

A REPORT ON A TRIP TO THE CHURCH IN SWEDEN

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The Rev. Paul C. Hewett, SSC

Rector, Church of the Transfiguration, Phoenixville,  
Pennsylvania

Anglican Fellowship of the Delaware Valley, Diocese of  
the Holy Cross, Forward in Faith/UK

Sunday, July 18. Flying into the light on a Sunday evening is fascinating. As the plane heads northeast from Newfoundland the sun is setting over the east coast of North America, but will soon rise in the higher latitudes as we head toward Scandinavia. In our life in Christ we are always moving from the darkness to the light. Our feasts begin as vigils, at sunset, so that we can move toward the rising of the Son of Righteousness, the Daystar dawning in our hearts.

Monday, July 19. At Arlanda Airport, near Stockholm, a rented car is waiting. On this trip there is the excitement of learning how to find one's way on Swedish roads, and of having complete mobility. Traffic is light and driving is a pleasure. There will be time to disappear into some remote villages, and to hike around.

The first stop is near the Airport: the Alsike Kloster of the Holy Spirit Sisters, pioneers of the religious life in the Church of Sweden. The Convent, next to the Parish Church, is a converted school, and houses at any given time a number of immigrant families who have sought refuge in Sweden. This year there are Muslim families from Albania, who will never forget the gracious hospitality and kindness of the Christians who took them in. Parents and children all help with the chores, and the modest convent buildings and routine are organized and peaceful. Upon arrival there is time to chat with Sisters Marianne and Ulla while they prepare spinach leaves for a big salad. There is also time at meals to meet some students staying there, and to talk about the great realignment in the Western Church. It is marvelous now how orthodox African

bishops, Anglican and Lutheran, are helping us in Sweden and in the United States. Orthodox Christians from various backgrounds are discovering one another and cooperating in creative ways in the face of the gnostic onslaught and the culture of death.

Tuesday, July 20. While driving south to Linköping it is necessary to get some gas. Here is a new challenge, another little "discontinuity." The pumps are different. There is one row of pumps for credit cards and another for cash. As Murphy's Law would dictate, I drive into the wrong one, discover this, and go to the pumps that allow for credit cards. The card is not inserted in the pump, as we would do, but into a remote kiosk which services a row of pumps, and has to be found. The first credit card is rejected. The second is accepted, but the computer wants to know the number of the pump. A man in the line now forming behind me says to punch in the number. Since I don't know the number I walk back to the pump. By the time I return to the kiosk the computer has forgotten about me and I have to start over again. The request for service is accepted! It is time to say grace, just as at a meal, and thank God that there will soon be gas in the car and the trip can be resumed.

A quick tour of Linköping Cathedral erases these awkward moments, and Vimmerby, in Småland to the south, is charming. This is Astrid Lundgren's world, where the famous authoress of children's books made her home. It proves possible to find a good hotel, in front of which is the market square. A play of a scene of one of Astrid Lundgren's books is being put on by local youngsters and a band, with a good crowd of bystanders. The Library is a block away and copies of Lundgren's books are available, where one can delight in reading at one's level of Swedish. After supper at a neighboring hotel there is time for a good walk around Vimmerby - it doesn't get completely dark till after 10.

Wednesday, July 21. A few kilometers west of Vimmerby is a most impressive 13th century church, the Pelarna Kyrka...small, with clean medieval lines on the outside,

and a remote bell tower. The interior lines are a charming, simple baroque. The country lane next to the church affords a walk in some fragrant northern woods. The goal now, and the centerpiece of the whole trip, is the annual Pilgrimage of the Society of St. Bridget at her convent in Vadstena, now to the northwest, on the enormous Lake Vättern. On the way it is possible to see the Alvastra Kloster, the ruins of a medieval Cistercian Abbey that was closed during the Reformation. A play is being rehearsed on the site. In the middle ages there was a living network of religious houses scattered around central Sweden. The one in Vadstena is now restored, and the others are stops on various pilgrimages throughout the year.

Now there is some difficulty in finding a place for the night, but driving in Motala, near Vadstena, out of the corner of my eye, I just catch sight of a sign with "B & B" and a Santa Claus ("Tomte") on it, so I turn around and drive back to it, and am offered a nice room. The proprietor describes a good path into the woods just behind, and during an evening walk, with darkness falling and everyone in bed, one lens pops out of my eyeglasses onto the dirt path below. There is an old saying about times like this: "offer it up." By some miracle the tiny screw does not fall out of the frame, and back in my room it is barely possible, with a piece of broken razor blade, to cobble the lens back into place. Somewhere down the road a little screwdriver might turn up to tighten everything properly.

Thursday, July 22. A lavish breakfast of several courses is spread out, and the proprietor, who says to call him Mr. Fix, sees me now in clericals, and tells me how he knows the former Warden of the Shrine in Vadstena, Fr. Göran Grefback. He speaks of his extraordinary work in Romania and China as Santa Claus, to raise money for poor children. After his wife comes in we looked at mementos of their travels. Gabriel, a long term guest from Romania, describes his post-graduate studies in Sweden.

Now on to Vadstena, the Centerpiece of the Trip, "Sweden's Walsingham." The General Chapter of the Societas Sanctae Birgittae has already been meeting for a few days, so it is easy to catch up with Fr. Mikael Isacsson, one of the organizers, and now the Curate at the Fuxerna Kyrka in Lilla Edet. We drive my car to a room set aside in the nearby gymnasium dormitory, part of a complex of buildings in a complex of winding roads.

Fr. Bo Brander is the Father Confessor of the SSB and a Doctor of Theology in Lund, and he relates "how the SSB was started in the 1920's in response to a charge by Archbishop Nathan Söderblom to deepen the spiritual life of the Church of Sweden by...(i) highlight(ing) the rich spiritual life inherent in the Swedish tradition focused on the life and spirituality of St. Birgitta and (ii) ...deepening contact with Brigittine communities throughout the world and with corresponding spiritual movements in the Church of Sweden. SSB has the character of a Third Order and its priests as well as its lay members accept a Rule of Life. SSB is led by a Father Confessor and a lay Sister Superior and an Episcopal Visitor, who for 30 years was Bishop (Bertil) Gärtner. There are 250 members, some 100 of which are priests. There are meetings three times a year for conventual gatherings and the Annual General Chapter in Vadstena during the week of St. Bridget's Feast Day, 19 - 25 July. Many people beside the members of SSB usually attend the General Chapter, and for many of them this is a regular annual event of inspiration & encouragement. The Solemn Service on the Eve of the 23 July, which includes a Procession to the Shrine of St Bridget usually gathers more than a thousand attendants."

At the meals there is time for some good talks with Fr. Mikael, and a priest from Latvia who is with the Archbishop of Riga, Janis Vanags. They are making a solid witness for the Faith. A friend of Bishop Keith Ackerman is there, Fr. Steven Paul Tibbetts from Peoria, Illinois.

As we gather for supper I meet a pilgrim named Elin Backersten who provides some background on the fabulous musical by Abba members Benny Andersson and Björn Ulvaeus, "Kristina från Duvemåla", based on Vilhem Moberg's series of books in the 1950's on some of the families who emigrated from Småland to America in the 19th century (The Emigrants, The Immigrants, The Pioneers and The Last Letter to Sweden). The goal is to get a general idea where Kristina and her husband Karl Oskar came from in Småland. The tapes of this musical were surreptitiously placed in my suitcase during my first visit to Fr. Rolf and Kiki Pettersson in Lilla Edet in 1999 and with the discovery of these tapes back home I became captivated by them.

At supper I sit with Birgitta Peterson, a member of SSB. We met last year at the Church Union gathering in Uppsala, and again in New York at her home. She has been enormously helpful in providing lists of people to visit or contact. Her husband Ralph is the Pastor Emeritus of St. Peter's in Manhattan, only a few blocks from the Church of Sweden in New York, where in the early 80's the Pastor, Evert Olson, opened his doors to our mission church, St. Mary Magdalene. I meet Fr. Bo Brander, SSB's Confessor, and the Mother Superior, who had been teaching in Jerusalem for nine years. Before Compline, Birgitta Peterson introduces me to Fr. Dag Sandahl of Kalmar, and so I finally meet the priest who in 1999, with Sister Karin of the Sisters of the Holy Spirit, crafted my first itinerary to Sweden - an itinerary jam packed with excellent meetings and visits representative of all the currents and emphases flowing through the orthodox remnant.

After Compline Fr. Göran Grefbeck and his wife Birgit have a party from the Pilgrimage to their house for coffee. They know people in Wynnewood, Pennsylvania, for me to contact. It is now late. After an hour of walking around and around on winding streets in the gymnasium (junior college) complex, whose buildings all looked the same in the dark, I wonder whether I will find the car, and my lodgings. But at long last, there it is.

Friday, July 23. This is St. Bridgit's Day and the magnificent pontifical Mass with Bishop Gärtner. For over a generation now he has been the patriarch of the orthodox remnant, a much loved and respected man. The various liturgies are in the famous Convent Church, which is as large as many cathedrals, and was designed by St. Bridget herself in the 14th century. Her Shrine is inside, in the nave. Many hymns having either Swedish text or music are sung, along with some of our own English hymns, sung in Swedish, and a great deal of plainsong. It is explained to me that Swedish is a language that, in the Liturgy, almost demands to be sung. And it is amazing how easy it is to sing in another language.

Afterwards, an excellent walk around Vadstena enables three useful purchases: the screwdriver for the eyeglasses, pipe cleaners, and a children's book. Before supper that evening I meet Fr. Ola Larsson and some of his family from the Ängelstad prästgård in Ljungby in Småland, not far from Hinneryd. Many in my mother's family, the Carlsons, emigrated from Hinneryd, through Göteborg, to Providence, Rhode Island in the early 20th century.

I then meet Elin Backersten's uncle and father and we continue the discussion about where Kristina and Karl Oskar came from in Vilhem Moberg country, and now it is coming into focus, that "it's all about half way between Växjö and Kalmar...it's near the Johannes Forsch glass factory...go to the Växjö tourist bureau." It is becoming clear that next year's trip should (DV) begin in Copenhagen and work north through Lund (Fr. Bo), Kalmar (Fr. Dag), Vilhem Moberg country between Kalmar and Växjö, and Hinneryd, near Ljungby (Fr. Ola).

Supper that evening is formal, with Archbishop Vanags and Bishop Gärtner at the head table with Confessor Bo Brander. I sit with Fr. Tibbetts from Illinois and the Treasurer of SSB, an English priest, very active in Forward in Faith, who is in both the SSB and the Society of the Holy Cross and knows Fr. Geoffrey Neal. There is also a Swedish priest who is knowledgeable about the Royal Family.

Vespers and Compline are most impressive, with Archbishop Vanags and Bishop Gärtner sitting on thrones next to each other. The highlight of this Liturgy is the Procession to Shrine, with the bishops and many hundreds of clergy and laity singing in procession through the Convent Church and out into the Convent precincts, and back again into the Church, to the Shrine, for final prayers, alternated with readings from St. Bridget's writings, and a blessing from Archbishop Vanags. It is an honor to be asked to take part in this Procession.

At the Reception which follows I meet Fr. Robert Hart and his wife Hanna from Liverpool, England. Before moving to Liverpool Hanna had worked on the staff of the Svensk Pastoraltidskrift, an orthodox journal of theology, commentary and book reviews. Hanna processed the overseas mailings and recognized my name. We "swap notes" on the various responses of the orthodox communities in England, Sweden and America to the current crisis.

Saturday, July 24. I sit down for breakfast with the Harts, and with some students, one of whom draws a map on the back of a bank deposit slip showing the "exact" locations of Vilhem Moberg's home, Karl Oskar's farm, Kristina's home, Duvemåla, and the place where the movies, "the Emigrants" and "the New Land" (starring Liv Ullman and Max Von Sydow) was filmed. After a lovely walk along the shores of Lake Vättern it is time to drive to Stockholm, about 150 English miles to the northeast, to visit Fr. Göran Beijer.

I find Fr. Göran's apartment in old central Stockholm with no trouble, but modern security being what it is, see a keyboard at his front door, which I remembered from last year's visit, but did not have the code. Public telephones are scarce nowadays, which a tour around the block reveals. There! Up the hill! A Seven Eleven! The cashier points out a small phone, which requires a phone card, which I buy, and do not know how to use. After waiting on his customers, he

shows me, and Fr. Göran is home to tell me the code to let myself in.

Fr. Göran Beijer is a leader in the new Mission Province and the founding Pastor of the St. Stephen's Koinonia in Stockholm. The emerging Mission Province is the closest thing in Sweden to the jurisdictions of the Continuing Church in the United States, which declared with the Affirmation of St. Louis in 1977 that the corrupt and apostate "General Convention Church" was schismatic had broken from the Catholic Faith with the purported ordination of women. We are the life boats put out from a sinking Titanic; we are the DeGaulle Free French after the Nazi takeover of France. We are Reconnaissance in the Army of the Lord, the trailblazers and the eyes of the Infantry, those larger remnant communities groping for a way out of Egypt into the Promised Land. One Lutheran bishop who has come forward to help the Mission Province is Bishop Obara in Kenya. Fr. Göran and I walk to a Greek restaurant in Södermalm, perhaps in itself a prophetic act, since so much of our way forward is going to lie with the Greeks. We talk until the wee hours.

Sunday, July 25. St. Stephen's Koinonia meets in a retirement home chapel in Stockholm, and reminds me of the parishes I have started and served throughout the United States - a resolute nucleus of pioneers. Having spent two weeks with a number of our communities in America, Fr. Göran knows our situation and how to relate to it. It is serendipity, or Divine Providence, or both, that July 25 is celebrated in Sweden as the Feast of the Transfiguration, the Feast of Title of my own parish in Phoenixville. Fr. Göran invites me to read the Gospel, the account from Luke of the Transfiguration, and to concelebrate. At the coffee hour the congregation carries on in Swedish, which is actually very helpful to me. After Mass, Father shows me the beautiful cemetery where Greta Garbo is buried. Now I have seen, or been near, the tombs of three famous Swedish women: Lundgren, Bridget and Garbo. We then drive 10 miles to Drottningholmslott, the residence actually used by the Royal Family, and tour the theater and gardens. The day ends with a



hilarious French movie from the 50's, "Mr. Huillot," a figure reminiscent of Chief Inspector Jacque Clouseau.

Monday, July 26. En route to his stuga (cottage) in the country near Gunsta, east of Uppsala, we stop in old Sigtuna for a look at the medieval Maria Kyrke. Fr. Göran's wife, Mai, sets out a delicious lunch, and their daughter, son in law and granddaughter are also there. They recommend some reading: Göran Tunström's Juloratoriet. In the early afternoon it is time to go to the Östanbeck Kloster, the Benedictine monastery near Sala, about 70 English miles to the west. Fr. Caesarius, the Abbot, and I talk that afternoon. The Monastery is a rugged old school house with adjacent buildings. The daily Mass and Offices are offered with great reverence and it would be a pleasure to spend many days, or years, there.

Tuesday, July 27. There is time for two beautiful walks, shopping in Sala, and a long afternoon talk with Fr Caesarius. He invites me to give a talk to the Community in the Library before Compline on the great realignment as it effects us.

Wednesday, July 28. I am invited to concelebrate the morning Mass, and after breakfast and farewells, begin the 6 hour drive across Sweden to Lilla Edet, arriving around 3 pm, for a visit with Fr. Rolf and Kiki Pettersson and their three children, Erik, Mikael and Karolina. Fr. Rolf is now one of the curates at St. Paul's in Göteborg, about 25 miles to the south. I visited St. Paul's last year - a model parish in every way.

Fr. Rolf and I discuss the whole matter of marriage standards for bishops and clergy, and about the great challenge orthodox parishes face when their good vicars retire and they must be replaced in a system that gives no quarter to the orthodox - a kind of soft totalitarianism. Then there is the topic of the tensions between traditionalist groups. We adjourn to attend the 6 pm Mass at the Fuxerna Kyrka down the street, celebrated by Fr. Mikael Isacson. During our delicious bar-b-que the Petterssons describe more of

their recent parish trip to Germany, to visit the places associated with Martin Luther. And then Fr. Rolf points out the new solar panels on the south roof of his house, to augment the wood pellet heating system and to produce hot water.

Thursday, July 29. After breakfast, we drive to the coast for stroll; Karolina fishes for crabs. Before lunch back at the house, Fr Rolf talks about his study of feminist theology. All too soon it is time to say good-bye and drive to Märsta to a hotel next to the airport near Stockholm, for the trip home the next morning.

### Conclusions and action points

What is the Spirit saying to the churches? As we walk in the Spirit, we know in all things to "ask God first," to take every thing captive to obey Christ, to listen deeply, to create space, breathing space, before we say or do anything, or face any challenge. As we live ever more deeply in the Word, in the Sacraments and in the one great Tradition of the undivided Church of the first thousand years, we experience more of the organic wholeness of the Church, its oneness in Christ through time and space. We experience more what Chesterton called the "democracy of the dead," the Communion of Saints, and the truth of the Vincentian Canon, that the Catholic Faith is what has been believed in all times, in all places, and by all the faithful - "antiquity, ubiquity and consent."

In the United States the remnants of orthodox Episcopalians, in their various jurisdictions, are now rethinking and reappraising, at a deep level, our vocation. What is God calling us to be, and to do, and how are we to link up with others in the Body, at home and abroad...not just with other Anglicans but with the Polish National Catholic Church, the remnants in Scandinavia, and the great Churches of Rome and Constantinople? What role can we play to help the two lungs of the Universal Church, the East and the West, breathe together again?

Here in America, among orthodox Episcopalians, there are now many voices calling for one province for all who endorse the Affirmation of St. Louis. Serious discussions are opening up and practical steps are being taken throughout the land to pave the way for this. This September 16-18 a Rally is being held in Wilmington, Delaware, with Bishop John Broadhurst as the keynote speaker, to lay some groundwork and plan ways to work more closely together. In our 25 year sojourn through the wilderness, the tribes of Israel are beginning to think about becoming a confederation in the Promised Land. We are seeing that we have outgrown the jurisdictions that have got us this far; we are like lobsters that have outgrown their carapaces and are now molting. The support and encouragement coming from orthodox provinces in Africa have completely transformed our situation and made it possible to project a single new province in communion with them.

We will have to face the mistakes we have all made. The issue my own Diocese of the Holy Cross will put on the table is the marriage standard for bishops and clergy, and indeed, for all the people of God. We must all face this in the light of the faith and practice of other Catholics throughout the world. There may have to be some grandfathering, with this and other issues, but there can be little doubt that the Spirit is encouraging us to move toward more discipline, not less, and toward a more vibrant evangelism.

Those who want to be faithful to the call of the Spirit share the same convergence point: the consensus of the Church of the undivided first millennium, the Patristic Consensus, the "One Great Tradition." The magisterial reformers sought with this, and the Papal Encyclical, *Ut Unum Sint*, opens the way in our time. From now on those of us who have confessional statements should see them through the lens of the Consensus of the First Millennium.

One reason why the Consensus of the First Thousand Years is so important is because that is when all the creative juices of the Church were flowing together. As the Spirit works in our midst to more completely reveal the essential unity of the Body, we can see the tremendous gifts each of its two great halves can offer the other. The Orthodox will be recognized more and more as offering the cutting edge in theology for many generations to come...theology that helps the Western Church transcend the conflicts of the 16th century. The Western Church brings its genius for organizing, administering, defining, communicating and releasing apostolates for every need.

We know the call of God upon us as Anglicans to let Him build us up, and not be lost by absorption in the larger Body. Rome and Orthodoxy, at their best, do not want this either. English spirituality is a priceless treasure to the Universal Church, and we should work for the same relationship with Rome that the Orthodox will insist upon: autocephaly.

As orthodox Anglicans in the United States we have experienced a sometimes unhealthy tension between those who founded the Continuing Churches and those who stayed in the system to find another way. As it turns out, another huge way has opened up, through the involvement of orthodox Anglicans around the world, who finally saw what was happening here. The tensions are being overcome now, and they need not plague the remnant in Sweden, if we see that those who leave the system (or, more correctly, say that the system left them) are, in the Army of the Lord, the Reconnaissance. The larger groups who stay behind are the Infantry. The two go hand in hand. The former blazes a trail, maps out minefields and reconnoiters enemy positions. The latter are the bulk of the army which confronts the enemy. "Continuers," those who proclaim the apostasy of the system, are like the DeGaulle Free French, paving the way for the D-Day invasion of the Infantry. Both Recon and Infantry share the same convergence point: the One Great Tradition, breathed upon us by the Holy Spirit, who is moving dramatically now...overtaking us...and sweeping us along into His

paradigm. It is amazing to watch significant numbers of evangelicals and pentecostals swept along with us.

So the networking among us is accelerating, and that is as it should be, with increasing communication with the Nordic Catholic Church, the Polish National Catholic Church, the Mission Province, the Free Synod and the Church Union in Sweden, the Religious Orders, Forward in Faith/UK and NA, the Continuers, the AMiA, Rome, and Orthodoxy.

Some excellent reading on the Pope's 1995 Encyclical on ecumenism, *Ut Unum Sint*, is Olivier Clement's *You Are Peter, An Orthodox Theologian's Reflection on the Exercise of Papal Primacy*. There may not be an Anglican or Lutheran alive who could frame a better response to the Pope's invitation to re-examine the Petrine Office "in a new situation."

As St. Irenaeus did in the 2nd century with *Against Heresies*, we should know our enemy better than he knows himself. He studied the gnostics carefully. As those who are studying feminist theology make their researches and papers available to the wider Body, we will understand more clearly the radical and absolute contrast between wicca, the perverse attempt to bend God's will to ours and to redefine human nature apart from Christ, and the Spirit of sonship, by which we cry, "Abba, Father!" and God is all in all.

Feminist theology, based as it is on illusion and rebellion against God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, argues from a position of weakness, and so like all gnosticism, is aggressive and totalitarian. Orthodoxy, proclaiming from a position of strength, as the Mind of Christ, is firm but gentle, releasing us into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. One leads to the Whore of Babylon, the other to the Bride of the Lamb, without spot or wrinkle.

Talks with Rome are expanding. I became aware in Sweden of the Prolusio to the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity (PCCU) headed by Cardinal Kasper. It has been duly noted that top level Anglicans are

drifting away from rapprochement, and that the lower level talks are on course and "knocking at the door." These lower level talks are on course with the One Great Tradition, in terms expressed by Professor Ola Tjörhom of Stavanger, Norway, and President of the Förbundet för Kristen Enhet, and Moderator of a dialogue since 2000 which includes Bishop Bertil Gärtner and Bishop Anders Arborelius, the Roman Catholic Bishop in Sweden. The Cardinal's question is who is here our partner? Are events suggesting a two-speed ecumenism? An international consultation of 15 participants, including Professor Tjörhom, has been set up, to go till November, 2005, and an internet discussion group on the Cardinal's analysis and question, called Paratheke, will go till January 25, 2005.

Questions arise in Sweden about possible arrangements within the Church of Sweden, such as a free diocese, with some resemblance to the emerging free province in the Church of England. Meanwhile the Mission Province is moving forward as the Reconnaissance. The more the various facets of the orthodox remnant keep good communication with each other and work together, the better. Theologians like Peter Haldorf, the Pentecostal in Linköping who has discovered the Patristic Consensus and wrote *Drink Deeply of the Spirit* can be brought "into the loop," as we keep our ears open to what the Holy Spirit is saying to the churches. The convergence point for all fullness of life in the Body is the same: the consensus of the undivided first millennium, the One Great Tradition.

God's ultimate will for us is "the eternal victory of Christ over hell and death - all forms of death. The Church is the sacrament of the Resurrection, where the Holy Spirit transforms the realm of death into the realm of breath, which here and now can make us living beings." (Ignatius IV, Patriarch of Antioch, *The Resurrection and Modern Man*, SVS Press, p. 7)