

The door to ordination once again open

– About the Mission Province in Sweden

Secularization

In resemblance with almost all old Christians countries in the western world have Sweden undergone a process of secularization, but this surpasses probably most other countries. Nominal are approx 80% of the Swedish population members in Swedish church. But a modest part of it is active church Christians. Of these is only a less part conscious and concerned about the apostolic and the inheritance of the reformation, that the Swedish church of old is bearer of. The leadership of the church has on the area after area abandoned the biblical doctrine and genuine Christian life, which leads to an undermining of the church's identity as a church.

The ordination stop etc

One of the visible proofs on the church's deliberate dissociation from reformatory Christianity is the ordination stop that has lasted since October 1993. This ordination stop concerns all, that holds firm the apostolic order of office what goes for man and woman.

An other visibly evidence on the church's spiritual decay is this, that none of the bishops have on considerable years appeared with reference to God's words in any current question and maintained a classic Christian attitude.

A third sign of the spiritual decline, that the Swedish church is in, concerns the education of pastors that the church provides the candidates with.

The knowledge in biblical, apostolic and reformatory theology is today so deficient with the majority of them that are ordained to the church most important office, Verbi Divini Ministerium, that our people not can get correct answer on the life's most important matters.

The Mission Province is established

Around in our country exists however many Christians, that experience this situation as tremendously distressing. Both in individual conventions with good priests and in different revival- and confession movements exists the serious question how one shall behave in this emergency. Much has been written, many conversations have been made and many conferences have been organized. For a group with roots in different traditions have this taken to decision and action.

In January 2003 was an association of support established in order to found what we now call the Mission Province. Formally was the Mission Province established the 6 September 2003 in the intention to choose and consecrate three bishops in order to ordain pastors for work in the small assemblies, that church's emergency begun force front and for the work in the free organizations.

Episcopal ordinations

The question if Episcopal ordinations versus Presbyterian ordinations have been discussed lively. But despite dissimilarity in tradition and in approach on bishop and apostolic succession were we united about that Episcopal ordinations is the way for the Mission Province. In June 2003 met representatives for the Mission Province bishop Walter Obare from the Lutheran church in Kenya (ELCK) at his visit in Sweden. ELCK have grown front out of the missionary work, that begun for more than 55 years ago by the Swedish The Missionary Association Bible Faithful Friends "Bibeltrogn vänner" and later extended with several other Scandinavian missions.

In December 2003 was three bishops elected for the Mission province. Then had already the formal question been placed to bishop Obare, if he could think that he could support the Mission province through consecration acts. Bishop Obare invited later the representants for the Mission province to deliberations in Kenya in February 2004, deliberation, that now lead to the feast the 5 February that, that is described below.

In which church?

An important question is and have been what the Mission Province is and which church bishop Obare would consecrate Arne Olsson to bishop in. In the Statutes for the Mission province, that was fixed at the spring 2004 confirms, that "the Mission Province is a part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. It is a free province of the Church and Congregation of God in Sweden, on the foundation of the unchanged Evangelic-Lutheran Confession. It stands in continuity with the spiritual tradition which has been kept and developed in the Church of Sweden, and regards itself as a non-territorial diocese in it."

What applies for the Swedish church and its relation to the Mission Province can you build two different outlook. The church structure, that the Swedish church have according to its church order (KO2000), haven't got place for the Mission province. Seen out of that perspective is the Mission province an alternative church structure besides the Swedish church. But on other hand is the Swedish church much more and something other than the mentioned church order. Here exists the entire spiritual apostolically and reformatory inheritance, that constitutes the roots in our country. Here exist all the spiritual movements that are not submitted to bishops or Chapters, synods or church order. In this view is the Mission Province a part of the Swedish church.

Therefore claims the Mission Province its identity as a free province within the Swedish church (but not yet acknowledged).

The consecration

The original plan for the Mission province was that that bishop Obare would first come in order to ordain two candidates to pastors, which was thought to happen in October 2004. First at a later opportunity would he come in order to perform the consecration. But in august 2004 gave bishop Obare the Mission Province the advice, that he would come at a suitable time in order to consecrate a pastor to bishop, and that he in its turn would ordain the pastors of the Mission Province. Then becomes it apparent, that these are not Kenyan church's pastors.

The 5 February 2005 was the here for the festival, when bishop Obare assisted by four bishops could consecrate the first bishop of the Mission Province in the church like hall on Schillerska senior high school in Gothenburg. Then was the pastor Arne Olsson consecrated to bishop. Thereby was the Episcopal office restored in the Lutheran church in Sweden. One of the faithful Christians was elected shepherd and installed in his assignment. Its many decades since this last happened in Sweden, there politically elected bishops in ages gone in the states leading-strings.

At his side had bishop Obare four representants from the Lutheran church community: the South-African bishop in ELCSA David Tswaedi from Johannesburg, the Belarusian bishop Leonid Zviki, the Norwegian bishop in Strandebarm prosti, Børre Knudsen and the Norwegian bishop in DELK (The Evangelical Lutheran church) Ulf Asp.

The ordination

After the consecration conducted bishop Arne Olsson an ordination, then three young men was ordained to the office of the Word. Two Swedish pastor candidates and Finnish got as the first through the new opened door to ordination. Jan-Ulrik Smetana was ordained to service in the Missionary Association Bible Faithful Friends (MSBV), Gunnar Andersson to service within Ecclesiastical Association for evangelical Lutheran believe and Niko Vannasmaa to service in the Finnish Luther Foundations koinonia in Helsinki.

That a big group of scriptural- and orthodox Christians in Finland have sought connection with the Mission Province has become an important broadening of the work and a big encouragement for many Christians both in Finland and in Sweden.

The ordination was concluded with that that bishop Arne Olsson led morning service where he was assisted by the newly ordained pastors and some other pastors in the Mission Province and more than 400 persons was celebrating the Lords Holy Eucharist.

The future

About the future can you know no other than such that God's word reveals. Therefore knows none what kind of future the Mission Province have. On the other hand shall you make plans. To the plans belongs, that additional two elected bishops shall be consecrated, probably within a year. To the plans belongs also that at least additional five candidates shall be ordained to pastors within a year.

There are within the Mission Province a firm belief and assurance that there is the church's Lord that has heard its children's prayers and done the feast the 5 February feasible. Therefore exists also the assurance that there that what the Lord have begun shall he also accomplish.

Reactions

A fairly big, both Swedish and Scandinavian media coverage, made the event in Gothenburg known. An unexpected objectivity has characterized that reporting. On the other hand have Swedish church reacted very negative. Already the same day did the archbishop express his dissociation with that that was has happened have happened in another church than the Swedish church. Bishop Arne Olsson have also already by Karlstads Chapter been explained unauthorised to exercise office as a pastor in the Swedish church. More reactions are to wait.

Some voices within the so-called confession movement have been highly negative, since they consider among other things, that the Mission Province divides the Swedish church and makes it more difficult for the work for confession faithful pastors and other co-worker in the Swedish church. At the same time can we notice a growing understanding and respect from other confession movement that not actively participate in the Mission Province's work.

All depends on God's blessing

For many have the words from the psalmist been to a renewed topicality: "When the LORD brought back the captives to Zion, we were like men who dreamed. Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them." The LORD has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy." Psalt. 126:1-3). God have blessed God's people in Sweden and Finland with a bishop that believe in all God's words and is prepared to obey God more than people. God have blessed us with three new pastors. When these new pastors, along with them that follow in their tracks, goes out with God's gospel, then lies in this a blessing and a power from God.

It's crucial for us all is that the apostolic message of salvation may reach out through the servants of the Word, and that these servants may go out filled by the gifts of Holy Spirit. Now is the "rite vocati", a presumption for God's blessing. Themselves can know, that God have sent them. And the congregation can know, that God have installed them in office of the Word.

*Bengt Birgersson
General Secretary*