

Dr. theol., Church of Sweden

FREDRIK SANTELL

THE QUEER VICAR IN BERLIN. HERIBERT JANSSON AND THE COMPLEX NEGOTIATION OF EMOTIONAL AND SEXUAL ATTRACTION IN THE COLD WAR ERA¹

The Church of Sweden vicar Heribert Jansson (1919–1996) served in the Swedish Victoria parish in Berlin 1950–1986, during most of the Cold war era. In this article, an incident in Berlin in July 1957 is investigated as a case study on the unclear Cold War praxis concerning queer behaviour in this international ecclesiastical, as well as diplomatic and political context. The aim of the article is to contribute to the complex LGBT history during the Cold War era. The investigation and different considerations following the incident involved several parties: the Swedish Consul General in Berlin, the Swedish Foreign Office, the Archbishop in Uppsala and the Uppsala Archdiocese chapter, the local board of the Swedish Victoria parish, the British authorities in occupied Berlin, as well as the Swedish government. From his first years serving in Berlin, Jansson’s relatively open queerness changed into a more subdued attitude after this incident and following his marriage in 1958.

Keywords: Church of Sweden, LGBT, Cold War

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On Monday, July 15, 1957, in the early morning hours, a car was found crashed against a tree in the fashionable suburb of Grunewald in the western part of Berlin. In the car sat two young Germans, 18 and 20 years old, in a state of heavy inebriation. The west German police arrived at the scene and found that neither of them could present a valid driving license. The police hesitated in their following actions, because the car had a diplomatic registration. They contacted the British authorities, responsible for this sector of the divided Berlin, the security and regulation of criminal cases related to foreign diplomatic personnel. The spectacular Jaguar E-type was well known from the diplomatic circles of Berlin as for the last 7½ years registered to the name of the Church of Sweden vicar Heribert Jansson (1919–1996), living a few blocks away. Together with the car keys were found the keys to Jansson's flat and the British authorities, primarily suspecting the young men of burglary or even worse, entered the flat to discover the vicar lying on a sofa in a state of deep stupor after apparent heavy drinking. Trying to take a first statement from the two youngsters and – after a forced shower – from the believed victim – the vicar, a – more or less – coherent story of the events during the late evening and night was reconstructed.

The vicar had been on his way from a late Sunday evening gathering in a parishioner's home. At 10 PM he was heading to the vicarage in Grunewald. There was a heavy heat in Berlin since a couple of days, Jansson felt thirsty and on his way stopped in the bar *Zwielicht* in Goethestrasse 59, Berlin-Charlottenburg, known to the Berlin police as a place for homosexual cruising. It was full of people, and Heribert Jansson sat down at the common table in the middle of the room, where after a while he found himself engaged in a conversation with the two German youths. They were ready to follow him home to share some whisky, and the three of them took off in vicar's car.

The young men later said they thought Jansson to be a Central European businessman or such. Also, according to the two young men, Jansson had after a while in his home tried to kiss them both and engaged in sexual activities, something that he could not remember and even denied afterwards. They drank heavily and, as Jansson fell asleep, the two youngsters took his keys, locked the flat and drove off in Jansson's car, a ride that ended abruptly by smashing against the tree.

After the initial interrogation, it became clear that if not handled with discretion, this incident would create a *cause célèbre* in the diplomatic circles of Berlin or even worse – become a public scandal.²

² The sequence of events reconstructed from the interrogation material in dossier H2/58 Heribert Jansson, Hemliga arkivet, Ecklesiastikdepartementets arkiv, Riksarkivet Stockholm.

Heribert Jansson – an extraordinary Swedish vicar abroad

Heribert Jansson was the vicar of the Swedish Victoria parish in Berlin from 1950 to 1986, for the most part of the Cold War era. I am currently writing his biography as a part of my research on the 20th century history of the Church of Sweden expatriate parishes.³ Heribert Jansson stands out in the group of Swedish vicars abroad during the last century. In this paper, I discuss the events surrounding the 1957 incident as an example of the complex negotiation of emotional and sexual attraction in the Cold War era.

Heribert Jansson was born in 1919 and brought up in the vicarage of Gillstad, diocese of Skara, in southwestern Sweden. After university studies in Gothenburg and Lund, he was ordained priest in the Church of Sweden diocese of Skara, in December 1947. In the spring of 1949, he was appointed assistant pastor in the Swedish parish in Copenhagen and after only a year there, at the age of 30, he was appointed by the archbishop Erling Eidem (1880–1972; archbishop 1932–1950), a study comrade of his father, a deputy vicar and Swedish Embassy Preacher in Berlin, where Heribert Jansson would serve for the next 36 years. Very soon, he became publicly known from the Swedish weekly press as an extravagant representative of Sweden in Germany.⁴

Writing queer history before the LGBT rights movement

I argue that it is not possible to use the widespread popular understanding of the Church as primarily negative and repressive factor in LGBT persons' lives, thus forming a foundation for the understanding of queer expressions during the 20th century church history.⁵ Nor is it possible to analyse this case apart from the perspectives of dogma and systematic theology on the teaching on sexual matters during the 20th century, or asserting that Christian denominations in Europe only recently have diverted from a repressing to a more and more open understanding of

3 Fredrik Santell, "En kyrka för livet genom hundra år," in *En kyrka för hela livet. Rikssvenska Olaus Petri-församlingen 100 år 1922–2022*, ed. F. Santell (Skellefteå: Artos, 2022), 17–84. Fredrik Santell, *Kyrka och diplomati. Svenska kyrkans utlandsförsamlingar under 1900-talet* (Skellefteå: Artos, 2024).

4 Press material in the archives of the Swedish Victoria Parish both in Church of Sweden archives (Svenska kyrkans arkiv i Uppsala) and in Berlin as well as in the family archives after Gun and Heribert Jansson, with Mrs. Christina Grossmann, Lund, Sweden. On Erling Eidem as Archbishop of Uppsala, see Anders Jarlert, *Erling Eidem, den personlige. Bibelforskare, ärkebiskop, mystiker* (Stockholm: Carlssons, 2024).

5 A simple search on the internet gives an overwhelming number of discussions of the subject.

what is now widely considered LGBT rights in Western society.⁶ Considered the complex context of relations between Individual and Society, State and Church over time, this case study aims at a more unbiased and empirical approach to the matter as a contribution to a future synthesis on queer behaviour over time and without a direct link to the last decades' rhetoric and praxis of LGBT rights.

In my upcoming biography on Heribert Jansson, I have chosen to openly relate to Heribert Jansson as a queer man. It is not because of the incident of 1957, until recently classified in the public archives and therefore publicly unknown, but in a broader context Heribert Jansson has already been "publicly outed" by the Swedish TV-journalist and former foreign correspondent in Berlin Ingrid Thörnqvist in her book on another spectacular Swede in Berlin during the cold war period, the director of the retirement home and asylum Haus Victoria in Berlin, coordinated by the Swedish branch of the Lutheran World Federation and the Swedish parish, Carl-Gustaf Svingel (1916–1995). There she tells the story of the vicar Jansson and his "secret".⁷

Heribert Jansson, himself a devoted archive researcher, apparently intentionally has left some rather curious traces in the Berlin parish archives, consisting of emotionally and sexually explicit letters and post cards from his correspondence with other men from almost all of his time in duty.⁸ One might wonder, why would a vicar leave such traces in the parish archives? The question rises both aspects of the evaluation of these letters as sources, as well as ethical aspects. I regard it from a sort of existential point of view. It is my task as a historian to use and analyse this material as a part of my research on the Swedish parishes abroad. Heribert Jansson left this material in the archives for a future researcher to find them. His living relatives, who had their doubts about what is nowadays considered his sexual identity, support my choice, and look forward to more profound results than the story about "a secret" told by the journalist Ingrid Thörnqvist.⁹

6 On the situation in the Church of Sweden, see Klas Hansson, *Svenska kyrkans primas. Ärkebiskopsämbetet i förändring 1914–1990* (Uppsala: Uppsala universitet, 2014), 375–385. Klas Hansson, *Kyrkomöte och kyrkopolitik. Politisk påverkan på Svenska kyrkans kyrkomöte* (dissertation, University of Uppsala, in print Skellefteå: Artos, 2014), 249–257.

7 Ingrid Thörnqvist, *Carl-Gustaf Svingel och drottning Silvias familj i det kalla krigets Berlin* (Stockholm: Ekerlid, 2020), 127–128.

8 Volumes JI:47–49 and PXIIIb:1–4, Svenska Victoriaförsamlingens arkiv, Svenska kyrkans arkiv i Uppsala.

9 In conversation with Heribert Jansson's daughter in law, Christina Grossmann, Lund.

The perspectives of the different parties involved

After the initial police report from July 1957, the Heribert Jansson case was treated by the Swedish Consul General in Berlin, the Swedish Foreign Office, the Archbishop of Uppsala and the Uppsala chapter as well as the local board of the Swedish Victoria parish in Berlin, the British authorities in occupied Berlin, as well as the Swedish government.¹⁰ All these parties took part in a sort of complex negotiation about the nature of Heribert Jansson's emotional and sexual attraction in the Cold War era. I will now briefly discuss the perspective of each party.

The close professional bonds between the Swedish vicar in Berlin and the highest ranked Swedish diplomatic representative in West Germany during this period, the Consul General in Berlin, were, in one way, a formal affair. Jansson was related to the general consulate as its chaplain in the capacity of embassy preacher. He was a part of the diplomatic representation with all its duties and benefits. This was a normal case for Swedish vicars in expatriate parishes.¹¹

Already a few hours after the incident on 15 July 1957, the criminal police of West Berlin informed the Swedish General Consulate. The Consul General Hugo Tamm (1903–1990) more than a week later sent a detailed report to the Foreign Office in Stockholm. The vice-commandant of the British Military Government in Berlin Edward Peck (1915–2009) had sent Tamm a consolidated report of his office on the matter and left the case in the hands of the Swedish Consul General to “take the disciplinary measures which might be considered necessary and also consider the desirability of Jansson's continued presence in Berlin”. Tamm informed Peck that the fact that the British authorities were involved, prevented the Swedish General Consulate from resolving the case as a local matter. Instead, the responsibility for the case now rested in the hands of the Swedish Foreign Office in Stockholm, as well as the Archbishop in Uppsala and the chapter there.

The legal department of the Swedish Foreign Office on 7 August 1957 informed Tamm that it was “from the Office's point of view, of great interest that Jansson should no longer remain in Berlin”. The Foreign Office wanted Jansson to request a leave due to personal matters and return to Sweden.

Jansson went on a year's study leave. He retreated directly to Stockholm, where he reported to the cabinet secretary of the Swedish Foreign Office Leif Belfrage (1910–1990), who informed Jansson about the impossibility of him to remain in Berlin, as the good relations with the allied had to be maintained.¹² On 14 August 1957, a month

10 Dossier H2/58 Heribert Jansson, Hemliga arkivet, Ecklesiastikdepartementets arkiv, Riksarkivet Stockholm.

11 Fredrik Santell, *Kyrka och diplomati*, 135–147.

12 Dossier H2/58 Heribert Jansson, Hemliga arkivet, Ecklesiastikdepartementets arkiv, Riksarkivet Stockholm.

after the incident, the chapter of Uppsala diocese was in session led by the Archbishop Yngve Brilioth, known for his severe stance, both literally and in his capacity of the investigator of the legal room for the chapters in the Church of Sweden (1934–1936), among other things, in matters of priest misconduct. Jansson gave his view of the incident in front of the chapter that could not come to any conclusion, since Jansson denied any public expressions of sexual intentions during the youngster's visit to the vicarage, so prompted by his lawyer Ragnar Gottfarb (1907–1988).¹³

In the middle of March 1958, Jansson sent a letter to the archbishop from Rome where he lived and worked on a biography on the Swedish Queen Victoria (1862–1930). He stressed that his only wish was to return to Berlin. He referred to the fact that the post as Swedish vicar in Oslo would be free later that year and wondered if that would be a possible solution of the matter. In answer to the archbishop's direct question, he said that he considered getting married.

Archbishop Brilioth, who was severely ill and would leave his duties about seven months later, answered that he found a serious lack of self-awareness in Jansson's letter. He called Jansson's thought of applying for the work as Swedish vicar in Oslo "surprising". Instead, Brilioth wanted to move Jansson to serve as an assistant priest in a remote part of Uppsala archdiocese, in Sandviken. Brilioth concluded his message with the conviction that "a morbid disposition" had placed Jansson in this deplorable situation. It is not clear, whether the archbishop thereby meant only Jansson's homoerotic disposition, or additionally perceived a threat of alcoholism.¹⁴

Already in December 1957, the majority of the local board of the Swedish parish in Berlin wrote to the chapter in Uppsala in favour of Jansson's return to the parish as its vicar. Earlier, they had been discreetly informed in detail about the incident by Consul General Tamm. The incident did, however, not impact the board, constituted by a cosmopolitan group of people apparently very much a part of the new reconstruction spirit typical of the afterwar Berlin.¹⁵ Several of them had been inhabitants of Berlin for generations, which before the nazi regime was known as an extensively sexually liberal metropolis. The psychiatric notions of homosexuality, bisexuality, et cetera from the late 19th century had more or less been invented as modern concepts in Berlin, among others

13 Dossier H2/58 Heribert Jansson, Hemliga arkivet, Ecklesiastikdepartementets arkiv, Riksarkivet Stockholm.

14 Dossier H2/58 Heribert Jansson, Hemliga arkivet, Ecklesiastikdepartementets arkiv, Riksarkivet Stockholm. Heribert Jansson, *Drottning Victoria* (Stockholm: Hökerbergs, 1963). Maria Eckerdal, *Slaget om kyrkan. Yngve Brilioths ecklesiologiska och kyrkopolitiska strävanden 1931–1958* (Skellefteå: Artos, 2018),

15 Dossier H2/58 Heribert Jansson, Hemliga arkivet, Ecklesiastikdepartementets arkiv, Riksarkivet Stockholm.

fuelled by the famous interwar sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld. The secret of his queer habits was, in fact, during his first seven years serving in Berlin a common knowledge and – surprisingly enough – generally accepted in his parish.¹⁶

I have already mentioned the Vice Commandant of the British Military Government in Berlin Edward Peck as an important actor in this case. Peck had arranged a voluntary interrogation of Jansson performed by two officials from his office, one identified as the political advisor and assumed representative of British intelligence service Bernhard Ledwidge (1915–1998), who ultimately served as the British ambassador in Tel Aviv. In Berlin, the capital of European espionage, this interrogation creates an impression of an attempt to recruit Jansson by the British. The Jansson's dossier was classified by the Swedish Foreign Office not only according to the 3rd paragraph of the Security Act due to the personal sensitivity in the matter concerning Jansson himself, but also according to its 10th paragraph with regard to foreign power.

Jansson's case was presented in a cabinet meeting on 26 September 1958 before the Prince Sovereign Bertil as the chair of the cabinet in the King's absence. Several appeals to the government in Jansson's favour had arrived from the great majority of the parishioners, from the Mayor of Berlin Willy Brandt, the Police President of Berlin Johannes Stumm, and the rural dean Heinrich Grüber. The Vice-Commandant Edward Peck emphasised that Jansson's return to Berlin no longer provoked any negative reaction whatsoever from the British side. Not only the King was absent, the Swedish Foreign Minister 1945–1962 Östen Undén likewise did not take part in the cabinet meeting. He is known to have been an advocate of a soft and inclusive policy in the dialogue with the Soviet Union. As noted before, he was not supporting any soft line in the Heribert Jansson case. The decision was passed that Jansson would remain in Berlin and would not be transferred to the remote Sandviken parish.¹⁷

After a year's study leave, Heribert Jansson returned to the parish in Berlin in the autumn of 1958 and remained on duty there until his retirement. During the autumn of 1958, he married the parish secretary Gun Grossmann (1919–2013), and they remained married until his death in 1996. Alongside his marriage, Heribert Jansson cultivated shorter and longer emotional and sexual liaisons with men. Nevertheless, his marriage should not be perceived as a simple alliance of convenience. The spouses had a mutual

16 Else-Vera Kotowski and Julius H Schoeps, eds. *Der Sexualreformer Magnus Hirschfeld. Ein leben im Spannungsfeld von Wissenschaft, Politik und Gesellschaft* (Berlin: BeBra Wissenschaft Verlag, 2004). Jennifer V Evans and Matt Cook eds., *Queer cities, queer cultures. Europe since 1945* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

17 Dossier H2/58 Heribert Jansson, Hemliga arkivet, Ecklesiastikdepartementets arkiv, Riksarkivet Stockholm. Mats Bergquist, *Östen Undén, Tage Erlander och det kalla kriget* (Stockholm: Santérus, 2023).

loyalty and strong emotional bond which, among other things, was based in the rebuilding work of the parish, as well as in the fight for Heribert Jansson's continued service there. Together with the wife's son from a previous marriage, they formed a family community.

The *Lavender Scare* as a mentality of the Cold War era

Only two months after the incident in Berlin, the Swedish Olaus Petri parish in Helsinki – the farthest eastern Swedish expatriate parish, was hit by another “homosexual scandal” – to use the term of the time. The organist Torsten Stenius (1918–1964) was reported to the Helsinki police for provoking a homosexual culture in the parish youth section.

All in all, this shows an example of what historians have called the *Lavender Scare* of the Cold War era, linked to the *Red Scare*; the scare of communism is frequently accompanied by the scare of the non-heteronormative. According to oral sources, it cannot be ruled out that the two scandals occurring two months apart were in fact provocations from the East at a time when the Cold War descended into ever lower temperatures. The expatriate parishes of the officially neutral Sweden were of interest to security and intelligence services. In this context, previous research showed how non-normative sexuality was used as a weapon and a tool of extortion. Furthermore, there were tensions between British and North American interests against the same background of intelligence and diplomacy.¹⁸

Apparently, in the middle of the 1950s there was no simple, clear and official view on the matters of non-heteronormative nature, neither in the Church of Sweden, nor in the political spheres, where this case was examined. Instead, a publicly known queer conduct gave rise to a complex contextual negotiation.

KOPSAVILKUMS

Kvīru mācītājs Berlīnē. Heriberts Jansons un sarežģītais dialogs par emocionālu un seksuālu tuvību aukstā kara laikā

Zviedrijas baznīcas mācītājs Heriberts Jansons (1919–1996) kalpoja draudzē Berlīnē no 1950. līdz 1986. gadam, tātad lielāko daļu aukstā kara laika. Šajā rakstā 1957. gada jūlijā Berlīnē notikušais incidents tiek pētīts kā gadījuma izpēte par neskaidru aukstā kara praksi attiecībā uz kvīru uzvedību starptautiskā baznīcas, kā arī diplomātiskajā

¹⁸ Fredrik Santell, *Kyrka och diplomati*, 291–298. David K Johnson, *The Lavender Scare. The Cold War Prosecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government*, (University of Chicago Press: Chicago 2004).

un politiskajā kontekstā. Raksta mērķis ir dot ieguldījumu sarežģītajā LGBT vēsturē aukstā kara laikmetā. Izmeklēšanā bija iesaistītas vairākas puses: Zviedrijas ģenerālkonsuls Berlīnē, Zviedrijas Ārlietu ministrija, Upsālas arhibīskaps un viņa kapituls, minētās draudzes valde, Lielbritānijas varas iestādes okupētajā Berlīnē, kā arī citas iestādes. Jansona salīdzinoši atklātās nenormētās seksualitātes izpausmes pēc viņa pirmajiem kalpošanas gadiem Berlīnē un vēlāk pēc viņa laulībām 1958. gadā vairs nesaistījās ar tādām kontroversijām kā agrāk.



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