

Catholicism in Sweden

Embodying the Church of Mission

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Introduction: Catholic Revival within the Swedish Religious Landscape

The Swedish religious landscape is full of contradictions. On the one hand, Sweden is described as one of the most secularized countries in the world. And, according to some measures, it is – religious participation is at an all-time low and only about 19 % of the population see themselves as religious,¹ religious schools are frowned upon,² religion itself is rarely discussed and is established as a category of otherness, often treated as odd and out-dated,³ and, at least in principle, public expressions of religiosity remain objectionable.

On the other hand, Sweden, similarly to neighbouring Denmark and Norway, falls under the so-called “Scandinavian paradox”.⁴ Although the Swedish state parted ways with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Sweden

1. Kancho Stoychev, *Voice of the People 2015*, Zurich 2015, 135.

2. See, for example, Per Dannefjord, Emilia Ericson & Ulf Gustafsson, “Religiösa skolor leder till segregering”, *SVT Opinion* 2016-07-01, <https://www.svt.se/opinion/replik-religionsfrihet>, accessed 2020-07-31; “Debatten om religiösa friskolor”, *Svenska Dagbladet* 2020-05-28, <https://www.svd.se/om/debatten-om-religiosa-friskolor>, accessed 2020-07-31.

3. Kerstin von Brömssen, “Reflections on Pupils’ Talk about Religion in Sweden”, in Marie Carlson, Annika Rabo & Fatma Gök (eds.), *Education in “Multicultural” Societies: Turkish and Swedish Perspectives*, London 2007, 141–159; Karin Kittelmann Flensner, *Religious Education in Contemporary Pluralistic Sweden*, Gothenburg 2015; David Thurfjell, *Det gudlösa folket: De postkristna svenskarna och religionen*, Stockholm 2016.

4. Peter Lüchau, “Atheism and Secularity: The Scandinavian Paradox”, in Phil Zuckerman (ed.), *Atheism and Secularity: 2. Global Expressions*, Santa Barbara, CA 2009, 177–196.

in 2000, the latter is still a majority church, responsible for several public duties, such as burials and maintenance of graveyards. Political parties can still influence church elections, and, as some argue, since the break of formal ties, the politicization of the Church of Sweden has increased.⁵ Historically religious symbols and rituals are also visible everywhere – from the cross on the flag and Christian public holidays to celebration of St. Lucia in many workplaces.

While the membership rates of the Church of Sweden went rapidly down from 82,9 % in 2000 to 57,7 % in 2018,⁶ several factors contributed to the increase in the percentage of other faiths, thus radically pluralizing Swedish society. Among the quickly growing “newcomers” are the historically oppressed Catholics, who began their revival in the twentieth century, mainly due to immigration, and, to a minor extent, conversions. In the span of the last two decades, the number of Catholics in Sweden nearly doubled and is currently estimated at around 150,000.⁷ Furthermore, although they remain a small percentage of the Swedish population (c. 1,5 %), their presence in public discussions is much more significant.

In this article, I will analyze the changing role of the Swedish Catholic Church both locally and within the global Church, presenting the Diocese of Stockholm and new Swedish Catholicism as an embodiment of the turn towards the “Church of Mission”. The Second Vatican Council initiated this turn and developed it in papal documents such as *Redemptoris Missio* and *Evangelii Gaudium*. In conclusion, I will compare the Swedish approach with that of places where Catholicism is slowly losing its established position, considering it as a possible model for further renewal and development.

The Diocese of Stockholm: Small and Large at the Same Time

Sweden has been described as a Catholic “periphery” in the media coverage,⁸ and, looking at the number of Catholics and the secular posi-

5. Anders Ekenberg, “The Church in Sweden: Secularisation and Ecumenism as Challenges”, *Polonia Sacra* 20:2 (2016), 23–45; Ulf Ekman, “The Reformation’s Divisions Still Mark Sweden – as the Pope’s Visit Shows”, *Catholic Herald* 2016-10-28, <https://catholicherald.co.uk/the-reformations-divisions-still-mark-sweden-as-the-popes-visit-shows/>, accessed 2020-08-11.

6. “Svenska kyrkans medlemsutveckling år 1972–2019”, <https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/filer/1374643/Medlemmar%20i%20Svenska%20kyrkan%201972-2019.pdf>, accessed 2020-07-31. For more details, see Jonas Bromander & Pernilla Jonsson, *Medlemmar i rörelse: En studie av förändringar i Svenska kyrkans medlemskår*, Uppsala 2018.

7. See “Kyrkan i Sverige”, <https://www.katolskakyrkan.se/kyrkan-i-sverige>, accessed 2020-07-31.

8. John L. Allen Jr., “As Pope Francis Gives Sweden a Cardinal, What’s Behind His Scandinavian Push?”, *Crux Now* 2017-06-26, <https://cruxnow.com/analysis/2017/06/pope->

tion of Sweden, it is hard to argue that it is not. Since the Reformation, Catholics have been marginalized and between the sixteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries they could face deportation and even the death penalty. Only in the 1970s were the last anti-Catholic measures taken away. Even after that, waves of anti-Catholic sentiment have occurred with some regularity, balancing between views of Catholicism as either exotic or dangerous.⁹

Despite these problems, the position of the Catholic Church in Sweden seems to have been systematically improving since the Diocese of Stockholm was formed in 1953. Spanning across the largest surface area in Europe and comprising 44 parishes, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Stockholm received the status of registered religious affiliation in the year 2000, allowing it to, among other things, collect the so-called *kyrkoavgift*, which replaced the formerly collected “dissenters’ tax”.

During the 65 years of its existence, the Diocese of Stockholm has experienced two papal visits, first in 1989 by John Paul II (1920–2005), whose visit was part of a tour of the whole of Scandinavia, and again in 2016, when Francis came to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. Both visits received significant attention, but in a widely different manner: the first visit was broadly criticized, while the second was met with ecumenical hope on the Lutheran side, joy among the Catholics, and curiosity from the rest of the Swedish population.

Moreover, in these 65 years the status of the Stockholm diocese within the Catholic Church was strengthened. In 1998 Anders Arborelius became the first Swede to become a Catholic bishop in Sweden since the Reformation, diminishing the exotic status of Scandinavian Catholicism, and in 2002 the Apostolic Nunciature was moved from Vedbaek in Denmark to Stockholm. In 2016 Elisabeth Hesselblad (1870–1957), a Swedish Bridgettine, was canonized, and in 2017 Arborelius was offered a red hat, becoming the first Swedish cardinal in history and soon receiving the title of “Swede of the Year” from *Fokus* magazine.¹⁰

The Diocese of Stockholm is also involved in the ecumenical dialogue, primarily through the Christian Council of Sweden. As Arborelius has

francis-gives-sweden-cardinal-whats-behind-scandinavian-push/, accessed 2020-07-31; Joe Slama, “Cardinal Arborelius Shows the Church’s Scandinavian ‘Peripheries’”, *Catholic News Agency* 2017-06-28, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/cardinal-arborelius-of-stockholm-shows-the-churchs-northern-peripheries-33002>, accessed 2020-07-31.

9. See more in, for example, Yvonne Maria Werner, “‘The Catholic Danger’: Liberal Theology and Anti-Catholicism in Sweden”, in John Wolffe (ed.), *Protestant-Catholic Conflict from the Reformation to the Twenty-First Century: The Dynamics of Religious Difference*, London 2013, 166–187.

10. Johan Hakelius, “Årets Svensk: Anders Arborelius”, *Fokus* 2017-12-14, <https://www.fokus.se/2017/12/var-man-vatikanen/>, accessed 2020-08-02.

indicated, cooperation on the local level seems to be the most effective.¹¹ For example, in Lund, since the visit by Francis in 2016, the local Cathedral belonging to the Church of Sweden and the Catholic Parish of St. Thomas have held joint Vespers in each other's buildings. After renovation works began on its church in late 2018, the Catholic parish was offered to move temporarily into the Cathedral and celebrate Sunday Mass there. Father Johan Lindén, St. Thomas's pastor, stated that "this is not merely a practical solution but a fruit of the Holy Father's visit and the joint document 'From Conflict to Communion'".¹²

At the same time, several widely publicized conversions garnered bad press. Among them was that of Ulf Ekman, a pastor and the founder of the charismatic "megachurch" Livets Ord. His conversion was a huge surprise to many, as, over 25 years earlier, Ekman was among the fiercest critics of John Paul II's visit to Sweden. His conversion was therefore highly criticized as causing "pain and disillusion".¹³ Similarly, the conversion of some members of Stiftelsen Berget, a contemplative community offering retreats and meditation space, and the introduction of daily mass in the Catholic rite at their premises (alongside the Lutheran), received sharp critique from the archbishop of the Church of Sweden, Antje Jackelén.¹⁴

Despite the growing curiosity about Catholicism, there is also a problem with information about, and the "marketing" of, the Catholic Church in Sweden. In a book written with his wife Birgitta, Ulf Ekman pointed to a profound lack of knowledge and anti-Catholic resentment as some of the reasons behind their former aversion to Catholicism.¹⁵ In the wake of the sexual abuse crisis, a vast majority of news referring to the Catholic Church in Swedish media is also primarily negative, showcasing its crisis and corruption, and thereby strengthening anti-Catholic sentiments.

11. Karl Gustel Wörnberg, "Bishop Anders Arborelius Reflects on Being First Native Swede Named Cardinal", *Catholic World Report* 2017-06-09, <https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2017/06/09/bishop-anders-arborelius-reflects-on-being-first-native-swede-named-cardinal/>, accessed 2020-07-31.

12. Zita Ballinger Fletcher, "Sweden's Lutherans to Let Catholic Parish Hold Masses in Lund Cathedral", *Crux Now* 2018-04-10, <https://cruxnow.com/global-church/2018/04/swedens-lutherans-to-let-catholic-parish-hold-masses-in-lund-cathedral/>, accessed 2020-07-31.

13. Ruth Moon, "Conversion of Sweden's Most Influential Pastor Causes 'Pain and Disillusion'", *Christianity Today* 2014-03-14, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2014/march/sweden-pentecostal-converts-catholicism-ulf-ekman-word-life.html>, accessed 2020-07-31.

14. Ekman, "The Reformation's Divisions".

15. Ulf Ekman & Birgitta Ekman, *Wielkie Odkrycie: Nasza Droga Do Kościoła Katolickiego*, Kraków 2017, 201-204.

Shift towards the Church of Mission

In an article on the “Scandinavian push”, John L. Allen Jr. describes the growing role of the Diocese of Stockholm as a significant part of Francis’ broader strategy of the “Church of the Peripheries”, which aims to strengthen Catholicism in the most remote parts of the world, at least from the Catholic perspective.¹⁶ As Allen argues, Francis seems to be viewing the local Catholic Church in Sweden, which grows primarily through immigration, as more tuned-in to the needs of migrants and refugees, and thereby more likely to defend their rights. This found confirmation in the words of then newly installed Cardinal Arborelius.¹⁷ Allen also highlights Francis’ ecumenical interests, especially in the “world of the Reformation”, for which purpose Arborelius is expected to build bridges with more credibility and authority.

The last point was emphasized by Francis in an interview given soon after his visit to Lund. Talking with Ulf Jonsson, a Jesuit priest from the Catholic parish in Uppsala, Francis emphasized two things that Catholics can learn from their Lutheran counterparts: appreciation for reforms and deepened attention to Scripture.¹⁸ At the same time, Francis shared his thoughts on the balance between the ecumenical and pastoral aspects of Catholic leadership. As he stated, he had hesitated to celebrate a Mass for the Swedish Catholics because he wanted to remain open and ecumenical. However, as he reflected on his “role as pastor of a flock of Catholics”, he decided to celebrate a Mass after all, just moving it to another day than that of the commemoration of the Reformation. At the end of the interview, Francis reiterated his understanding of the “Catholic” as open and welcoming, not having rigid perspectives.

This approach might be seen as controversial and novel, but, as the gradual development of Catholicism in Sweden shows, Francis’ strategy is not a revolutionary change in approach. Instead, it is a continuation of the strategy that commenced during the Second Vatican Council. As Gerard Hall and Michael Muonwe argue, the Second Vatican Council offered the first significant shift from a colonially understood missiology towards a new understanding of what can be termed the “Church of Mission”, which should

16. Allen, “As Pope Francis”.

17. Carol Glatz, “Sweden’s First Cardinal Missioned with Promoting Church in Largely Secular Country”, *America Magazine* 2017-05-25, <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2017/05/25/swedens-first-cardinal-missioned-promoting-church-largely-secular-country>, accessed 2020-07-31.

18. Ulf Jonsson, “Interview with Pope Francis on the Occasion of His Apostolic Trip in Sweden”, *Ecumenical News* 2016-10-28, <https://www.ecumenicalnews.com/article/interview-with-pope-francis-on-the-occasion-of-his-apostolic-trip-in-sweden/54043.htm>, accessed 2020-07-31.

seek to engage continuously in a critical dialogue with all cultures.¹⁹ Furthermore, while some Catholic theologians may accuse John Paul II and Benedict XVI of a restorative approach,²⁰ this “missionary” line of thinking has been deepened by them as, for example, comprehensively described by John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio*. In this encyclical, John Paul II argued that Church activities should focus on three types of missions: addressing those who have never experienced Christ, bearing witness in established communities, and evangelizing anew regions that lost their faith.²¹

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Francis reaffirmed this direction, seeking the roots of the ecclesiastical renewal in its missionary character:

I dream of a “missionary option”, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelisation of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation. The renewal of structures demanded by pastoral conversion can only be understood in this light: as part of an effort to make them more mission-oriented, to make ordinary pastoral activity on every level more inclusive and open, to inspire in pastoral workers a constant desire to go forth and in this way to elicit a positive response from all those whom Jesus summons to friendship with himself.²²

To emphasize his message, Francis established October 2019 as an Extraordinary Missionary Month under the theme “Baptised and Sent: The Church of Christ on Mission in the World”, calling all Catholics, including laypeople, to reflect on their role in the missionary activities of the Church.²³

The Diocese of Stockholm, then, exemplifies Francis’ focus on the missionary and open character of the Catholic Church. First, it has a task of

19. Gerard Hall & Michael Muonwe, “Towards Integrative Christian Theology and Experience: Missiology, Inculturation & Practical Theology”, in Claire E. Wolfteich & Annemie Dillen (eds.), *Catholic Approaches in Practical Theology: International and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, Leuven 2017, 50–51.

20. Most significantly in Hans Küng, *Can We Save the Catholic Church?*, London 2013, 31–34.

21. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio: On the Permanent Validity of the Church’s Missionary Mandate*, § 33, https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio.html, accessed 2020-07-31. It must be noted, though, that the understanding of the term mission evolved over time and had a varying shape, with different points of emphasis, in each pontificate.

22. Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, § 27, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html, accessed 2020-07-31.

23. See “Baptised and Sent: The Church of Christ on Mission in the World”, <http://www.october2019.va/en.html>, accessed 2020-07-31.

re-evangelization in a country that seems to be gradually leaving behind its Christian roots. Second, it is called to be a witness to the welcoming character of the Catholic faith. Third, it is supposed to work towards the true “Catholicity” of the Church, bridging gaps between denominations. Fourth, it is supposed to represent Catholic diversity, universality, and missionary character through the fact that it has a significant presence of sixteen missions, ranging from Polish to Vietnamese. Fifth and finally, it is supposed to represent the renewed approach to inculturation by working with the best elements of Swedish culture.

The last point has been captured well by Arborelius in another interview:

Sweden has an open heart for questions between justice, peacemaking, [and] reconciliation. [...] On many issues, there is a common outlook, I would say. Of course, there are other issues that are more difficult, abortion and so forth, but there are issues where the Swedish society can show something beautiful.²⁴

Arborelius himself has a role to play in all that. As the Ekmans write, the death of an influential Lutheran bishop, Bertil Gärtner (1924–2009), created a leadership void among conservative Christians in Sweden. This role has been gradually filled by Arborelius.²⁵ Similarly, Federico Cenci points out that not only Catholics, but also “many other people who are not Catholic look to him as a moral and spiritual authority who works for peace and solidarity on the world level”.²⁶

Moreover, apart from leading the Christian conservatives, Arborelius speaks on behalf of all religious people. For example, in a recent letter written for the Feast of the Epiphany, he argued:

It is regrettable that those who have found the way to Christian faith are no longer shown acceptance and empathy in our country. [...] many signs point to a lack of respect for and understanding of those who believe and what they believe in. [...] In a pluralistic society like

24. Joshua J. McElwee, “New Swedish Cardinal Suggests High-Level Advisory Group of Women”, *National Catholic Reporter* 2017-06-28, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/people/new-swedish-cardinal-suggests-high-level-advisory-group-women>, accessed 2020-07-31.

25. Ekman & Ekman, *Wielkie Odkrycie*, 224.

26. Federico Cenci, “Interview: Bishop of Stockholm: ‘In Sweden, the Catholic Community Is Growing Every Year’”, *Zenit* 2016-10-24, <https://zenit.org/2016/10/24/interview-bishop-of-stockholm-in-sweden-the-catholic-community-is-growing-every-year/>, accessed 2020-07-31.

ours, we should be more careful not to create unnecessary tensions that build up walls and fuel division.²⁷

The Diocese of Stockholm also mirrored the work on behalf of religious people in a pushback against the proposed ban on religious schools.²⁸

Arborelius also represents a new face of the Church. He lauded the transfer of authority on liturgical translation to the local bishops, praising the strengthened role of the local Church. He proposed a new advisory body of women that was supposed to mirror the College of Cardinals, giving them an opportunity for participation in the Church's leadership. Finally, he emphasized the reliance on laypeople, stating that "in our countries, it's quite natural because we live in a very democratic society and you rely a lot upon the help of laypeople".²⁹ All of these have been a visible part of Francis' strategy.

The missionary character of the Catholic Church in Sweden is, finally, represented in the calling of individuals, who are supposed to be witnesses of faith in their everyday life. The fact that Francis supports the Catholic Church in Sweden seems to influence their possibilities of engagement positively. In the words of Arborelius:

This is a sign that the Catholic Church is truly part of Sweden, after centuries of marginalization and persecution. People are becoming more used to seeing Catholics in society. Until now, Catholics were more in the cultural and intellectual sphere, and very little in the area of political or social organization. But now, it's possible for a Catholic to reach these positions. The Swedish ambassador to Italy [Robert Rydberg], for example, is Catholic.³⁰

27. "Sweden: Card. Arborelius (Stockholm), 'Do Not Create Tensions That Build up Walls and Fuel Division'", *SIR* 2019-01-07, <https://www.agensir.it/quotidiano/2019/1/7/sweden-card-arborelius-stockholm-do-not-create-tensions-that-build-up-walls-and-fuel-division/>, accessed 2020-07-31.

28. Mary Farrow, "Catholics Decry Swedish Political Party's Plan to Close All Religious Schools", *Catholic News Agency* 2018-03-20, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/catholics-decry-swedish-political-partys-plan-to-close-all-religious-schools-58561>, accessed 2020-07-31.

29. McElwee, "New Swedish Cardinal".

30. Alexandre Francheteau, "A Hunger for Truth from the Only Region in Europe Where the Church Is Growing", *Aleteia* 2018-01-03, <https://aleteia.org/2018/01/03/a-hunger-for-truth-from-the-only-region-in-europe-where-the-church-is-growing/>, accessed 2020-07-31.

A Way of Renewal?

Sweden seems to exemplify the Church of Mission well, because it is not a Church of Possession. It is not connected to the national identity,³¹ it has no established position and is, therefore, less susceptible to corruption and political collaboration. While the local denominations with a historically strong standing have been accused of cultivating the culture of “clericalism”,³² a similar culture is largely diminished in a country where parishes are so far apart, priests are so few, and the laity has a significant say in all Church matters. Instead of looking to grow or retain its position, as Philip Geister put it, the Catholic community in Sweden may play the role of a “creative minority”.³³ Because of that, however, the Catholic Church in Sweden seems to be able to propose novel solutions and thereby can be used to offer at least some principles of renewal also in other parts of the world.

What seems to work well in the Swedish case, and could be reapplied elsewhere with ease, includes a greater inclusion of women (who serve, for example, as altar servers, lectors, and distributors of communion during Masses, a sight that would be difficult to experience in the neighbouring and overwhelmingly Catholic Poland), a more significant role of permanent deacons and a greater recognition of lay theologians, ecumenical cooperation that has real visibility (as in the case of Lund mentioned above), and interreligious work towards a common goal. Greater emphasis could also be put on the increased appreciation for modern culture in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council. Increased scrutiny of the actions of the Church management could be beneficial for transparency. The Diocese of Stockholm can, finally, provide a testing ground for re-evangelization, offering strategies of better inclusion.

Simultaneously, the Swedish approach is not without its vices. In Francis’ plan high reliance is put on the person of Cardinal Arborelius, which has its benefits but also its dangers (especially for those who, like Hans Küng,

31. As in the case of Poland, described in Magdalena Działkowska, “The Polish Case: Pedophilia, *Polak-Katolik*, and Theology of the Nation”, *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* 96 (2020), 235–251.

32. Cindy Wooden, “Clericalism: The Culture That Enables Abuse and Insists on Hiding It”, *Catholic News Service* 2018-08-22, <https://www.catholicnews.com/services/englishnews/2018/clericalism-the-culture-that-enables-abuse-and-insists-on-hiding-it.cfm>, accessed 2020-07-31; Jason Blakely, “Sexual Abuse and the Culture of Clericalism”, *America Magazine* 2018-08-23, <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2018/08/23/sexual-abuse-and-culture-clericalism>, accessed 2020-07-31.

33. Philip Geister, “Creative Minorities as a Starting Point of Theology”, public lecture delivered at the University of Hamburg 2019-10-10. The term “creative minority” was introduced in Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, Oxford 1934–1961, and later popularized in the Catholic context by Benedict XVI in many of his addresses.

see overreliance on leadership as strongly problematic).³⁴ The fact that he is presented as the leader of conservative Christians strengthens his position interdenominationally, but at the same time constitutes a point of polarization with the Church of Sweden and the Swedish state, diminishing and, on some occasions, hindering the possibility of working towards common goals, especially on a central level.³⁵

This is aggravated by a certain atmosphere surrounding conversions. Among the reasons for their change of denominational affiliation, former members of the Church of Sweden tend to allege the constancy, stability, and firmness in content of the beliefs represented by the Catholic Church, which they see as operating regardless of secularism.³⁶ Additionally, a few conversions have had a negative focus, with accusations directed against the Church of Sweden, for instance, that it is “tainted by atheism”.³⁷

The conservative/liberal polarization may also affect those Catholics who see themselves as liberal, and gradual evolutionary changes within the Church proposed by Arborelius may seem insignificant. For some of them, like poet Marcus Birro, the Swedish Catholic Church should lead the new wave of revolution, challenging Rome when it comes to celibacy, contraception, and homosexuality.³⁸ The pressure to conduct radical reforms has been even more emphasized since two cases of abuse of minors were reported in Sweden in April 2010. At the same time, traditionalist movements have their own presence, trying to pull the rope in the other direction.³⁹

There is also a certain one-sidedness in the Lutheran-Catholic relations, with Lutherans opening their places of worship, as in the previously mentioned Lund, or in Visby, where the pastor of the local Cathedral placed a bowl with holy water next to the entrance to make Catholics feel at home.⁴⁰

34. Küng, *Can We Save*, 37.

35. Christina Anderson, “Pope Francis, in Sweden, Urges Catholic-Lutheran Reconciliation”, *The New York Times* 2016-10-31, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/01/world/europe/pope-francis-in-sweden-urges-catholic-lutheran-reconciliation.html>, accessed 2020-07-31.

36. “Pope Heads to Sweden, Where Catholics Thrive after 500 Years”, *VOA News* 2016-10-28, <https://www.voanews.com/europe/pope-heads-sweden-where-catholics-thrive-after-500-years>, accessed 2020-07-31.

37. Catherine Marciano, “Pope Francis Holds Catholic Mass in Secular Sweden”, *The Local* 2016-11-01, <https://www.thelocal.se/20161101/pope-francis-greets-catholics-in-secular-sweden>, accessed 2020-07-31.

38. Marcus Birro, “Catholics in Sweden Must Challenge Rome”, *The Local* 2010-04-14, <https://www.thelocal.se/20100414/26070>, accessed 2020-07-31.

39. For more information about traditionalist movements, see Yvonne Marie Werner, “Protest i traditionens namn: Den katolska traditionalistiska rörelsen”, *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* 96 (2020), 253–272.

40. Henrik Radhe, “Katolsk flirt i Visby domkyrka efter 500 år”, *Helagotland.se* 2018-05-16, <https://helagotland.se/samhalle/katolsk-flirt-i-visby-domkyrka-efter-500-ar-15174860.aspx>,

At the same time, Catholics do not offer similar welcomes to Lutherans and remain ecumenically stuck in the joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. The lack of reciprocity in openness from the Catholic side can build resentment and, in the long run, backfire, causing the ecumenical relations to collapse.

The Diocese of Stockholm struggles, finally, with the formation of second- and third-generation Catholics, who follow their Swedish counterparts and move away from the faith of their parents, keeping it only as cultural baggage useful to mark the rites of passage and holidays. The “Church of immigrants” will need to find the best ways to attract its youth, giving them the adequate means to operate faithfully in the secular culture.

Despite all these problems, however, the Church of Mission seems to be a realistic way of renewal and development in the West, where Christianity gradually becomes a song of the past, as the Diocese of Stockholm is the only Catholic Church in Europe growing at a fast pace.⁴¹ Being as young as it is, it has already shown how significant it can be in the future of Catholicism, and it has only recently received means to work towards the strategy proposed by Francis. The coming years will show whether and how it will meet these challenges. ▲

SUMMARY

Since its establishment in 1953, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Stockholm has been growing at a fast pace, both due to migration and, to a minor extent, conversions. During that time its position has strengthened significantly, wearing off the historical resentments and becoming a significant interfaith agent. It also became an important periphery in Pope Francis' vision of the Church, which found its concrete expression in his visit in 2016. The article analyzes this changing role of the Swedish Catholic Church, both locally and within the global Church, presenting the Diocese of Stockholm and new Swedish Catholicism as an embodiment of the turn towards the Church of Mission. The article frames these developments in the context of the Second Vatican Council, which initiated such a turn and developed it in papal documents such as *Redemptoris Missio* and *Evangelii Gaudium*. In conclusion, the article compares the Swedish approach with that of places where Catholicism is slowly losing its established position, considering it as a possible model for further renewal and development.

accessed 2020-07-31.

41. The concept could perhaps also assist in finding an answer to the need for reform in countries such as Ireland, as described in Fáinche Ryan, “Consumerism Replaces Catholicism? The Case of Ireland”, *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* 96 (2020), 219–233.