteborg. Bishop Gartner was the one orthodox bishop remaining in Sweden. In the early 80's our mission in Manhattan, St. Mary Magdalene, was sponsored by the Church of Sweden in New York, when the Rev. Evert Olson was the Pastor. He too had ties with Bishop Bertil Gartner. Added to all that was my own family background in Sweden, in the region of Goteborg. My former vicar from London, the Rev. Canon Geoffrey Neal, now one of our priests in Virginia, was giving all possible encouragement for us to open a door with the faithful in Great Britain, the Forward in Faith which he helped found.

So I asked one of the Forward in Faith bishops, the Rt. Rev. John Broadhurst, of Fulham, whether it would be useful to visit Sweden and widen our contacts there. He advised doing this, and suggested getting in touch with the Rev. Dag Sandahl, a pastor in Kalmar and a regional dean of the Free Synod. Fr. Dag got in touch, and he prepared an itinerary for a visit one week before the October, 1999 Forward in Faith Synod and Assembly in London. Before departing on October 18, Archbishop Morse indicated that I should go as his official representative, and on October 8, during our Clericus at the Episcopal Heritage Church in Washington, D.C., the Archbishop celebrated the Mass of St. Bridget, Patroness of Sweden.

The trip begins

At the Philadelphia Airport, on the evening of October 18, tickets at the ready, some time to spare, I went to the bar for a beer. Suddenly, who should appear, but Fr. David Kennedy, the Master of the Society of the Holy Cross in the Americas. He and three other priests from Florida were leaving for a Pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, by way of Philadelphia. What is the statistical likelihood that such a rendezvous should occur? I told them I was going to venerate the Shrine of St. Bridget, and that we could very usefully all be in prayer for one another.

Little did I know that upon arrival in Stockholm I would hit the ground running. Sister Karin of the Community of the Holy Spirit in Alsike met me at the Airport. After a warm greeting she handed me an amazing itinerary for the next two and a half days, so rich and full that I knew I was in for one of those *kairotic* moments in time. Immediately we had a short tour of nearby Arlanda, the oldest town in Sweden, and one of the places where the Church first got a foothold, nearly eight centuries ago. Then there was lunch at the Convent with Sisters Marianne, Karin and Ella, all pioneers of the renewal of the religious life in the Church of Sweden. Sister Marianne had been at the Forward in Faith Assembly the previous year, and her Convent is one of the nerve centers of the Free Synod, as I would discover that evening.

Afternoon coffee was graced by the Archbishop emeritus, Gunnar Weman, who would present the official view of the situation within the Church. He wished for greater charity from his side of the bench, now that 41 years of gnosticism has engendered a festering system of broken promises, cold tyranny, ever increasing encroachment of subtle manipulation from the secular state, and "inclusive language." One of the ironies of the secularized church is that it becomes an ever increasing irrelevance to the secular society.

The Free Synod

The ordination of women was passed in 1958 with tremendous pressure from the government; the clergy were seen as part of the civil service, and there must be no "gender discrimination." Freedom of conscience in this matter was gradually constricted until in 1993-94 it became the law that everyone in the Church must go along with the new agenda. Older women now predominate in the theological colleges and the Priesthood is being trivialized. Orthodox ordinands are blocked, and for clergy who resist, there is no more preferment and no moving around; each faithful priest is restricted to his present post. Where ever in the world the gnostic agenda is fomented, the pattern is the same: marginalize and eliminate. The agenda is also the same: abortion, homosexuality and divorce, all pointing to the attempt to redefine human nature, and to deny the Incarnation. The orthodox know that God is using today's heresies for a shakeout of the Western Church and a massive realignment of the entire Body of Christ. All of this first emerged in Sweden.

It is arctic winter in the Church of Sweden. Yet the faithful have suffered and sacrificed and are finding a way forward. They know that our Lord Jesus Christ is Himself the Way forward, and the Synod churches I visited show through their architecture, art, music, liturgy, preaching, attendance, and predominance of young people, an attentiveness to the stirrings of the Holy Spirit. They want to be ready for the spring thaw. I saw many examples of solid work in the Church, with real eucharistic communities and a recovery of the one great Tradition.

Quite by "accident" the past two bishops of Goteborg were orthodox, Bishop Gartner and his predecessor. They were alone among the 13 bishops, and since 1992 there has been no orthodox diocesan. In 1983 the Free Synod was organized, with a system of regional deans and the beginnings of an infrastructure for a free province. I met five of these deans and was impressed by the way they work together. The King and Queen lend quiet support behind the scenes. To the astonishment of the gnostics, young catholic candidates for Holy Orders still come forward.

There is a candid admission that the old state church is a Titanic that has hit the iceberg, and that the lifeboats must be put out. A relationship has been opened up with Forward in Faith in Great Britain, contact with the Norwegians and others in the region is good, and there is good communication with the Roman Bishop of Sweden, who is alert and sympathetic. The relationship of the Church with the State is complex and in flux, and in the coming year there will be a surface separation of the two. In reality, at the local level, there will be even greater control by the secular authorities.

Representatives of the Free Synod

On Tuesday evening after Vespers the Sisters in Alsike had set up a buffet dinner for about ten people, clergy, seminarians and laity from the Stockholm area, serving in the Free Synod in various capacities. Far from being dispirited, they want to live in the freedom St. Paul describes in Galatians. There was discussion of the recent meeting of the Regional Deans in Rome, with some mention of the difficulties of uniting the old "evangelical" and "high church" elements. We also talked about the Norwegians, now linked with the Polish National Catholic Church, to form the Nordic Catholic Church, and about Forward in Faith, and the Province of Christ the King.

I told them the story of our Province, and how the Lord has led us, out of Egypt and into the wilderness. In the Province, we have charted a course that involves some far-reaching reforms – restoring a sacramental, as opposed to a merely juridical, episcopate, building up a first-rate seminary, mapping out a missionary strategy, strengthening our canons, giving local parishes control of their own property, restoring the permanent Diaconate, moving our headquarters to Washington, D.C., seeing to it that the archbishop would eventually have his own diocese there, and opening up doors to other Catholics throughout the world. Ultimately it is our vocation to help reveal the unity of the Body of Christ, and the consensus of the undivided first millenium.

Everyone I met, all through the trip, was interested in knowing more about our Seminary, and in meeting Archbishop Morse. "God favors the bold" was the theme of our session, and we talked about the importance of acting on principle, on what God ordains in Scripture and Tradition. "We have the mind of Christ." I assured everyone that we wanted to help them in every way we can, and to be in touch now more than ever.

Uppsala and Stockholm

After Mass and breakfast at the Convent, Sister Karin took me on a tour of Old Uppsala, the site of the ancient pagan temple, three burial mounds of Viking chiefs, and of the first cathedral, in the time of St. Eric, King and Martyr. She dropped me off in the home of the Rev. Jan Bystrom, and I said thank you and goodbye to Sister Karin. A doctoral student from the University of Uppsala, Michael Isaakson, joined Fr. Jan and me for lunch. Fr. Jan is a chaplain

of students and Director of the Institute of St. Anskar, and Michael is writing his dissertation on St. Ignatius of Antioch. They introduced me to academic and ecclesial Uppsala, with tours of the Cathedral and University. At the train station Michael handed me over to Fr. Folke Olofsson, Vicar of Rasbo and Dean of the Uppsala region of the Free Synod. Fr. Folke is a theologian and a pastor, and is the author of Where Is the Church of Sweden Going? It was a treat to meet his family and stay with them, and experience the culture from within the families with whom I stayed. After a tour of his 13th Century church we talked until the wee hours of the morning, and his most urgent wish was that Bishop Morse could visit him right away.

The next morning, Thursday, we continued to swap notes and see his satellite parish nearby. Fr. Sverker Tronet, Dean of the region of Strangnas, arrived for lunch, after which we headed for Stockholm. He has excellent connections with the Roman hierarchy. We saw the Cathedral in Stockholm, the University, and the parish Fr. Goran Beijer was serving, until he was restricted to one mid-day Mass per week. In fact, we arrived in time to see him before that very Mass, and discuss our plans to meet again in London in the coming week. Fr. Sverker and I made for the train station, and I boarded a train for Linkoping, some 100 miles to the southwest, to meet up with Fr. Niklas Adell.

Linkoping and Vadstena

Fr. Niklas is Pastor of St. Hans Kyrka in Linkoping, and Dean of that region. He and his son got me at the station, and during dinner with his family, we laid out the itinerary for the next couple days, and discussed many matters – the Missouri Synod Lutherans, for example, who want to be catholics, and have bishops, and also of a meeting he had helped organize in 1997 for the Free Synod in Linkoping. The attendance was expected to be just a few hundred; over 2,000 came. Fr. Hans can get things organized. After the Friday morning Mass in his splendid modern church we had coffee in the parish hall with the staff and some parishioners of this lively parish in a newly developed part of town.

We headed for lunch on Friday to nearby Vadstena, to the Shrine of St. Bridget, to meet the Vicar emeritus of Vadstena, Fr. Goran Grefback. I learned of the Pope's pilgrimage to the Shrine in 1989, and how, more recently, he proclaimed St. Bridget to be a Patroness of Europe. St. Bridget was one of the leading lights of the Church in Sweden in the 14th Century. She and her husband had eight children, and after he died, she founded two cloisters, one for men and one for women. Vadstena has been a place of pilgrimage ever since. Fr. Niklas and I talked on the way home about the need of the Free Synod for its own bishop, and how a consecration of such a bishop should take place in the Shrine Church. The name of the Archbishop of Riga, in Latvia, came up, as a bishop who perhaps could help with such a consecration, along with Bishop Gartner and Archbishop Morse.

That evening, back in the Adells' home, there were three local priests over for supper, and we spent hours going over the plight, or dark night, of the Church, and how to move the present situation along – to utilize every possible source of tangential energy, every possible fulcrum, every prompting of the Holy Spirit.

Lilla Edet and Goteborg

It was time on Saturday morning to say goodbye to the Adells and go by train about 120 miles southwest to Goteborg, Sweden's second largest and most industrial city. Another of the regional deans, a young priest named Fr. Rolf Pettersson, met me and took me some 40 miles north to the Fuxerna Kyrka in Lilla Edet, a small industrial town where he is the curate. After meeting his wife and family, we talked about his situation, and the real issues to be faced in setting up a consecration of a bishop for the Free Synod. How, for example, would such a bishop be supported? He had recently been in Rome with the other regional deans to pour over all these matters. That afternoon we went to his 18th Century church, with masterful, exquisite renovations and awesome icons, for a typical Saturday afternoon Baptism, at which there were about 40 family members. As in all the Synod parishes, the fidelity and hard work of the clergy bear fruit in congregations which are growing stronger.

On Sunday morning, October 24, I met the Pastor, and was asked to concelebrate with him and Fr. Rolf. The Mass was beautiful in every way, and I felt I was part of a really solid eucharistic community. The plan for the evening was to visit Goteborg and see one of the lay leaders of the Free Synod, Ulla Ericson, who recently was dismissed from the work she was doing for the official Diocese. We went to a parish church near the University of Goteborg, the Buros Kyrkan, for an evening Mass. Not too long ago, Fr. John Paul Westin, SSC, now in Wisconsin, spent four years there, and he and I are in touch.

There must have been over 100 students at the Mass, and dozens of faculty members, and young families, and a young priest whose sermon was so special that knowledge of Swedish was not necessary to be moved by it. Ulla and I drove back to the Petterssons for supper, and time to reflect. The next morning I was to fly to Gatwick Airport, and in the remaining hours, Fr. Rolf and I agreed that we could work to overcome the obstacles in the way of an episcopal consecration. Bishop Gartner could not see me on this trip, because of a conference, but in due course we would all be in touch. Yes, we are vulnerable, but our whole trust and confidence is in God, our heavenly Father. And his saints, like Bridget, are praying for us.

I said to Fr. Rolf that the past week had been like being given a room-sized loaf of bread to eat. That reminded him of the angel that showed Elijah the bread he must eat, after the contest on Mt. Carmel with the prophets of Baal, and Elijah's flight from Jezebel. Elijah just wanted to die. "And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat...and again the second time, Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for thee." On he went, in the strength of that meat that foreshadows our Eucharist, forty days and forty nights, to Mt. Horeb, and to the still small voice of the Lord, and to the new order God intended for His people.

Forward in Faith, and on to England

I flew to Gatwick on Monday morning and went right away for a couple days of hibernation to the Monastery of the Holy Trinity, in Crawley Down, a few miles south of the Airport. This Monastery is the Church of England's one contemplative order for men, and is signed on with

Forward in Faith. Fr. Peter the Guestmaster and I took a train into London on Wednesday morning, to register for the Forward in Faith Synod, along with over 800 other priests. Fr. Geoffrey Neal and I met up, and it was possible that afternoon to sit down with Fr. Goran Beijer, the priest from Stockholm who had been virtually thrown out of his parish. We were able to go over some of the concepts of how a Free Synod bishop would function in Sweden. For example, a parish that invited our bishop in could be cut off. So the invitation would come from a "free eucharistic community" or *koinonia*, which might be coterminous with the parish. In the International Synod, reports from various countries were made, and I spoke briefly about the Province. There was genuine appreciation from many quarters about the stability of the Province, for the tone of its life, and its growth this past year. Fr. Neal and I shared the same goal: to widen the door that has been opened to the Province, and to help those who want to visit us now to do so.

One evening, after the proceedings, Bishop Broadhurst and his wife invited Fr. Neal and me back to their home for drinks. Fr. Sam Edwards was there, from Forward in Faith in North America. The fact that we talked for four hours indicated the interest that has built up in the Province of Christ the King, now that we are more visible. There is genuine interest in us, and in learning more about us, and seeing how the hard line we have taken in the United States is benefiting everyone.

One bishop who would like to visit the Province is the Rt. Rev. Paul Richardson. I served in Wandsworth, London in the early 70's in the parish next to his, and we became friends as well as colleagues. He left London shortly after I did, to be a chaplain in Norway, and then, in Papua New Guinea he was consecrated a bishop, later served a diocese in Australia, and is now in Newcastle. I saw him for the first time in 23 years, and he made a presentation on our destiny in the Church that was absolutely crystal clear, learned and electrifying.

We can encourage others to come as well, to our synods, clericuses and to our Seminary. The door is open. An understanding of our hard line is growing, as is the interest in our life together. The hard line is serving us well, in matters of holy orders, marriage, liturgy, ecumenism, and our vision of the future.

Other features of the Synod and Assembly were a plea for unity from the Archbishop of Canterbury, many reports, and a keynote address from Fr. David Moyer, SSC, Rector of Good Shepherd, Rosemont, and President Pro-tem of Forward in Faith in North America. He spoke of the ordeal of the parishes that are still trying to break "out of Egypt" and find their way forward. Since I once served at Good Shepherd, Rosemont, it was fascinating to be simultaneously with the successor of my former rector, Fr. Rutler, and with my former vicar from Wandsworth, Fr. Neal.

The remainder of the trip was restful, at Turvey Abbey in Bedfordshire, a Roman Benedictine community two miles from the Neals. We went to Mass on Sunday, October 31, to a Forward in Faith parish in Wellingborough, St. Mary's, a masterpiece designed by Sir Ninian Comper, with a solid, growing congregation and a gifted young priest, Fr. Robert Farmer.

Conclusion

After returning home on November 2, it was possible to report to Fr. Dag Sandahl in Kalmar, Sweden, to thank him for what he set up, and to begin planning the next phase of our involvement. I also want to thank at this time everyone who so generously opened their homes and hearts, and offered time, and transportation, and thoughtful preparation.

I invited Fr. Dag to visit the Archbishop in the near future, to look at the possibilities before us.

We can also resume our contact with the Church in Latvia. The Archbishop's pectoral cross comes from the Dean of the Russian Cathedral in Riga, who was martyred by the KGB when they came through in the late 1930's. In March, 1992, at the Episcopal Heritage Church in Washington, D.C., we had a "Latvia Day" to honor the suffering churches of that region. Setting up this Sunday involved extensive contact throughout that Spring with the (then) Latvian Consulate and with their Center in Rockville, Maryland.

Through Fr. Dag, and Fr. Rolf, and others, we can be in touch with Bishop Bertil Gartner, now living near Goteborg.

Today, November 11, I am inviting Bishop Paul Richardson in Newcastle to visit the Province in May of 2000. One of the Provincial Episcopal Visitors, Bishop Michael Houghton, visited Archbishop Morse in Berkeley, California, last October. He will be in Philadelphia this May, and we will be in touch about that. Other "PEV's" also want to visit us, and diaries are being prepared.

News of our Seminary in Berkeley, St. Joseph of Arimathea Anglican Theological College, is being spread abroad, for the training of men for the Priesthood in any of our churches. Ordinands in Sweden are looking for a way forward.

This Report is now sent to everyone I visited, to open up more extensive intercontinental communication, and as a token of gratitude for the warm and gracious hospitality of the churches in Sweden and the United Kingdom.

May all our life together in the Holy Spirit reveal the unity and splendour of Christ's Church, to the glory of God, the Father Almighty. Amen.