

New Knight of the Grand Cross of the Pontifical Equestrian Order of Saint Sylvester



I Vatikanens tidning *L'Osservatore Romano* av den 12 november 2021 återfinns ett tal av Vatikanbibliotekets prefekt, Monsignore Cesare Pasini i samband med att förre Vatikanambassadören Fredrik Vahlquist tilldelades den förnämsta graden av påvliga San Sylvesterorden. Då både Vahlquist och biblioteket är medlemmar i Skara stiftshistoriska sällskap är det hedrande att få återge denna artikel. Sällskapet är också tacksamma för alla de "dörrar" som öppnats och de kontakter som knutits i Rom genom Vahlquist förtjänst liksom genom ambassadören Bo Theutenberg.

Tal vid ordensföreläsning

New Knight of the Grand Cross of the Pontifical Equestrian Order of Saint Sylvester

A symbol of true friendship

MSGR CESARE PASINI

Pax et bonum

It gives me great pleasure to greet His Excellency Ambassador Fredrik Vahlquist in this "Franciscan" way as he receives the rank of Knight of the Grand Cross of the Pontifical Equestrian Order of Saint Sylvester. He often concludes his messages with these Latin words, and I have read them many times at the end of the emails we have exchanged over the years. They provide a welcome and noble sign of the "Franciscanism" which accompanies us today: this honour which is presented here by Cardinal José Tolentino de

Mendonça is in fact bestowed by the Pontiff who considers St. Francis as more than just a name.

In composing these remarks, I looked to our electronic correspondence for some meaningful insights with which to mark this occasion. But as I am sure we all recognize, the "vast sea" of emails is too large and chaotic and therefore of little use to capture the story of one's connections, collaborations, the life of an institution, or even the course of a friendship. Nevertheless, I have made the attempt.

I found particularly eloquent the very first message (in chronological order) from Fredrik Vahlquist. Dated 2 October 2008, it was sent after he had become the Swedish Ambassador to Croatia having served as Ambassador to the Holy See from May 2002 to June 2008, and was addressed to Barbara Jatta and copied to Paolo Vian and to Cardinal Raffaele Farina (who unfortunately could not be here today). Indeed, it was then-Prefect Farina who had first approached Fredrik with regard to the manuscripts of Queen Christina of Sweden that are preserved in the Vatican Library. After some meetings and other necessary developments, we began to formulate the great plan to restore and preserve the manuscripts of Queen Christina with the financial support of the Marcus and Amalia Wallenberg Foundation. In this email, Vahlquist expressed his gratitude for having received "the very interesting and well-written article" by Paolo Vian that appeared in *L'Osservatore Romano* on 30 July of that year, which recounted the conversion of Queen Christina, the history of her collection up to its inclusion in the Vatican Library, and the generous support from Sweden for its restoration. Vian had written that this initiative constituted the "apex of a long-standing friendship and of the respectful and affectionate consideration for the Vatican institution", which was part of the "dense network of relationships built by Ambassador Vahlquist, including the participation by members of the Library's staff at conferences in Sweden, the gifts of precious printed books and facsimiles to the Library, and the visits to the Library by various Swedish delegations". Vahlquist confessed that he felt "a bit moved by [Vian's] kind words about my — that is, his — part in our joint project".

I can sincerely say that it is indeed we who have been moved by his many acts of friendship, solicitude, and aid which are far from having ended in 2008! One need only recall the wonderful exhibition, entitled *Bilder av Kristina*, of a selection of restored volumes at the Royal Armoury (Livruskammaren) in Stockholm in 2013, or the generous support for the organization of the Salone Sistino where we are gathered today; for the cataloguing of printed volumes (incunabula and Aldines), and for the challenging project, still in progress, to digitize and catalogue a large number of manuscripts in Queen Christina's collection.

I have used the word 'friendship' to describe our collaboration with Ambassador Vahlquist, and I cannot pass over the many convivial gatherings at the *Villa Medulla*, as Fredrik likes to call it, the home of Barbara Jatta, a true friend of



Ambassadör Fredrik Vahlquist, Monsignore Cesare Pasini och Sällskapetets ordförande Johnny Hagberg i samband med överlämnandet av vadstenstrycket Horae de Domina.

Vahlquist and of Sweden (from which she received the honor of *Commander of the Royal Order of the Polar Star*). On those occasions, we have shared a table and pleasant conversation with Fredrik and his wife Elisabeth (warm congratulations in anticipation of your celebration of fifty years of marriage in 2022!), with many Swedish friends (I think here especially of Åke Bonnier, Dean of the Cathedral of Stockholm and then Bishop of Skara [Church of Sweden]), and many friends of Sweden (I note one who is present with us today: Anna Della Croce Brigante Colonna, former Italian Ambassador to Sweden).

From time to time Fredrik would include welcome details about himself and his family in our correspondence, with particular reference to Vadstena and St. Bridget, both of which have strong meaning for him. Not only is Vadstena his birthplace but it is also where St. Bridget founded the first monastery of the order which takes its name from her, and where her remains were laid to rest. Fredrik is proud to note that he was born on 3 May “almost exactly 600 years after the founding of the Mother Convent of Saint Birgitta’s Order on 1 May 1346”, to quote his own words. It has been our pleasure to come to know and to share the profound yet reserved spirituality of Fredrik and Elisabeth, faithful members of the Church of Sweden.

These links between Fredrik Vahlquist and St. Bridget extend also to the Bridgettine Sisters. Thanks to him we

have had occasion to visit the Casa di Santa Brigida in Piazza Farnese, the place where the saint lived and died.

I have not yet mentioned that this distribution desk (for books), from which we are speaking, was inaugurated on 27 April 2015 by Queen Silvia of Sweden, and that, thanks to Frederik Vahlquist, it was donated by the Foundation of King GustafVI Adolf for Swedish Culture (Stiftelsen Konung GustafVI Adolfs fond för svensk kultur). Indeed, through the efforts of Ambassador Fredrik Vahlquist, the Vatican Apostolic Library has grown closer to the Swedish nation in many ways. While we have been privileged for many centuries to preserve the library of Queen Christina and with it the rich cultural heritage of Sweden, and indeed of the world, that it contains, we acknowledge with great gratitude the generous support that the Swedish people have shown for the Vatican Apostolic Library.

We are indeed happy to join Cardinal José Tolentino de Mendonça as he presents this honour conferred upon His Excellency Ambassador Fredrik Vahlquist by Pope Francis. We wish to thank him personally for the friendship, generosity, and dedication with which he has done so much for us with — if I may say so — an *exquisitely evangelical* graciousness, one which seeks the good of others without recompense.

Pax et bonum, dear Fredrik.