

# “We walk here as in the land of Sodom and Gomorrah”

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## Archpriest Vitaly Babushin about Sweden and the Swedish Church

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### Part 1. Archpriest Vitaly Babushin about Orthodoxy in Sweden, Sergius parish and mission in the country of the Vikings



Worship in the field. Photo from the archive of Archpriest Vitaly Babushin

– **Father Vitaly** , Anna of Novgorod, daughter of the Swedish king Olof Shchetkonung, married Yaroslav the Wise and at the end of her life became a monk. The princess is glorified by the Orthodox Church as a saint. Is it true that the Swedish Orthodox consider St. Anna of Novgorod their patroness?

– Anna of Novgorod, historically, can rightfully be called the patroness and prayer book about the fate of Orthodoxy in Sweden. Probably, the patron of the Stockholm parish, St. Sergius of Radonezh , will probably not be an exception , together with the Stockholm Icon of the Mother of God revealed in Sweden and Russia.

Few of our Orthodox brothers in Sweden know about the existence of such an icon. This is an excerpt from the Tikhvin icon; The Stockholm icon miraculously came from Sweden to Russia, and after the Bolshevik revolution its traces were lost.



Archpriest Vitaly Babushin. Photo by the author

At the end of the 17th century, Russian merchants visiting Sweden bought the icon from the Protestants. This is narrated in the legend about the Stockholm Icon of the Mother of God, published in the pre-revolutionary magazine “Pilgrim’s Rest”. The celebration takes place according to tradition on November 26 - the day of the solemn meeting of the icon in the Tikhvin Monastery.

**– It turns out that the “Stockholm” icon of the Mother of God is a copy of the Tikhvin icon?**

- Yes. This is an excerpt from a “very wonderful letter.” Traders from Novgorod, who saw the icon from one of the Swedes in Stockholm, were so taken with it that they decided to buy it from the Protestant Swede. He did not agree for a long time, but could not resist the large sum of money offered.

In our church, as well as in the Transfiguration Parish of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, there is a copy of this icon. Our list is modern, about 15 years old. This large icon in the Byzantine style was painted by one of the pious Christians, our parishioner, who then left Sweden. The original image of the Stockholm Icon of the Mother of God was the size of a palm.



List of the Stockholm Icon of the Mother of God. Sergievsky parish. Photo by the author

**– Judging by the decorations placed in the icon case, were any miracles recorded?**

– I can’t name any special supernatural miracles yet. Pious parishioners, in gratitude to the Mother of God for resolving some difficult life situations, brought things dear to them. These are precious items: wedding rings, crosses; being in the icon case, they testify to the gratitude of the people to the Mother of God for Her help.

**– On the Swedish island of Gotland, in the basement of a restaurant there is a branch of the museum - the foundation of an Orthodox church built in the 13th century by Novgorod merchants. Do you serve funeral services there?**

– This is private territory, and therefore there are certain difficulties with visiting these places, at least no one invited us to perform sacred rites there.

I think that perhaps in the future there will be some kind of dialogue with representatives of the Swedish Church about our ancient monuments preserved on Gotland as a memory of Russian-Swedish relations.



An auxiliary building of the Protestant church, part of which is occupied by the St. Sergius parish. Funds are being raised for the construction (purchase) of a full-fledged church building. Photo by the author

**– Father Vitaly, but in 2005, the Russian Orthodox Church decided to sever relations with the Swedish Church in connection with the establishment of an official rite of blessing of same-sex couples...**

– With this break, the Russian Orthodox Church placed a clear emphasis on what the current Swedish Church is. In other words, we told the Swedes: “As long as you still retained some kind of Christian identity, we could have some common ground with you: discuss general Christian topics, debate, participate in cultural and social projects. But you introduced into the life of your church things that are completely contrary to the Christian way of life - same-sex “marriages”, participation in gay parades. From our point of view, the Holy Scripture has ceased to be an authority for you; for your organization, God is no longer an authority, since you can freely distort His Divine Revelation to please your passions. Everything that was Christian in your church is no longer so.”



Bishops and priests of the Swedish Church. Photo: Kyrkans Tidning  
<http://www.kyrkanstidning.se/inrikes/nya-praster-och-diakoner-i-svenska-kyrkan>

This gap seems to state the fact that, as a Church, we can only deal with the Church, which, in our opinion, the Swedish Church is no longer.

Swedish Protestants are already developing a gender formula for Baptism that will not include the names of Father, Son and Holy Spirit

An exceptional case in our relations is perhaps Holy Baptism. While Protestants perform it in the name of the Most Holy Trinity: “In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,” we can accept them into Orthodoxy through the sacrament of anointing. However, in reality, Protestants themselves demand that when converting to Orthodoxy, the full rite of holy Baptism be performed on them according to the Eastern rite. I say this because I recently heard that Swedish Protestants are developing a special gender formula for Baptism, in which there will be no Divine names of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I am afraid that after such an innovation, the Baptism of Swedes during their transition to Orthodoxy will become a natural condition.

However, if the Swedish Church asks us to participate in any forums, then I think it would be wrong not to share our opinion with them.

**– How are things going in general with the spiritual life of ordinary Swedes? In the Swedish television program “From Sweden to Heaven,” the journalist visited Catholics, Muslims and idolaters with equal delight. What place does the Swedish Church occupy in the life of a modern Swede?**

– The only thing in which the Swedish Church is truly active is social projects, since it does not have religious projects. Archimandrite Dorofey (Forsner), abbot of the Serbian monastery in the town of Bredared, is a Swede, from the family of a Swedish pastor. No one, probably, knows better than he the state of affairs in the modern Swedish Church. Archimandrite Dorotheos says that the state of the Swedish Church has ceased to be religious. 40–50 years ago, the conservative part of the pastors and parishioners of the Church of Sweden still preserved the traditional way of life for Lutheran communities and families. Nowadays, it is not at all necessary for a Swedish priest (or, rather, a “priestess”) to be a believer during the so-called “initiation.” This emphasizes the direction of their organization from a religious Christian ministry exclusively to a social institution concerned with burial and a “theological” interpretation of gender experiments.

Today it is not at all necessary for a Swedish priest (or rather “priestess”) to be a believer during the so-called “ordination”

In addition to preserving cemeteries, another main task of the Church of Sweden is to issue baptism and marriage certificates, since many Swedes traditionally, without motivating these actions with religious feelings, baptize their children and marry here. You are not required to have faith in God, any religious efforts, or participation in worship - it all comes down to concluding contracts, membership fees, and some kind of legal function.



Swedish graduates on a truck. Photo: Sveriges Radio

<http://sverigesradio.se/sida/artikel.aspx?programid=103&artikel=5882134>

I once attended a service in a nearby Protestant church, from which we rent premises. This coincided with the end of the school year, when merry schoolchildren are transported around the city in trucks and come to church for the so-called blessing. I came with one of our parishioners to see what this blessing was all about. The woman priest spoke to the graduates for about forty minutes about how much energy she had when she was young, and she was very jealous of their youth, sexuality and regretted that her years had passed. She can't play football, frolic, drive trucks to loud music like they do. I kept waiting for at least one word to be said about God. But there were no such words, because talking about God is considered in this case to be something uncomfortable, forcing one to think, strain, and relate oneself to the Highest One. Why should young people think about this if everything is fine?

And another priest, also a woman, one and a half to two years ago in one of the cities of Sweden, before the start of the moose hunting season, went to the sacristy during a service, put on a plush elk head and went out to preach like that. The few parishioners had a lot of fun and left in a great mood: what a service, finally something new was found in the Swedish Church!



Sveriges Radio <http://sverigesradio.se/sida/artikel.aspx?programid=93&artikel=5678453>

The woman priest told reporters that when she saw an interesting souvenir in the form of an elk's head in the window of a hunting store, she thought: "This is what we need. This will at least delay and amuse people in the church a little." The task of the Swedish Church, according to its minister, is to amuse people and create a good mood for them. How? Moose head. This characterizes the spirituality, or lack thereof, in Swedish Protestantism. Therefore, I agree with Father Dorofey, who believes that modern Sweden is a post-Christian country.

The task of the Swedish Church, according to its minister, is to amuse people and create a good mood for them

#### **– Are there really no conservatives left in the Swedish Church?**

– I can judge this, of course, only based on the contacts of our parish. We have to rent premises from Protestants for holding holiday services. We do not have any relations with the Swedish Church as such. In the parish in Luleå, for example, last year we organized, together with the Russian-Swedish cultural society and the Lutheran parish from which we

rent premises, an Easter holiday, which was attended by both Swedes and Swedish children. We talked about God at the same table. Swedish children may have heard about God for the only time - from the lips of our Orthodox parishioners or priests.



Easter holiday in Luleå, in which representatives of the Swedish Church took part. Photo from the archive of Archpriest Vitaly Babushin

Once a Swedish male priest said that since you will serve in our building, you need to appoint an observer over your service, and this will be a female priest. He said this so provocatively, and then added: "Of course, it will be difficult for you." There seemed to be some kind of conservatism in this pastor, since women in the Swedish Church are a recent phenomenon. To my condescending smile at his words, he replied: "Then we'll try to make sure it's a man." But there was still a woman, which doesn't change the essence.

I have a feeling that in the eyes of Swedish priests, especially women, we Orthodox clergy look like something like shamans. They also have a ritual side, but they still look at us almost as pagans. I don't know why, because in the Swedish Christian Council, besides us, there are other Orthodox Christians - Serbs, Romanians, Greeks, but for some reason the Swedes don't treat them that way, it seems to me.

**– Probably because the Swedes do not have a historically established fear of Romanians or Greeks, but they do have fear of Russians.**

– At the same time, we, like the Swedes, are people of the north, although we call ourselves the Eastern Church. The Swedes have much closer historical ties with us than with the Serbs.

**– Father Vitaly, is it necessary for a Swede to learn Russian in order to be Orthodox? Do you conduct services in Swedish?**

– There is a need for liturgical Swedish in the town of Arbuga, where the Swedish Orthodox community lives, which we provide for at their request. Services are held there in both Swedish and Church Slavonic. The Swedes have a craving for the Church Slavonic language when our Russian saints are close to them. In Arbuga, the Swedes built a temple on their private plot - a small chapel, a chapel, modeled on the temples of our northern architecture. And they study Church Slavonic because they like it. And through the liturgical Slavic language they learn Russian.



Orthodox Swedes near the chapel they built in Arbuga, Västmanland County. Photo from the archive of Archpriest Vitaly Babushin

They accepted the Orthodox faith in its Russian clothing, so to speak. They value these clothes; they try to study every thread, every stitch. They are trying to embroider something with their own hands.

**– Why then, do you think, the Orthodox deanery of St. Anna of Novgorod, organized by the Serbs for the Swedes in a number of cities, uses only the Swedish language in services?**

– I think the whole point is that the majority (if not all) of the parishioners there are Swedes and the serving priest is also a Swede. Their need for Slavic liturgical languages is minimal or non-existent. In our parishes, the Swedes communicate with the Russian-speaking majority and their souls gravitate towards Russia and its shrines. There were even cases of Swedes moving to Russia for permanent residence.

The Serbs have set themselves the task of creating the Swedish Orthodox Church, which in the future may receive autonomy from the Serbian Patriarchate. But so far it is extremely small and unpopular. However, it is precisely there that the Swedish liturgical language is in demand. Therefore, Archimandrite Dorotheos (Forsner), about whom I have already spoken, is translating liturgical books from Serbian and Greek into Swedish. He does this well: recently in Belgrade a complete Orthodox prayer book was published in Swedish, which contains morning and evening prayers, prayers for Holy Communion, and canons. This prayer book quickly sold out in our Sergius parish; it was mainly purchased by women whose husbands were Swedes. In order to introduce them to Orthodoxy, you should at least try reading them prayers in Swedish at home.



Serbian monastery in the town of Bredared, where Archimandrite Dorotheos serves. Photo: crkva.se: <http://www.crkva.se/kloster.htm>

We have no need to serve in Swedish, just as, for example, Stockholm Orthodox Serbs and Romanians have no such need. Only Romanian-speaking and Serbian-speaking parishioners attend their services; only Russian-speaking ones appear in our church. In fact, of the number of parishioners who participate in divine services, there are no Swedes at all, with the exception of two or three people who often go to services and know Russian, or at least know and understand the divine service without translation.

“We value the Church Slavonic language,” a Swedish parishioner told me. – You feel the worship service there much more deeply

By the way, one of these Swedes once told me: “Don’t even try to serve in Swedish. It will sound awkward.” And it’s not a matter of pronunciation at all. “The most important thing,” he said, “is that we value the Slavic language. The divine service in Swedish does not express the meaning that the Church Slavonic language expresses, and although I do not understand it very well, I feel it with all my soul and understand the divine service much more deeply than Swedish words can express.”



Priest Vitaly Babushin. Photo by the author

As you can see, the native Swedish speaker himself speaks about the imperfection of this language as a liturgical language. In addition, in modern Swedish editions of the New Testament and liturgical Orthodox texts there are a lot of unresolved problems that cause debate among Orthodox Swedes when one of them proposes another reading. Perhaps one day the Swedish language will take its rightful place as the language of our communication with God. But for now, I repeat, we have no need to serve in Swedish. St. Sergius Church is visited mainly by Russians who come to the service from the Swedish world, listen and use everyday Swedish speech. And for them it is very important in the Russian Church to sip on the pure native liturgical language, so that it can be heard both in the altar and in the choir. Then the mind is simultaneously tense and relaxed. And when you hear everyday Swedish here, it’s very tiring, because in this case you always have to break yourself. And in prayer , as in a conversation with a loved one, you always speak from your heart and do it best in your native language.

Not all Swedes support sex education and gender play in kindergartens - but they are afraid to say so



**– The Russian media are filled with news about the anti-Christian “achievements” of Sweden: sex education, blasphemy, freedom of sin. What are your impressions of this country, after all, you have lived here for three years?**

– My first impression, which becomes more acute every year, is that we are walking here as if in the land of Sodom and Gomorrah. Even next to our temple there was a cafe with a sign on which it was clearly written “Cafe Sodom.” I am absolutely sure that my task and the task of those people whom the Lord entrusted to me as a flock is to lead such a way of life that the Lord will never pour out His wrath on this earth, as has already happened in history. I believe that any country exists solely because it has pious people, like the biblical Lot. They certainly exist among the Swedes, because not everyone here accepts and supports what is introduced by the state from childhood - I mean sex education, gender games.



Stockholm Pride (gay parade). Photo: <http://www.stockholmpride.org/en/Join-Pride/Become-a-Proud-Sponsor/>

Although, in order to resist the state system, which harshly implements its experimental educational programs, one must have heroic qualities. Some parents, trying to resist this system, fall into the plane of the child rights protection system. Here you want it or not, but a priori it will be not the state that is to blame, but the parents, as if falling out of the coordinate system. You can fall out yourself, but we won't let your child! Therefore, many parents hide their indignation, keep it to themselves, rush around, look for a way out, but there is no way out. It's like totalitarianism: you don't really have freedom - the freedom to refuse all this.

In Sweden, there are special services that monitor the lives of children starting from the moment a pregnant mother is registered with a nursing home. If something seems doubtful to them, they have the right to double-check it, warn and take educational measures to the extent that your child may not return from kindergarten or school. He will end up in someone else's family. There are enough such cases among our parishioners in Sweden to draw serious conclusions.

Parents here are simply afraid to declare their reluctance to bring their child to kindergarten when their teacher is homosexual or he was a man, but became a woman: the children are accustomed to the uncle, and now he is the auntie. In our opinion, a child who observes such deformity develops a corresponding ugly worldview. Isn't this where, by the way, this is where the mass of works of “contemporary art” fills the Stockholm metro, street banners... all these crazy sculptures in school courtyards, ubiquitous advertising. Some kind of irresistible

craving for ugliness, which is instilled under the guise of cultural breakthroughs and the highest achievements of civilization, along with the appearance of prosperity and clean streets.



Contemporary art in the center of Stockholm. Photo:  
<http://www.panoramio.com/photo/6008325>

Not all parents are ready and able to resolutely resist this inoculation of spiritual and moral ugliness, because they will be viewed by this system as disloyal citizens, but at the same time receiving salaries and social benefits from the state. This is the paradox. I don't want one and I can't refuse the other. Therefore, people have to look for some ways to bypass the system. Only a healthy family can be the main support in this.

**– I recently read in a Swedish newspaper about a teenager who, living in the outback, began wearing a dress to school and asking to be called by a woman's name. They started laughing at him, the teacher forbade him, saying that he was a boy. Perhaps a conservative view of family relationships has remained in the periphery in Sweden?**

– The life of a city dweller and a villager are certainly different. This is a non-denominational phenomenon. A city dweller always has a lot of free time, with the exception of people who are forced to work several jobs to feed their family. They, as well as the inhabitants of the outback, busy with hard work, have no time to surf the Internet, go to hot spots, they earn their daily bread. Such a person, as a rule, is far from thinking whether he should be a man or a woman.

Here, in Sweden, there are no such large farms as in Russia or like, say, the collective and state farms that existed in the Soviet Union; here everyone lives on their family farms or farms. We have already spoken about our Swedish parish in Arbuga. So, they are just such a small village. They have a house, some land, and a vegetable garden. They themselves built an Orthodox chapel on their property, show zeal for God, live with whatever God sends, and are slowly engaged in missionary work. These people are completely different, not like city dwellers.



Orthodox Swedes in the town of Arbuga. Photo from the archive of Archpriest Vitaly Babushin

The connection with the land and one's ancestors is much stronger in the village than in the city. That's why the gay pride parade is held not in the village, but in the city, because in the village no one will come to it: people are plowing the land. In the city, on the contrary, there is an abundance of free time. I look at how persistently the Swedes run through the streets of Stockholm to maintain their physical fitness, and I remember the Soviet pictures "A healthy mind in a healthy body." And I joke, thinking to myself: where do they find so much time and - most importantly - health to play sports? The answer suggests itself. If a person has this world - the only thing he has, then he will try as much as possible to preserve it and protect himself from all possible and impossible problems. Therefore, Swedes, as a rule, are not inclined to get involved in conflicts and even communicate with each other in a somewhat formulaic way, rather than from the heart, from the heart.

The gay pride parade is held in the city, not in the village - because in the village no one will come to it

There are explanatory and warning signs all around. How is it in Russia? If there is a sidewalk and you are riding a bicycle along a bike path, and the road is blocked by a large family, most likely you will not ring the bell to make them make way, but will simply carefully pass people somewhere on the side of the road. A Swede, on the contrary, will not do this (not every Swede, of course). He will call until the last minute, because he is driving along his own path and *they must* give way to him alone, even if it is a gaping mother of many children with sleeping babies in a stroller. The same order applies to highways. Of course, it's good that everyone sees their own lane and is guided by the signs, but this creates the impression that a person exists for the signs, and not vice versa.



Stockholm. Photo: <http://www.stockholm.se/TrafikStadsplanering/Trafik-och-resor-/Cykla-och-ga/>

I have often witnessed how, when a car breaks down on the road, a Swede stops in the lane to which the sign indicates him, even if this causes a traffic jam - he will not care at all who is driving behind him. Because you can't cross the lane. The only thing that can sober him up is a police or ambulance siren. Then he can drive a little forward.

**– Reminds me of a picture I saw in the north of Sweden: Sunday morning, rain, a Swede stands on a stepladder and paints his absolutely unfaded house. Most likely, he has this task written down in his diary.**

- Yes. That's right. Swedes are very disciplined and do not like changes in schedule. Therefore, they plan it for a long time in advance. I had to get used to this too. And I am also increasingly convinced that the Swedes exist within the framework of a law invented as a protection against communication. If, for example, at the checkout in any Russian store, instead of saying hello, the salesperson says sharply or even rudely: "Will you take the package?", a relationship arises between you. Good or bad is another matter. You can say yes, you can snort, you can smile and say, "Sure, let's do it." In Sweden, no one would ask that, especially in a harsh manner; Here you will definitely receive a peaceful, beautiful smile, and you will calmly pay with a card. No problem!



At the checkout in a Swedish store. Photo: ICA: [www.ica.se/butiker/kvantum/malmo/ica-kvantum-malmborgs-mobilia-2765/butiken/avdelningar/kassa/](http://www.ica.se/butiker/kvantum/malmo/ica-kvantum-malmborgs-mobilia-2765/butiken/avdelningar/kassa/)

The word "Hey!" ("Hello!") with which the manager always greets you, it's as if he's putting some kind of barrier between you. I tell you "Hey!", and that means that I don't want your problems to come into my life. I may have my own problems, but I don't want to open them to you, because you will open yours in return, and I definitely don't need that.

And when in Russia they say to me: "Will you take the package?", I feel that the cashier is either tired of everything or his day is not going well. And maybe, who knows, on his part this is an appeal to me as a Christian, so that I at least slightly smooth out his daily routine at the cash register and say something good in response, and not rude. At least he smiled. Not formulaic.

| Here people stop communicating, everyone is closed by patterns, rules

Here in Russia people always communicate, but in Sweden they stop communicating; here everyone is locked into patterns and rules. And if the template does not allow the Swede to take a step forward, because a limit line is drawn there, even if, by stepping, he will not create any obstacle for anyone, but, on the contrary, will make it possible for other people to go or pass, he will never do this until the loud sound a siren that threatens him with big problems. While people stand behind him, tormented by expectations, he will never think about them, stress that someone might be late somewhere and that someone might have more serious problems than him.



Father Vitaly Babushin. Photo by the author

Why is this so? I don't know for sure, because I've only been here for five years. Maybe this period is not enough for objective observations. But I come to the conclusion that it is the Swedish system of life coordinates that is to blame, in which obedience to the law is higher than human feelings. A system that proclaims your personal good, personal well-being as an absolute value, to achieve which you don't have to think about others, you can change any norms, traditions, be free from morality and God's truth, proclaim sin as the norm, and reduce the voice of conscience to a consultation with a psychologist, who must will adjust special medications that help you stay in the system and always breathe clean air, walk along specially laid ecological paths and admire interesting people at joy parades with rainbow-colored flags.

Arkady Ryabichenko talked with Archpriest Vitaly Babushin

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