

A REPORT ON A VISIT TO THE FREE SYNOD OF THE CHURCH OF
SWEDEN AND THE MISSIONARY PROVINCE
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Stockholm: the St. Stephen's Koinonia

This year's trip, with twelve days, was a blessing. There would be time for sightseeing and relaxed visiting, as well as a round of meetings and conferences. The Beijer's were gracious hosts for the Stockholm leg, and they live in the center of the city. Fr. Göran's tour of Gamla Stan, Skansen and the changing of the Guard at the Royal Palace was unforgettable. One evening Fr. Göran took me to the Koinonia of which he is the Pastor, St. Stephen's, for a meeting of the Board, a solid and lively group. Their first taste of adversity was to begin in an excellent location in a very suitable chapel, only to be forced out, to meet where it would be harder to grow. St. Stephen's is active in the new Missionsprovins, to spearhead a jurisdiction that will continue an orthodox witness for Swedes. Later on Fr. Göran took me to St. James in Stockholm, where he was the Vicar, until forced out for his witness for the Faith. On a Wednesday he celebrated the only Mass still permitted him at St. James, with over twenty in attendance.

Alsike: the Sisters of the Holy Spirit

These sisters not only helped restore the Religious Life in Sweden, they are now pioneers in setting up the Mission Province. An afternoon chat with Sisters Marianne, Karin and Ella, revealed that a Pentecostal pastor in Linköping, Peter Haldorf, is writing extensively on the fathers of the undivided

Church, showing the patristic understanding of life in the Holy Spirit, in books such as Drink Deeply of the Spirit. John Zizioulas, a Greek Orthodox, deals with this theme in his Being as Communion. After supper Sister Karin led a choir practice in the Parish Church next door, and it was good to see how the Parish Church and Convent live and work side by side. The next day we drove to the annual Church Union Conference in Uppsala.

Uppsala: the Church Union Conference

The theme of this year's three day Conference at the University was "He has made us and we are His: on the call to live in the Swedish Church." The Church Union is analogous to its namesake in England: a well established group for continuous education and renewal of clergy and laity in Catholic Faith and Practice. Some nine lectures, seven seminars and a number of sermons were given, touching on liturgy, prayer, theology, Scripture, ecclesiology, and mission. When Dr. Folke Olofsson, a Docent of the University and Vicar of Rasbo, spoke on the Church's basic structure, he presented an icon of Mary holding the infant Jesus, His cheek pressing against hers. That point of contact between Mother and Son shows us everything we need to know about the Church.

Another highlight of the Conference was the opportunity to meet the nearby Benedictines; it will be important to visit them on the next trip. I met Sister Gerd Swensson, who is very knowledgeable about both the churches in Sweden and England. She would like to see the spread of the Society of the Holy Cross, a secular institute for orthodox Anglican priests, to traditionalist priests in Sweden. As a priest of the Society, I gave her encouragement with this. Among many other new acquaintances was Birgitta Peterson, a physician who lives in New York and spends time in Sweden, and helped me with translations.

THE MISSION PROVINCE

On Saturday afternoon Sister Marianne and I left the Conference to go to Stockholm, to attend a steering committee meeting of the Mission Province, comprised of over a dozen people, clergy, lay and religious, and chaired by Fr. Bengt Birgersson, Mission Secretary and Professor of the School of Theology in Göteborg.

The Mission Province is a natural outgrowth of the Free Synod, and can relate to it as a reconnaissance unit that guides the infantry. The bishops who help the Mission Province will come initially from abroad, from Kenya, for example. And the Missouri Synod in the United States is increasingly active in assisting traditionalist Lutherans not only in Latvia but now in Sweden. Creative possibilities as well as tensions are found in the Mission Province's coalition of three strands from Swedish Church life: the high church, the evangelical/confessionalist and the pietistic, or we might say, charismatic.

I was asked to give a report on our experience with the continuing church movement in the United States and its relationship with Forward in Faith/UK and Forward in Faith/NA. We can now see the possibility of one province in the United States for all orthodox Episcopalians, that together with the Mission Province, FiF/UK, and the Nordic Catholic Church, can journey through the wilderness to our convergence with Rome and Orthodoxy.

After the meeting there was a treat at the Beijers' of an authentic Swedish supper, and the next morning I took an early train back to Uppsala to the Church Union's High Mass at the Cathedral, where I was invited to concelebrate. That afternoon Fr. Folke Olofsson picked me up for the short trip to Rasbo, his Parish.

RASBO: THE ANCIENT PARISH

It is a pleasure to visit the Olofssons. On Monday afternoon we had a long walk in the Nordic countryside, and in a copse of fir trees found some mushrooms which Ann cooked with the supper. The Parish that Fr. Folke

serves was founded in the early middle ages, and is the Church in that place. As priest, pastor, theologian and poet, he has ministered there, and also the wider Church, with his lectures and published works. A collection of Fr. Folke's poems is now available in the bookstores.

The mission of the Rasbo prästgård, and parishes like it, is to the people who live there, and there is a primary school for the children. Such parishes can also serve as ballast in the hull of the Free Synod and the Mission Province. They can be a steadying influence, with orthodox priests at the helm, and can be launching pads into places like Uppsala. On Tuesday morning I took a train to Göteborg, to meet up with Fr. Rolf Pettersson.

GÖTEBORG: ST. PAUL'S

Fr. Rolf is now the Curate at St. Paul's, a newer parish born of the industrial revolution in Sweden's second largest city, and Scandinavia's largest port. During the tour of St. Paul's, Fr. Rolf explained that the Parish is what we would call "Prayer Book Catholic," and is large, active and well-led; the Vicar is a solid believing priest, Fr. Stig Andersson. The place had the feel of a genuinely Christ-centered community, and one weekday evening Mass had a large congregation. There is an abundance of ministries and missions flowing out of St. Paul's, which would make the Parish's patron proud. One of Fr. Rolf's ministries is, with Fr. Göran, to edit the Svensk Pastoraltidskrift, a bi-monthly orthodox journal for the Church.

We drove to the Petterssons' home in Lilla Edet, about 30 miles to the north, for supper. Fr. Rolf and Kiki have three children, Erik, Mikael and Karolina. Learning Swedish was made easier by the discovery of Erik's comic books, (Calvin and Hobbs among them) and one evening the family presented me with the Swedish keyboard now in use for this report. Kiki, who works in the local library, brought immensely helpful videos made for immigrants.

GÖTEBORG: SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

On Thursday Fr. Rolf took me back to Göteborg for lunch with Fr. Bengt Birgersson of the School of Theology (Peter Isaac Béens Utbildningsstiftelse), which is serving the Mission Province as a Seminary. The School is in rented facilities alongside the University, in a busy part of the city. There was an opportunity to meet the Rector, Dr. Rune Imberg, and faculty and student members. There are 15 full time students. Dr. Jeffrey Gibbs of the Missouri Synod also visited the Seminary recently and said,

The...Church of Sweden is thoroughly infected with skepticism and liberalism. I was told that pastoral candidates need not believe in the deity of Christ...but as He ever does, God has preserved for Himself a remnant in the Church...The faculty and the students at the Lutheran School of Theology in Gothenberg are part of that believing remnant of genuine Lutheranism that still seeks to serve and reach out with a pure Law and Gospel message. They are eager to study the Holy Scriptures. So I went and lectured on the gospel of Matthew...Our friends and fellow confessors in Gothenberg live in a thoroughly secularized society...their faith is under pressure, and their devotion is one that is being tested by fire.

After returning to Lilla Edet with Fr. Rolf, we had supper and a quiet evening for reflection on what the Holy Spirit is doing in Christ's Body, to gather the remnants in the wilderness, where He can, through fiery trials, prepare us for the Promised Land. Early the next morning Fr. Rolf drove me to the airport in Göteborg, for a flight to Newark by way of Oslo. In October, at the Forward in Faith Assembly in London, it will be possible to meet again with Fr. Roald Flemestad of the Nordic Catholic Church in Norway, and with Fr. Göran Beijer.

CONCLUSION

Cold gnostic darkness has spread over significant portions of the Western Church and perhaps the "rule of thirds" applies, and a third of the heavenly lights have been extinguished (Rev. 8:12). It sometimes seems that a third are faithful, a third are in rebellion and a third are indifferent. Regarding the established state churches and the main line churches, the rebellion against Catholic truth and order can be so entrenched that we are driven to Jeremiah 19 for a parallel. The destruction of Jerusalem was set in motion when God told Jeremiah to break the pottery flask. The realignment of the churches is well under way, and the issue is the Incarnation. Those who believe that Jesus is God in the flesh are lining up on one side, and those who deny this, and seek to re-define human nature, and foment the culture of death, are lining up on the other. In many churches the gnostics are dominant and totalitarian.

In the Church of Sweden, as in the Episcopal Church, sophisticated, high-tech gulags are well-established, to marginalize and eliminate all opposition, and the gnostics are becoming more brazen. Meanwhile, the orthodox remnants are finding ways to connect with each other, and our convergence point is going to have to be the consensus of the undivided Church of the first millennium. When the Church was visibly one the creative juices could flow together, and we have suffered for lack of that since the Great Schism. 16th century confessional statements, as important as they are historically, are not going to hold us in the ferocious storms that are coming. We are facing issues of the early centuries of the Church's life, gnosticism and Arianism among them, and now the Lord is gathering His remnants. We can delight in discovering the remnants, the pious, the holy, the faithful in the land.

As we warm up our communications with the Greeks and Russians and other Eastern Orthodox bodies, we can work with them on the agenda set forth in Pope John Paul II's Encyclical *Ut Unim Sint*, "to reflect with him in light of Scripture and the earliest practices of the Church on ways to reshape the exercise of the Petrine

Office." (Robert George, "The Divisions We Must Sustain," Touchstone, Vol. 16, No. 6, p. 51) John Paul's encyclicals are just barely being unpacked, and his invitation in Ut Unim Sint awaits a coordinated response. The Eastern Orthodox will be setting much of the theological agenda of the 21st century. John Zizioulas' Being As Communion is, for example, a masterpiece on ecclesiology. Much of our practical agenda is going to come from Solzhenitsyn's Harvard commencement address.

The link that the Free Synod and the Nordic Catholic Church have built over the years with Forward in Faith UK is going to prove invaluable. In the United States, we are strengthening our link with FiF UK by sending over a dozen people to the Assembly in London in October.

The Missionary Province may find that the coalition of high church, confessionalist and pietistic elements is a blessing in disguise. The high church is the dogmatic and skeletal framework in the Body, the evangelical or confessionalist is the muscle, and the pietistic or charismatic is the heart. Our Lord is of course to be the Head. The devil wants to separate these elements from each other, and pick them off one at a time. In the saints, we see a fusion of all three. The Catholic Church includes all three. Dogma, missionary zeal and warmth of holiness are inseparable.

The Church's life and witness, in its fullness, will entail a synergy between the parish, the diocese, the seminary and the religious life. It is very important that we try to keep all four working dynamically together.

An issue that has troubled us in the United States is the relationship between the continuing churches and the group that wanted to stay inside and fight (FiF/NA). Our movement, at its most creative, would opt for a model that sees the continuing churches as reconnaissance units, and those still inside as the infantry. Those of us in the continuing churches could be the trail blazers, charting a course forward,

mapping the mine-fields, shielding the infantry, and passing intelligence back to the main body of the army. They too need to find a way forward, out of Egypt. In World War II the Free French resistance often worked with those who out of necessity appeared to collaborate, but would offer their basement for a printing press or their attic for a radio transmitter. The Missionary Province may find the recon/infantry metaphor useful in its relationship with the Free Synod.

An issue that troubled us even more in the US was the fracturing of our movement from the outset. We made great strides in building parishes, dioceses, training programs and summer camps, but we let ourselves split over what kind of body we should be, and what standards we would have. And there were personality clashes and misunderstandings. In the UK the faithful have gone forward more slowly, but they have stayed together. Working with them is helping us in our goal of having one province in the US for all who share the same convergence point with FiF/UK.

May I take this opportunity to thank all those who made my visit possible - gracious hosts, benefactors, counselors, colleagues, and my Parish, for releasing me for this work of stirring the pot and building bridges.

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