



Religion today: tradition, modernity and change

Religion in modern Sweden

Narrator:

For more than four centuries, to be Swedish was to be Lutheran but today Sweden has the lowest church attendance of any European country. Just 2% of people make up the congregation. In the year 2000, church and state finally split. Ending a process accelerated by recent social change.

So is religion dead? Does modern society mean the end of spirituality?

Narrator, Jessica Lindohf

This is Starbett church in the south of Sweden. It's Scandinavia's oldest Christian place of worship, and a few miles from Lund, the university town where I began my studies to become a Theologian. And where I first became aware that the church was in crisis.

Jessica Lindohf, University of Glasgow

The odd thing is that the church really comes into its own right in high days and holidays. 85% still christen their children and church weddings are increasingly popular. And this is a country that perceives itself as secular and have rejected traditional notions of god a long time ago.

Daniel Landing, Dalby Church

It's a challenge in a way that we want them to come as a regular members of the parish. But we don't know really how to do that. It's mainly of course because it's a tradition. It's a traditional way to look at the church. And especially here in Sweden, they connect these rituals if we should say rituals, to be a part of the Swedish society, to be a Swede so to speak.

JL:

These children are typical Swedes. Christened in church but have hardly been since. The parents Ulf and Elizabeth told me why they turned to the church only for the big occasions.

Ulf Anderson

It's a very important part of your life. Because you're born. You're christened. And marriage. And the funeral. Because if you haven't got the church when somebody dies you want to, where should you go?

Narrator:

So you tend to go to church during the big ceremonies. But not the usual Sunday service. Why is that?.Time?

Elisabeth Brodin

Yes.

Ulf Anderson

We work. We work lots of weekends so, and actually most of the service is rather boring.

JL:

Do you find is it alright to sort of pick the bits you like, or the bits you believe it, and the bits you don't.

Elisabeth Brodin
Yes, of course. Of course.

Ulf Anderson
Pick the good part.

JL:
The danger with picking the good parts is that Cathedrals like this become little more than museums.

Priests at Lund Cathedral are considered to be forward thinking. Priests recognise that society is changing and the congregations are falling. So how can they keep the church alive?

Domprovost Anders Svehnignsen, Lund Cathedral
Well I should say that's one of the main questions really, for all churches today. To try to reach out and be welcoming to people in the churches. And in the Lutheran church I think we have been trying to do that for quite a lot of years.

JL:
So how far is the church willing to go in order to adapt people's wishes?

Domprovost Anders Svehnignsen
That's another quite interesting question really. We talk today a lot about so called 'New Age' and people are today we find looking for spiritual experiences on other places than in the old churches so to say. And I think that a church like a Cathedral should be open, even for experimental services and experimental ways of opening doors for people to the church and to Christ.

JL:
And one of the most successful ways of opening the doors to Swedes has been through music.
Sweden might have the lowest church attendance in Europe but at the same time there's the highest density of choirs. Half a million Swedes regular sing in church.

Tesee, the 12th century French Monastic tradition, has an increasing number of followers. It has little to do with Lutheranism but has successfully attracted people back into the church.

Mats Nyberg, Lund Cathedral
I think that **Taisee** is something social. It's something for the parish, for the congregation. It is something that we do together and I think that we cannot stick to only traditional forms. We have to turn to do in different ways. I think that's necessary.

JL:
So are you saying that it's the church basically has to adapt in their forms of worship to people who have become more private? Rather than the other way around.

Mats Nyberg
I don't know. But people need something more. And if we don't offer something, people will search outside the church instead.

JL:
But in a typical modern city like Lund, the social function of the church has disappeared. A hundred years ago there was a social and economic centre of the society. Later the government took care of it's own citizens, and formed a welfare state where the need for the church was much less but the need for answers did not decline.
At Holmer College, outside Lund, students search for meaning and alternative spiritualities.

This is Sweden's first University of New Age. Funded by the government, people take year long courses to look for spiritual answers outside Christianity. The course leader Magnus Skanberg explained how their beliefs go beyond traditional religion.

Magnus Skanberg, University of the New Age

We are pointing towards the same areas. Value, morals, what is life really about and the soul, the spirit but we have no ready answers and we focus on the students making their own map. And what are the principles for the map-making, that is not about physics or chemistry, but about human life.

JL:

Perhaps a future religion can be found some miles away, in Malmo. Multiculturalism has had a profound effect on religion here. Its growth demonstrates a most compelling reason for the split between Swedish church and state. Modern Sweden celebrates all facing religions. This is a relatively new situation. Since immigration only started in the 1970's. This Mosque just outside Malmo is the largest in the whole of Scandinavia and provides a focus from a strong and vibrant new religion. I wanted to know how easy it is to practice Islam in secular society. Stipan Kopilovic and Arslan Mehinovic have been living in Malmar for several years.

JL:

So is it difficult to be a Muslim in a very secular society?

Stipan Kopilovij,(Bosnian Muslim refugee):

I think it's much easier than the generations before us but still there is a lot of problems that is connected with being Muslim. The society questions your belief. And in that way, your belief kind of gets bigger even.

Arslan Mehinovic, (Bosian Muslim refugee):

Because Muslim people are like new group of people in Sweden and that's the problem because Swedish people are very closed.

Stipan Kopilovij

I don't understand why in this secular society, religion is shown often, maybe 80% or 90% as something that is dangerous, threatening and something that closes the human being into being a narrow minded person.

Stipan Kopilovij

To be spiritual is a basic need for humans and we cannot take that away. We cannot hide from that. And by acknowledging spirituality and showing the positive aspects of it, we can somehow understand religion.

JL:

So is religion in modern Sweden a dying practice? Or is it that as a society become more complex, so in turn does religion?

Elisabeth Brodin

Yes. I think it's important for the children really, to not for us to tell them what to believe in. I think they have to sort out for themselves.

Mats Nyberg

We must also speak, talk to people in a way that they can understand what we're saying. And I don't mean to transform all our rituals into something that they're not. But we have to be more.. we must talk in a way that people could understand. And feel that this has something to do with my life.

Magnus Skanberg

Young people in many ways have a lack of guidance. They look at pop stars being 21 telling them about what is important. So they need ecumenical guidance and spiritual guidance.

JL:

So I found that in 21st century Sweden, religion is not so much disappearing as transforming.