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**RISTO LEHTONEN**

**CHURCH IN A DIVIDED WORLD**

*The Encounter of the Lutheran World Federation with the Cold War*

*Risto Lehtonen*

**CHURCH IN A DIVIDED WORLD**  
**THE ENCOUNTER OF THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION**  
**WITH THE COLD WAR**

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# FOREWORD

Sir Lawrence Freedman of King's College, London, once began a review of *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, "Frostbitten: Decoding the Cold War, Twenty Years Later," in the following way: the period is an "undifferentiated chunk of history that stretched across time and space with a vast cast of characters and occasional moments of drama."<sup>1</sup> It evidently becomes necessary, then, – both for scholars and leaders of societies – to give form to what is undifferentiated and for the sake of the future to discern patterns of meaning in what would otherwise be routine events that possess no inner coherence.

Most analytical studies of the Cold War, a "chunk of history" of great importance, have looked at it through the lenses of political, economic, social, and military conflict. But do these angles of vision tell the whole story? It has become increasingly clear to many that the time has surely come for thoughtful and honest studies of the role of the Christian community, in its many and various manifestations, during that tense and crucial period of human history. This is, largely, an unwritten chapter, a missing piece in any comprehensive understanding of our recent past.<sup>2</sup> Risto Lehtonen's *Churches in a Divided World* is a major contribution to overcoming that deficit.

Even though I had known Risto Lehtonen since 1959, it was not until 1985 when I became his colleague at the Lutheran World Federation in Geneva that I realized that he possessed an uncommon ability to give form and meaning to many undifferentiated yet crucial events – chunks of history – that were constantly unfolding within and around the world's Christian community. And for him that vocation has always been for the maintenance of that community and the global strengthening of its ecumenical and Lutheran mission.

The first arena in which Risto made his mark – nationally, regionally, and internationally – was the student Christian movement. For many this was the training ground for leadership in the ecumenical church – from John R. Mott and Nathan Söderblom to W.A. Visser't Hooft and Philip Potter. Risto Lehtonen has a place among the truly notable church leaders of our time.

In 1968 he was elected General Secretary of the World Student Christian Federation and he and his family took up residence in Geneva. The times were those of "the turmoil of revolution." Indeed, Risto Lehtonen used that phrase in the title of his important work, *Story of a Storm: The Ecumenical Student Movement in the Turmoil of Revolution, 1968–1973*.<sup>3</sup> The "revolution," of course, was the global upheaval within the world of

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<sup>1</sup> Lawrence D. Freedman, "Frostbitten: Decoding the Cold War 20 Years Later," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> To be sure, there has been significant historical work done regarding "the role of the churches during the Cold War" by scholars such as Jens Holger Schjørring, Hartmut Lehmann, Katharina Kunter, Klaus Koschorke, and Peter Maser in German. In English, however, such literature is at best meager. General and even brilliant historical studies of the Cold War – by scholars such as John Lewis Gaddis, Odd Arne Westad, Melvyn Leffler, Anne Applebaum and Tony Judt – do not pay much attention to the role of religion in general or churches in particular. Important work in this area has, however, been done by individuals such as Dianne Kirby, Philip Muehlebeck and William Inboden. The volume of essays from a 2011 conference held in Bratislava: Filo, Julius, ed., *Christian World Community and the Cold War* (Bratislava, 2012) had its impetus in the work of Risto Lehtonen. Two important collections have recently appeared: Mojzes, Paul, ed., *North American Churches and the Cold War* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2018) and Sjöström, Lennart, ed., *Innan murarna föll: Svenska kyrkan under kalla kriget* (Skellefteå: Artos, 2019).

<sup>3</sup> Risto Lehtonen, *Story of a Storm: The Ecumenical Student Movement in the Turmoil of Revolution, 1968–1973* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998 and Helsinki: The Finnish Society of Church History, 1998.)



the university. In the spring of 1968 a new French Revolution erupted. The Sorbonne became the Paris fortress of a newly founded Student Soviet. There were tumultuous events: street battles, barricades, fights with the police, occupations of university and other civic buildings by students who envisioned the creation of a new society to be run on principles of direct democracy. The Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, held in Uppsala, Sweden in July of the same year, was also largely marked by these revolutions which aimed at subverting and destroying the political structures of the time in order to build a new socialist society.

The entire story of these five years, 1968 to 1973, cannot be retold here. What we remember is that even at this early stage of his service to the global and ecumenical church, Risto Lehtonen had to take “undifferentiated chunks” of both contemporary history and Christian conviction and endeavor to give them meaning in the patterns of their relationship. His was a crucial albeit costly vocation.

In 1973 Risto Lehtonen, still in Geneva, moved to the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) where, in 1978, he became Director of its Department of Church Cooperation.

A central issue, one of several facing Risto Lehtonen and many others, was the enduring cultural captivity of the LWF to its member churches in the North and West. This came to the fore following the Assembly of the LWF held at Evian, France in 1970. Stefano Moshi, then Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, had argued at Evian against continued use of the term: “Mission, being Western mission domination, belongs to the past. The churches in Asia and Africa are equal partners to the churches in the West. We, therefore, want the name ‘Church Cooperation.’”<sup>4</sup> Lehtonen dealt with this concern largely by initiating, through the Department of Church Cooperation, an extensive program of regional consultations in which local churches, full members of the LWF and no longer to be regarded as “mission fields,” developed their own strategies and programs for mission. He thus led the way in what was later acknowledged as the growing realization of the global communion, *communio*, of Lutheran churches.

For much of the time when Risto Lehtonen was providing new foundations for the LWF in respect to the mission of the church, he was also deeply involved in the Federation’s planning for its Seventh Assembly which was held in Budapest, Hungary in the summer of 1984. Thus it was that Lehtonen found himself in the midst of Cold War tensions. This involved tense and complicated negotiations with both the Lutheran Church in Hungary and the government of Communist Hungary. Not only was this the first major church meeting held in Eastern Europe after World War II, but also the Lutheran Church’s relationship with the Hungarian government had been stormy (again, for Lehtonen!) since it centered largely around the central role of Bishop Lajos Ordass. In the first Case Study of *Church in a Divided World* (Chapters 4–6) Lehtonen provides in depth – and perhaps definitively – an account of this whole story.

In another essay, from 2011, Risto Lehtonen summarized the LWF experience of its Budapest Assembly held during the Cold War, an experience in which he played a major role, in the following starkly honest three points which are also found in Chapter 15.2. of the present study, “Impact of Budapest Assembly on the LWF”

1. The decision to meet in Budapest, in the territory of the Warsaw Pact, was a timely affirmation of the LWF’s response to the Cold War through witness to the unity

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<sup>4</sup>C.f. Schjørring, Jens Holger, Prasanna Kumari, and Norman A. Hjelm, eds., *From Federation to Communion: The History of the Lutheran World Federation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1957), 157.

- and the mission of the Church to be carried out under any political order.
2. The appraisal of the political trends in Eastern Europe and of the stage of the Cold War had been inadequate in the LWF. This caused a partial paralysis of the Assembly in dealing with the issues of unity and mission theologically and in relation to a socialist society.
  3. The Assembly showed how vulnerable the LWF is when faced with divisive forces, this time originating from outside but adopted inside, resulting in erosion of mutual trust and in conflicts of personal flavor. The experience points to the urgency of facing the controversial past – also of the Cold War – in church and society with academic curiosity and with an openness and freedom conveyed by the Gospel.<sup>5</sup>

These kinds of judgments, characteristic of Risto Lehtonen, demonstrate his perceived vocation to differentiate and derive meaning from the “chunks” of a history with which he had been intensively involved as a theologically alert church leader passionately immersed in the times in which he has lived.

From the foregoing it is clear that much of Risto Lehtonen’s life has been spent in the “turmoil of revolution” – storms in the World Student Christian Federation, the development in the Lutheran World Federation of a radically new understanding of the mission of the church, and induction into the cauldron of the global Cold War as it disrupted particular individuals and churches including, among others, Lutheran communions in Hungary and Ethiopia.

In what is technically called his “retirement,” Risto Lehtonen has devoted himself to the present volume, *Church in a Divided World: The Encounter of the Lutheran World Federation with the Cold War*. Even though the volume is not complete – “case studies” of the Lutheran churches in other countries, the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) and the vast territory of the former Soviet Union come to mind, are needed – it stands as an invaluable contribution to 20th Century church and global historical understanding. Here that “chunk of history” called the Cold War is differentiated and given meaning in relation to churches, particularly those of the Lutheran World Federation. In this volume the rare gifts of Risto Lehtonen are evident, and he has been exercising those gifts with insight, comprehensiveness, and dedication for more than a half-century. For what purpose has he done this?

Lehtonen frequently describes himself as an “evangelical catholic.” This is a self-description of a commitment to the mission of the ecumenical church that faces ever-new requirements of understanding and renewal in situations which are novel yet in the patience of God inextricably bound to both creation and salvation.<sup>6</sup> His commitment to the Christian world communion marks his enduring contribution to church and world.

Norman A. Hjelm  
Wynnewood, Pennsylvania, USA  
Pentecost 2019

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<sup>5</sup>Lehtonen, Risto, “The Lutheran World Federation under the Cold War” in Filo, Julius, ed., *Christian World Community and the Cold War: International Research Conference in Bratislava on 5–8 September 2011* (Evangelical Theological Faculty of the Comenius University in Bratislava, 2012), 235.

<sup>6</sup>The most thorough study of “evangelical catholicism” remains Sven-Erik Brodd, *Evangelisk Katholicitet: Ett studium av innehåll och funktion under 1800- och 1900-talen* (Lund: C.W.K. Gleerip, 1982).

## ABBREVIATIONS

AACC	All Africa Conference of Churches
CCCE	The Council for the Cooperation of Churches in Ethiopia
CCIA	Commission of the Churches on International Affairs
CDA	Churches' Drought Action in Africa
CDA/E	Churches' Drought Action in Africa/Ethiopia
CI	Caritas Internationalis
CMCR	Committee for Mutual Christian Responsibility (Ethiopia)
CPC	Christian Peace Conference
CPSU	Communist Party in the Soviet Union
CRDA	Christian Relief and Development Association
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
CSCE	Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe
ECHAAT	The Ethiopian Oppressed People's Revolutionary Struggle
EDU	Ethiopian Democratic Union
EECMY	Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus
EKD	Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (Evangelical Church in Germany)
ENA	Ethiopian News Agency
EOC	Ethiopian Orthodox Church
EPD	Evangelische Presse Dienst
EPLF	The Eritrean People's Liberation Front
EPRP	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party
FELM	Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission
GDR	German Democratic Republic
GHM	The German Hermannsburg Mission
IFLO	Islamic Front for the Liberation of Oromia
IMC	International Missionary Council
JRP	Joint Relief Partnership (Ethiopia)
LC-MS	Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod
LWA	Lutheran World Action
LWC	Lutheran World Convention
LWF	Lutheran World Federation
LWF-CDS	Lutheran World Federation / Community Development Service
LWF-DS	Lutheran World Federation / Department of Studies
LWF-DWS	Lutheran World Federation / Department of World Service
LWF-GS	Lutheran World Federation / General Secretary
LWI	Lutheran World Information
MEISON	All-Ethiopian Socialist Movement
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NECC	Near East Council of Churches
NLC	National Lutheran Council (USA)
NLM	Norwegian Lutheran Mission
NMS	Norwegian Missionary Society
OAU	Organization of African Unity
OLF	The Oromo Liberation Front
PMAC	Provisional Military Administrative Council (Ethiopia)
RVOG	Radio Voice of Gospel
SALT	Strategic Arms Limitation Talks

SEM	Swedish Evangelical Mission
SIM	Sudan Interior Mission, also Society of International Missionaries
TCRS	Tanganyika Christian Refugee Service
TPLF	The Tigray People's Liberation Front
UK	United Kingdom
ULCA	United Lutheran Church in the USA
UN	The United Nations
U.S., USA	United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VELKD	Vereinigte Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche Deutschlands (The German United Lutheran Church)
WARC	World Alliance of Reformed Churches
WCC	World Council of Churches
WPE	The Workers' Party of Ethiopia
WSCF	World Student Christian Federation
WW I	World War I
WW II	World War II

# INTRODUCTION

## WHY THIS TOPIC?

Why yet another book on the Cold War? It is, after all, a topic on which historians have written volume after volume over the past decades, presenting their findings and views on the political climate and developments in large parts of the world during the era from World War II to the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

However, little research has been conducted on one sector of civil life: the impact of the Cold War on the life of churches and their members in countries most affected by the collision of East and West during that era. Cold War historians have mostly been silent regarding the church and religions, and even church historians have bypassed the challenge.<sup>7</sup> Yet the Cold War deeply affected particular churches and their working patterns and conditions on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

## THE URGENCY OF THE TOPIC

The imminent loss of eye-witness accounts of the Cold War threatens to deprive us of knowledge which comes from the experience of the era which archived documents do not fully disclose. Knowledge of the multiple dimensions of the history of the Cold War is necessary if we are to grasp both the undercurrents of today's politics and the nature of the forces that divide humanity and the church today. The heritage of the search for the identity of the church in mission and the search for her unity that arose as a counter movement against the destructive divisions caused by the Cold War, is needed for meeting present and future threats to humanity.

## AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study is

- to present the story of major challenges of the Cold War, 1945–90, to the worldwide communion of Lutheran churches in a single volume with two case studies;
- to contribute substantively to international research on “Christian world community and the Cold War;”

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<sup>7</sup> Several recent studies of Cold War history, to be sure, do recognize the inherent and in several cases direct influence of religions on the policies of combatants on both sides: e.g., Applebaum, Anne, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe 1944–1956* (New York: Doubleday, 2012); Leffler, Melvyn P., *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union and the Cold War* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2007); Inboden, William, *Religion and American Foreign Policy 1945–1960* (New York and Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Kirby, Dianne, ed., *Religion and the Cold War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, 2013); Filo, Julius, ed., *Christian World Community and the Cold War* (Bratislava: International Visegrad Fund, 2012); and Mojzes, Paul, ed., *North American Churches and the Cold War* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2018).

- to identify patterns of how the Cold War influenced the self-understandings of the church and its international roles as experienced by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF);
- to identify issues that require further research.

It has been my intention to produce a readable, well-documented study for an international readership, which might include theologians, political scientists, historians, and church leaders on different continents and which would also be helpful for persons interested in the history of the Cold War and in the role of the Christian Church during it.

## **METHOD AND SOURCES**

The study is primarily historical. With regard to the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and its member churches I have tried to draw as much as possible on primary documentation. In dealing with the wider context of the Cold War and theology I have relied on recognized publications by scholars and historians. I have also made use of interviews, biographies and private archives of persons involved in the church – Cold War encounter as well as general sources published in newspapers, journals and on the internet. Personal discussions with church leaders and persons engaged in academic circles in the regions involved, have played an important role in this study. At some points, I have drawn on my own notes on situations in which I was personally involved through my work in the LWF.

On events and issues not covered by public documents and also because of frequent selectivity of records on politically sensitive issues, it has been necessary to extend the research to “experience knowledge” still available from leading figures and from grass-root sources by means of interviews and access to private archives, and also through memoirs and biographies of church leaders, theologians, governmental representatives, and political personages. Obvious difficulties for the use of eye-witness sources have arisen from their uneven accessibility.

The vastness of the experience of the LWF and its member churches in the time span 1945–90 have forced me to be selective. Choices have been made to concentrate on those phases and sequences of events which have had a formative effect on the ecumenical and political profile of the LWF and which highlight the LWF as a communion of churches responding in various ways to the political forces and events of the Cold War. Because of the scope and timespan covered, I have aimed at presenting a documented description of the profiles of the LWF at moments and phases of its marked shifts; I am not offering a comprehensive account of the LWF’s relation to the Cold War.

The topic is approached by case studies, each of which follows a chronological pattern and highlights the theological and political/ideological trends involved. The studies deal with the impact of Cold War politics on the LWF at large and with the experiences of specific LWF member churches. Each case study is based on documented records of both the political and church histories of the period concerned. I have made a consistent effort to review sources from different sides of political division.

Main factors influencing the decisions taken in choosing the focal areas of the study include (1) the necessity of limiting the study for the sake of the manageability of the topic; (2) the selection of those cases which have visibly involved the LWF at the points

of its theological and political convictions; (3) the wisdom of avoiding concentration on those cases which have already been studied internationally and/or ecumenically in broader based research efforts; (4) the avoidance of events and experiences which have local significance but which have only marginal importance for an international research project; and (5) an inevitable concentration, whether conscious or subconscious, on particular situations and issues in which I have been personally involved.

Within the two case studies I do make references to significant events, countries, churches, and periods of special conflict that in my view ought to be taken up as objects of serious research. They are located in Southern Africa, Latin America – especially Brazil, Chile, El Salvador and Nicaragua, the Middle East, China and the internal polarization of both the political and the church scene of North America. In all of these crisis points of the Cold War, the LWF was involved through its officers, staff and its member churches. A thorough analysis of the events and conflicts in these areas and the particular role of the LWF as a segment of the international ecumenical community calls for wider efforts within the framework of a more comprehensive international, ecumenical study.

The concluding chapter attempts to draw some tentative conclusions regarding the LWF experience during the Cold War. It is hoped that this will benefit further studies on the roles of the church in politically polarized societies and international scenes. The conclusions are likely to touch questions concerning what has been learned or observed during the Cold War that appear relevant both for today's often divisive discussions on the mission and the self-understanding of the church locally and globally, and for understanding the political, ideological and spiritual contexts for today's world-wide church.

Even with these restrictions in scope, the topic has proved too wide to be covered in one single study.

The contribution of several church leaders, theologians and political and social scientists as well as former colleagues and LWF staff members has been invaluable during the writing process. While listing all of them does not make sense, I wish to emphasize the support of just a few of them: I am endlessly grateful to Jean Olson Leshner for lending me precious original material from her personal archives, as well as to bishop emeritus Eero Huovinen and professor Matti Kotiranta for their patient support and encouragement over the years, helping me to achieve my goal. I am most indebted to my former colleague Dr. Norman A. Hjelm for giving so much of his time to provide precise editorial assistance and corrective remarks, and to Merja Luukkanen, my assistant during my years in Finn Church Aid, for her untiring work in helping me to keep the writing process together during its final phase. Finally, I want to express my deep gratitude to my wife Pepi Reinikainen for her affectionate care and support, enabling my absorbing in the research and writing process.

# PART ONE – THE BEGINNING

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE COLD WAR SETS THE SCENE

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) was founded at a time when a world which longed for peace after World War II was turning into a theater of war. In the postwar months preceding the founding assembly of LWF in June 1947, the British, American and Soviet leaders had made crystal clear their assessment concerning the future of the world community. The objectives of the East and West were incompatible. As Lutheran churches from all the continents gathered in June 1947 in Lund, Sweden, an open conflict between former allies was a fact. It affected both the world political climate and the conditions of churches.

The significance of the churches' moving together immediately after World War II is hard to grasp unless we face what was at stake in the new political division of the world, and what its effects were for peoples, nations and societies. The rapid sequence of events involving the governments of both large and small countries and affecting their societies also touched Christian churches, changing their working conditions and placing new priorities on their agendas. A bird's eye view of the emergence of the Cold War facilitates an understanding of the churches' experience of the rising global conflict.

The events marking this new era, which affected the whole world, started to roll on May 8, 1945. Hitler was dead. The word of his suicide started to spread even as smoke still rose from the burning buildings of Berlin. Soviet troops advancing from the East and American troops from the Southwest met in the German capital. The allies from the East and the West shook hands as Germany surrendered unconditionally. This was the turning point, even though it was only the fighting in Europe that came to a halt in May. The new era for the world community that began to dawn while the war still continued in the Far East became not an era of restoration and peace but of the Cold War.

The war had begun on September 1, 1939 when the army of Hitler's Germany entered Poland with the Soviet army following suit as an ally. A few weeks earlier, von Ribbentrop and Molotov had signed a mutual non-aggression pact which contained a secret protocol in which it was agreed that Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Finland, and half of Poland would be included in the sphere of interest of the Soviet Union, and that Hitler's Germany was to have free hands to pursue its objectives in the other half of Poland and in the rest of Europe. In response to the German invasion of Poland, Britain and France immediately declared war on Germany.

In June 1941, Germany turned against the Soviet Union. Britain with the support of the United States allied itself with the Soviet Union. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7 of the same year, the U.S. formally joined the alliance and soon assumed the leading role in the fight against both Nazi Germany and Japan. The war



that originated in Europe ultimately touched all continents causing the death of millions.<sup>8</sup>

After the cessation of fighting in Europe in May 1945, the war escalated in Asia. Nuclear bombs, the first ever used, were detonated over Hiroshima on August 6, 1945 and three days later over Nagasaki, killing within a few days some 215,000 civilians, and with aftereffects many more. Japan surrendered on August 14. This resort to the use of nuclear weapons by the Americans took place at a time when Japan had already announced its readiness to surrender. The bombs were meant to hasten the ending of the war, but also to signal the military superiority of the U.S. over all other countries. This immediately triggered a race between the Soviet Union and the U.S. for the further development of nuclear arms. The Hiroshima-Nagasaki event thus caused a worldwide fear for the future capabilities for mass destruction.

Although the end of the war was considered by the victorious powers as only an uneasy cease-fire, it did give to the war-torn countries an opportunity for some degree of recovery. Non-combatants were able to find their way back into civilian life under radically changed conditions. The loss of family members and friends, and anguish about the fate of refugees, displaced persons, prisoners of war, and those still missing was an excruciating concern for many. Both personal and collective futures were uncertain. The behavior of the occupiers and the unpublished intentions of the occupying powers spread uncertainty and fear. Unanswered questions concerning international justice and unresolved ideological tensions loomed over nations and governments. The conclusion of the war brought at best only a partial peace.

The general public, including the churches, had little inkling of what the leaders of the victorious powers were planning and deciding. The leaders of the three allied powers, Winston Churchill, Franklin D. Roosevelt and Joseph Stalin, had met in Tehran on November 28 – December 1, 1943, where they already agreed about principles for the division of Europe. In February 1945 they met again at Yalta, where they continued to redraw the map of Europe. They decided between themselves to let the USSR annex the Baltic countries, to move the whole of Poland westwards, to divide both Germany and Austria into four occupation zones, and to leave Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Greece independent, albeit under the joint supervision of the allied powers for the sake of ensuring their mutual interests in appropriate proportions. Finland, which had twice, in 1939–40 and 1941–44, been at war with the USSR and briefly, in 1944–45, with Germany, had never been occupied, although it was forced to accept an allied Control Commission in September 1944 after the armistice with the Soviet Union. According to local hearsay, the personnel of the Commission consisted of six Britons and five hundred Russians. For most of Europe, the period until the Paris Peace Treaty of 1947 was a time of deep political uncertainty, and for the countries under Soviet control the time was much longer.

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<sup>8</sup> No accurate figures of casualties during World War II exist. The statistical information available is dependent on its source; methods and principles of counting differ widely. Even in the most official statistics the demarcations between main categories are not clear. Figures of military casualties are usually given in three groups: those killed in action, those missing in action, and those who died as prisoners of war. Information on losses in the Far East (i.e., Japan, China, and Indochina) is only partially available. Figures regarding civilian casualties are everywhere imprecise. Such statistics are usually given as victims of air raids, as those killed in war-related functions, as those killed among persecuted groups within the general population, and as victims of war crimes and starvation. A minimum estimate of all deaths caused by the war is frequently given as 57 million persons, whereas a realistic total is likely to be considerably higher, possibly close to 100 million.

*The uncertainty also touched the Bishop's Residence in Tampere, Finland.*

*Upon my return from the army to the Bishop's Residence on October 4, 1944, one of my first sights was to see my father, then the Bishop of Tampere, sitting in front of the fireplace throwing pile after pile of his archived papers into the fire. I asked: "What are you doing?" His reply was curt: "The Control Commission has arrived in the country. You never know what is going to happen." There went to the ashes much first-hand documentation of our church's international and ecumenical history from the mid-thirties to the end of the war. He had been responsible for the international relations of the Finnish Lutheran Church, including those with the Nordic Churches, the Church of England and the Protestant Churches in Germany. It was certainly not the only collection of letters, memos and reports that was burned at the time of the arrival of the British-Soviet Control Commission.<sup>9</sup>*

The founding of the United Nations, which took place in April–May 1945 in San Francisco, provided a ray of hope to governments and to peoples plagued by widespread insecurity and disillusionment. The new organization was planned to replace the defunct League of Nations as a worldwide instrument for building peace and for establishing a legally binding code of conduct for the international community. The idea had first been expressed in August 1941 when the President of the U.S., and the British Prime Minister met in a military harbor off the coast of Newfoundland. The public result of this meeting was "The Atlantic Charter" which came to play a significant role in the consolidation of a broad international front against Hitler and Nazism.

The charter included a reference to "the establishment of a wider and permanent system of general security" and to the elimination of armed aggression in the postwar era. The basic purpose of the meeting was, however, to clarify the objectives of the Western powers in the war against Germany now fought in alliance with the Soviet Union, and to ensure the broadest possible support for them. Later, at the Tehran conference in 1943, and after much arm twisting, the allied leaders, Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin, reached an agreement about the replacement of the League of Nations with a new structure.

The formal founding took place at the Conference on the Organization of the United Nations, April 24, 1945, in San Francisco. Representatives of 51 Governments that had declared war against Germany were present. On October 24, 46 governments ratified the constitution, whereby the United Nations Organization came formally into existence.

The hope invested in the UN, which was portrayed as an effective operational instrument for preventing and solving international conflicts, soon proved to be an illusion, especially for cases in which the superpowers had a stake. The authority for peacekeeping was, according to the UN constitution, in the hands of the fifteen-member Security Council, of which its permanent members, Britain, China, France, Soviet Union and the USA, each had an absolute right of veto. Without their accord, the UN was powerless. The limits of its effective authority became evident quickly as East-West polarization escalated.

A sharp, although not unexpected turn which came to affect the postwar mood widely took place at the last meeting of the allied leaders, held in Potsdam, Germany,

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<sup>9</sup> Personal notes of the author, early 1960s.

July 17 – August 2, 1945. Harry Truman had taken the place of Roosevelt, who had died on April 12, and Clement Attlee was replacing Churchill, whom he had defeated in the British elections in July. Joseph Stalin alone represented the continuity of the alliance. The war-time atmosphere of cooperation was wiped away by Truman, who distanced himself from his predecessor's conciliatory approach towards the Soviet Union. Truman was determined to stop the unforeseen expansion of Soviet influence in Europe, whereas Roosevelt had been inclined to negotiate further concessions to the USSR. Stalin had expected that the Soviet Union's allies would provide compensation by offering concessions in light of the immense costs to the Red Army for achieving victory over Nazism. Soviet losses in military deaths alone had been some eight or ten times more numerous than those of the West. The main items on the agenda, now overshadowed by open tension, were the implementation of the occupation of Germany, preparations for peace agreements with Germany's allies, and questions of war reparations.

The short, sunny moments which marked end-of-the-war parades passed quickly after the Potsdam summit. Clouds of suspicion between the former allies gathered in the skies of Europe and spread to other continents. The Soviet leaders blamed the Americans for breaking their wartime promises. Whatever impression the parties had about their wartime talks, Stalin returned promptly to an unbending ideological position. The two visions for world community, that of Soviet-promoted socialism and of American-sponsored democracy, came to a head-on collision after the defeat of the common enemy of Nazism.<sup>10</sup>

Sharper signals provoked the collision. Stalin delivered a speech in Moscow on February 9, 1946, in which he left out all the past rhetoric of cooperation between the wartime allies and emphasized the strength of the Soviet system and people and their unambiguous commitment to the international class struggle. He blamed Western "monopoly capitalism" for generating wars. He promised the strengthening of socialism and an increase of the production of consumer goods.

Soon after Stalin's speech, George F. Kennan, one of the most seasoned American experts on Russia, who was stationed at that time as a diplomat in Moscow, sent President Truman an 8,000-word message, which became known as "The Long Telegram." He alerted Truman to the new mood among the leaders of the USSR and urged the US government to take measures to "contain" communism without a direct use of military power.<sup>11</sup>

On March 5, 1946 Churchill delivered a remarkable speech in Fulton, Missouri. His eloquent words about the descent of an "Iron Curtain," which stretched from Stettin on the Baltic Sea to Trieste on the Mediterranean and which divided Europe into two hostile camps, gave the next sign of the toughening of the confrontation. The speech was well noted among governments all over the world. Churchill enriched the current political vocabulary with a new term: "Iron Curtain."<sup>12</sup>

The few dissenting voices among those involved in policy-making who questioned the necessity of dividing the world into two hostile camps have gone largely unno-

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<sup>10</sup> Zubok, Vladislav, and Pleshakov, Constantine, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 32–35.

<sup>11</sup> George F. Kennan, *Memoirs 1925–1950* (New York: Bantam, 1967), 583–98.

<sup>12</sup> The person who perhaps popularized the use of the term "Cold War" as descriptive of the emerging confrontation between the two superpowers was the renowned American journalist Walter Lippman who introduced the phrase in his writings for the *New York Times* as early as 1947.

ticed. John Kenneth Galbraith, a long-time aid of President Franklin D. Roosevelt and a recognized expert on American economic policy after the Great Depression, is one example. His view regarding the basic weakness of the USSR and his questioning of the validity of Western decisions, which forebode the escalation of the Cold War, remained among minority views in Washington.<sup>13</sup> The influence of opposition forces as well as of “peace churches” and pacifist groups in the USA also remained marginal. The containment of communism, the policy adopted by Truman, became the doctrine for the Western world in relation to the Soviet bloc.

In the Soviet-led bloc, all signs of public dissent were crushed by the dictatorship. Remnants of politically, ideologically or religiously based opposition lived underground. There was no place for a peace movement independent of the government. The promotion of peace was by definition an integral part of the policy of the Communist Party: “Socialism is a peace movement” was part of the official doctrine. Independent peace movements or organizations were regarded as superfluous and in effect dangerous because they provided a support base for opposition. Stalin went to the gross extremes of liquidating innocent and loyal citizens and sending hundreds of thousands of people to forced labor camps for even the vaguest rumors of dissidence.

At the end of the war, the prevailing chaos of daily life occupied the minds of ordinary citizens more than anything else. The state of the European continent after the surrender of Germany was far from calm. Endless convoys of refugees and displaced persons, refugee and prisoners’ camps, lack of transportation and acute famine marked the state of affairs well into 1948. Germany represented the most dramatic scene of postwar Europe. Chaotic conditions prevailed in large areas from the Finnish Gulf to the Balkans. Restrictions for travel and limited access to international media were part of the order of the day.

*A personal experience of the author from his travel through Germany in 1948:*

*I had letters of invitation in my pocket from the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) and the British Student Christian Movement when I boarded a ship to Copenhagen in August 1948. I was to attend an international student conference on mission, to be held in the Netherlands and a Student Christian Movement camp for high school students, to be held in the South of England.*

*It had required several months to get through all the formalities. It was quite a procedure already to receive necessary visas for the travel through Sweden and Denmark. I had to apply for two visas from the British Consulate, one for transit through occupied Germany and another to enter the U.K. For the British, Finland belonged to the category of enemy territories.*

*The Bank of Finland granted me permission to buy 18£ for my three weeks of stay in the sterling area. The requirement of clearance from the Finnish Security Police had*

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<sup>13</sup> Galbraith reveals in his *Memoirs* his personal views on the difference of attitudes between Roosevelt and Truman towards the Soviet Union. Galbraith felt that an open conflict over the future of Germany and Europe at large was neither necessary nor desirable. The extreme impoverishment of the USSR by the war was, in his view, not adequately recognized. After the withdrawal of American and British support, Russian military strength was bound to drop dramatically. Galbraith, John Kenneth, *A Life in Our Times: Memoirs* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1981).

*been lifted in the previous autumn when the Paris Peace Treaty had come to force and the Allied Control Commission had left the country.*

*I traveled from Copenhagen by train to Utrecht, the Netherlands, where the WSCF conference was held just before the founding Assembly of the World Council of Churches gathered in Amsterdam. This train ride provided me my first direct exposure to post-war Germany.*

*The approach to Hamburg was at a slow speed because of the repair work. The train crept a long while through industrial areas and blocks of apartments all in ruins. Groups of children were keeping watch over our international train on the banks and waving to passengers. I suddenly noticed that some co-passengers were throwing loaves of bread through opened windows which the on-looking children had apparently been hoping for and now rushed to collect. I could hardly understand that this scene was in Germany 1948.*

*Passengers were not allowed to leave the train during the stops except for the platform. I tried at the station in Hamburg to buy a soft drink. The only drink available was rhubarb juice, a glass of which cost three cigarettes.<sup>14</sup>*

A prolonged shortage of food and other necessities for life added to the discomfort in war-ravaged areas. Even in 1948 in Britain, ration coupons for buying flour, milk, eggs, bacon and sweets were in full force. The peoples of the contested territories, most severely in the Soviet-influenced countries, came under close scrutiny, even pressure, by the political, military and intelligence authorities.

It soon became evident that the division of Europe was to deepen and not to remain a temporary postwar phenomenon. The West strengthened its military and economic security by rebuilding its armed forces, by allocating more resources towards the development of new arms, and by protecting its sphere of influence in scientific, educational and cultural sectors. The controlled wartime economy was made to give way to a market economy.

The American Marshall Plan, initiated in 1948, brought new dimensions to trans-Atlantic cooperation. Industries, trade and entire national economies were to be rebuilt by means of aid related to currency reforms and to new structures of economic cooperation. The whole western half of Europe was to become a stable and prosperous area in order to be well-equipped to counter the Soviet grip over Eastern Europe.

In the east of Europe, life remained far more frugal. For the communist authorities, the protection of their countries and social systems against assumed external or internal threats was a concern that required much of national economies. Strong military forces and state security organizations were matters of high priority as was the building of heavy industry and the collectivization of agriculture.

However, high costs and the lack of popular support undermined the pursuit of socialist goals. Furthermore, the high-quality education that was vital for the creation of a socialist society was burdened by the demands of ideological correctness at all levels of teaching and research and, indeed, by the weight of compulsory indoctrination in Marxist-socialist doctrine.

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<sup>14</sup>From the author's personal travel notes of 1948.

The most horrid part of the Stalin years for life in socialist countries was the deliberate sowing of mistrust among people in all the realms of society and the use of intimidation and fear as a means of controlling people. The elimination of “enemies of society” and the arbitrary imprisonment of persons in labor camps and prisons, characteristic of the worst eras of Stalinist rule, were harbingers of a future under socialism. The grimness of the fate of those who happened to come to disfavor in the eyes of the ruling communist elite must not be forgotten.

This part of the history of Soviet communism extended to the early part of the Cold War. It has been engraved in the experience of the people who survived the era. It is also part of the history of the worldwide church as several generations of Christians who were touched by the consequences of the Stalin regime carry within themselves its indelible marks. Memories of the horrors of the time can scarcely be numbered: children taken from their parents, fathers disappeared in prisons or in distant labor camps, mothers sent to distant regions from where they tried to trace the whereabouts of their family members, all this because they once belonged to an “undesirable” part of the population. The misfits of society included church members, priests and pastors, intellectuals, artists, even experienced party workers and leaders suspected of disloyalty – and many others. Young people were denied access to schools and to higher education because their parents were held to be among those misfits of society. Once a person was labelled an enemy of society there was no mercy. The church and other religious communities had no place in society. What could not be eradicated was held up to the world as evidence of religious liberty in the country. Furthermore, until the death of Stalin in 1953 the Soviet Union tried to impose the same discriminatory church policies on its satellites in Eastern Europe.

Side by side with the dreadful history of the Stalin regime, it has been customary in the West to consider the most disagreeable aspects of the Soviet system as the only and entire picture of the socialist society. The stories of those, who even under the dark post-war conditions were able to lead human, even artistically or scholarly creative lives and were part of supportive communities, are not widely available because of totalitarian controls by the regime. With the opening of archives, the aspects of Soviet life reflecting humane values and hidden adherence to Christian tradition have begun to come into the open. In trying to understand the similarities and contrasts between people and societies on different sides of the Cold War it is necessary to acknowledge within them the existence of different layers, which defy the social and ideological uniformity of a totalitarian society. They existed also during the rule of Stalin until his death in 1953.

After the end of Nazism, the fear of a totalitarian Soviet communism expanded rapidly among all the neighboring countries of the USSR. It was most intense in the still formally independent countries which, however, had a Soviet military presence. A combination of domestic communist activity with open or clandestine Soviet interference in local politics was designed to unsettle societies as a step toward the acceptance of Marxist-Leninist socialism. This prompted millions to leave their homes in Soviet-occupied areas and move to the West. Many others who opposed the new imposed order, however, were determined to live within it, either voluntarily or out of necessity.

The exodus of pastors, priests, bishops and Christian lay leaders, who had found themselves to be under severe restriction, being threatened with imprisonment or even execution, became a source of friction between the church members who remained in their native countries, and the exiles. This friction was sharpened when leaders of both sides sought recognition in global church bodies.

The restrictions of people under occupation were obviously harshest in countries

directly controlled by the USSR. Two neighbors of the Soviet Union, Finland and Austria, managed to come out of the plague with the greatest ease. The former had not been occupied by Soviet Union or Germany while the latter had been merged into Hitler's Germany, but both had allied control commissions to supervise the implementation of armistice agreements.

In practice, supervision by the major powers was not confined to internationally approved monitoring; it was expanded under the pretext of supervision to active interference and manipulation in the life of these countries. Fears of further interventions and of an all-out Stalinist subjugation plagued the minds of most. The principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of independent countries and, indeed, respect for international law and moral principles in power politics became a bitter joke among people under threat.

The expansion of communism in a large part of Europe drove the former wartime allies to have a new look at the prospects of Europe and at the future of the world. The wildest responses to the "red menace" arose in the U.S. where the Soviet menace was more of a bad dream than a real threat. American extremist right-wing movements came to play a major role in Cold War politics. They succeeded to give the global conflict an eschatological significance. The high-pitched public hostility between the Kremlin and Washington and the ensuing acceleration of the arms race was not primarily a result of official government policies or official propaganda but was supported and even advocated by a sizable segment of ordinary citizens on both sides of the "curtain". Aggressive attitudes and emotions dominated public opinion apparently more loudly in the West and more quietly in the East. The political and military polarization between the U.S. and the USSR was not in the hands of their leaders, but it had strong roots among the faiths and traditions of the peoples.

The depth of the rift between the Soviet Union and its allies and the Western powers dawned only slowly among the rank and file of the general public. Nevertheless, it was a rift that touched most areas of life from education to ethics, from science to music and the arts, from economy and technology to matters of faith and religion. Most dangerous was the nuclear arsenal which was hectically developed on both sides of the "curtain" at absurd costs and in utmost secrecy. The warnings of several top-level scientific and military experts concerning the risks and, indeed, the immorality of nuclear arms went largely unnoticed. Even alerted elites failed to grasp the fragility of a peace enforced both by super bombs themselves and the risk of entrusting ultimate decisions about their use to a few persons. The magnitude of the danger which nuclear arms pose to humanity has been perceived in its gravity only in retrospect.

A sense of relief after the fighting stopped in Europe and the Far East, the politics of confrontation in Europe, and the concentration on postwar reconstruction in Europe and North America – the combination of these factors somehow blinded the eyes of the general public in Europe both to the nuclear threat and from noticing the wars underway in Asia. The Third Revolutionary War was fought in China from 1945 to 1949.<sup>15</sup> From 1945 to 1949 Indonesia fought its war of independence against its Dutch

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<sup>15</sup> An open war broke out between the Kuomintang led by Chiang Kai-shek and the Communists led by Mao Zedong in 1927. The civil war continued until 1936 when Chiang Kai-shek and Mao Zedong agreed on a common front against the Japanese. The shaky alliance between the nationalists and the communists broke down finally in 1946. The war began anew and ended with the victory of Mao Zedong in 1949 and the withdrawal of the nationalists to Taiwan. Cf. Lew, Christopher R., *The Third Chinese Revolutionary Civil War 1945–1949, An Analysis of Communist Strategy and Leadership*, (London and New York: Routledge 2009).

and British colonial rulers. Unresolved tensions in Southeast Asia led to the eruption of a full-scale French – Indo-Chinese war in 1946 that ended only in 1954. The super powers had a more or less hidden role in all of these conflicts. Armed struggles of international significance also broke out elsewhere. The poisonous seeds sown in Palestine since the end of World War I were producing a harvest of long-term violence in the Middle East. Furthermore, the colonial system under the British, French, and Portuguese governments was on its deathbed, although most of the violent conflicts erupted only after the 1945–1947 period.

From its very beginning, the Cold War was not limited to the European – North Atlantic region. The competition for recruiting allies from governments and the rivalry for the souls of nations and peoples on other continents spread rapidly. Arms export was included in humanitarian development aid. The superpower conflicts were extended to areas that could not defend themselves against big-power economic and military pressure. Coups d'état became the order of the day for many countries of the "South". The strength of the big powers and their new weapons were tested in numerous proxy wars, fuelled from the mid-forties on. The main players of the global conflict were directly involved in the last phase of Greece's Civil War 1945–1947, in the events leading to the Palestine - Israeli war in 1948, and in the Chinese revolutionary war 1945–1949.<sup>16</sup>

Soon after the war, multitudes of people on both sides of the "Curtain" in the "North," however, turned to the down-to-earth matters of everyday life. Despite the visible differences of living conditions on each side, the aspirations were strikingly similar. Among the young people were many war veterans, some ex-prisoners of war, and some who had been conscientious objectors. The priority for all of them was to find a job or to study and to prepare for future professions, to settle down, and raise a family. For many, a desire to overcome the traumas of the war, to find some valid purpose for life and some hope for the coming generations were live concerns. National leaders had lost their auras. There were few in the old Europe and in North America who were able to capture the minds of the postwar generation and to stir their imagination about a better, and viable world. Perspectives on international politics, current social and armed conflicts, decolonization, and human rights were remote to those who had returned from the trenches. A new and silent generation was in the making. Adjustment to the real world of the Cold War was the order of the day.

The worldwide church experienced a different turn. The calamities of the war and the immense human need crying for helping hands had aroused Christians even during the war to launch relief actions and cooperation between churches. Out of that grew a new wave of the movement towards the unity of the church in the postwar situation, a movement in which the drive for a joint witness to the Christian message and for postwar relief and reconciliation were inherent parts. Once the contours of the bipolar conflict of the Cold War became evident, it also became clear that the churches involved were not ready to accept the political boundaries of the Iron Curtain to

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<sup>16</sup> Numerous studies have been published about the political, economic, military and security agency methods applied during the Cold War among them Visuri, Pekka, *Suomi kylmässä sodassa* ["Finland in the Cold War"] (Helsinki: Otava, 2006); Hughes-Wilson, John, *A Brief History of the Cold War: The Hidden Truth about How Close We Came to Nuclear Conflict* (London: Constable & Robinson, 2006); Westad, Odd Arne, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Andrew, Christopher and Mitrokhin, Vasili, *The Mitrokhin Archive, The KGB in Europe and the West*, Allen Lane The Penguin Press, London 1999.



determine the parameters of their service and witness. Indeed, the curtain became for churches a challenge that called them to cross political borders with their message and ministry. Christian leaders accepted the challenge with determination. They saw in the postwar era signs of a *kairos*, a moment for new beginnings, for spiritual renewal, and for a renewed commitment to a united witness in the devastated world.

Several world gatherings of Christians in 1947–1948 displayed the new mood in the worldwide church. Besides the founding assembly of the Lutheran World Federation in 1947, the events included the world gathering of the International Missionary Council (1947), the World Conference of Christian Youth (1947), the Lambeth Conference of the Anglican Communion (1948), and the inaugural assembly of the World Council of Churches (1948).

The vision and determination of Christian leaders to gather Christians together from all continents for common witness and service revealed their deliberate rejection of passive adjustment to the ideological and political borders set by the world powers. These conferences and events presented, not least with their reports, a conspicuous contrast to the tired acceptance of the political East-West polarization by the general public.

In the evaluation of the events, trends, and choices of both political authorities and church leaders during the opening years of the Cold War, it is to be noted that these years were still part of the Stalinist era, the influence of which was experienced not only in the USSR but also in its satellites as well as widely in the international community. They were also the opening period of the rise of the U.S. as a world leader, a new experience for both Americans and the rest of the world. Moreover, these were the years when the anti-colonial movement was beginning to show its muscle as an emerging factor in the shaping of the world community. An astounding change of scene took place during a short time span.

# CHAPTER TWO

## CHURCHES RESPOND TO THE CRY OF DEVASTATION

### 2.1. THE CHALLENGE TO CHURCHES LEFT BY THE WAR

The massive devastation of the war and the rise of new tensions were a call to Christians all over the globe to come together and to accept jointly the challenge of suffering left by the conflict. Their most visible concerns centered on service to refugees, on participation in general relief actions, on the reconstruction of damaged churches, and on rescuing the “orphaned missions” which the war had cut off from the sending churches. Even more, however, was at stake within the Lutheran churches of Europe and North America.

The war had driven Christians apart from one another, severing mutual communication across the lines of battle. Now, however, doors were opening as churches in nations which had been at war began a common search for reconciliation and for the expression of the bonds of faith and love which tie the Christian community together across all human barriers. It was a time of a grand vision of the unity of the church.

The outbreak of the war in 1939 and the rapid success of German military offensives awakened Christians, particularly in the U.S. and Sweden, to a concern for the victims of the war and Nazi rule. Numerous fundraising drives in both countries were initiated for relief to refugees and to other victims of Hitler’s dictatorship. American Lutherans had had their agencies ready for reactivation since the days of World War I. The history of church relief actions during and immediately after that war was still in close memory.<sup>17</sup>

In Sweden, where the Church of Sweden was at that time a state church and therefore severely restricted in respect to international activities, pastors and lay leaders launched separate aid campaigns and formed voluntary organizations around the country to channel assistance from within the Church of Sweden to the people and churches hit by the war. The building up of common instruments for meeting the postwar challenges was a new task for most churches.

The preparations for a global ecumenical organization had been continuing through the war under the auspices of an interim organization called “World Council of Churches – in Process of Formation.” Its office was located in a modest villa in Champel, Geneva. Willem A. Visser’t Hooft, a Dutchman already tested in several

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<sup>17</sup> The National Lutheran Council (NLC), founded in 1918, became the core organization of American Lutherans for international cooperation in the aftermath of World War I. It became the U.S. base for the Lutheran World Convention (LWC) which was founded in 1923 in Eisenach, Germany. John R. Morehead (1867–1936) was an early pioneer of American Lutheran relief to Europe in the aftermath of World War I, and subsequently of both international Lutheran cooperation and advocacy for the unity of the church. He had just been made executive director of the NLC, when he was at Eisenach elected chairman of the executive committee of the newly founded LWC. With the weight of his personality, his practical grasp of work, and his contagious vision he provided an example to those who two decades later led inter-Lutheran cooperation. Nelson, E. Clifford, ed. *The Lutherans in North America* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 403–414; Wentz, Frederick K., *Lutherans in Concert: The Story of the National Lutheran Council 1918–1966* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1968), 40–62.

international global ecumenical endeavors, served as the general secretary of the provisional organization. With a small team of five full-time staff members he was able to maintain communication with church leaders on different continents across the borders closed by the war. His circle of contacts and advisers included an impressive range of the pioneers of the ecumenical movement – theologians, laypersons, established church leaders, and also significant personalities in international public life including activists involved in political liberation movements.<sup>18</sup>

Visser't Hooft succeeded in keeping alive corporate planning that laid the foundation for the World Council of Churches (WCC) which was formally inaugurated in 1948. An expanded agenda for joint responses by churches of all continents to the postwar needs of peoples, nations and churches was shaping up. An operational unit for interchurch aid and service to refugees was among the plans.<sup>19</sup>

The Lutheran World Convention (LWC), which had been founded in 1923 as an instrument for international cooperation between Lutheran churches and specifically as a vehicle for post-World War I relief, was in a state of confusion. It had never had regular staff or an operational office. It relied on church leaders and theologians and on the finances and other means available to them for common ecumenical tasks. Its founders and tone-setting leaders had come mainly from Germany, the U.S., and the Nordic countries.<sup>20</sup> The rise of Nazism and, especially Hitler's turn against the churches in 1936, had resulted in the steadily tightening isolation of the churches of Germany from the rest of the world, thereby bringing German participation in international ecumenical and inter-Lutheran endeavors virtually to a complete halt. This proved to be the suffocation of the LWC.

At the end of 1946 the LWC existed only on paper. However, not only its German base was defunct. The Church of Sweden with its semi-official organizations for international relief had run into an internal crisis which slowed her down in moving from wartime aid campaigns to an effectively coordinated participation in postwar international relief functions. Most of the other members of the LWC were recipients of international aid. At the outset, only the Americans were equipped for rapid large-scale relief actions.

During the war, the "official" Protestant Church of Germany had delivered some assistance to churches in countries within the German sphere of interest. This activity had no relationship with the ecumenical efforts coordinated by the WCC in Process of Formation or with the LWC that still existed on paper. The lost war and Hitler's

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<sup>18</sup> Visser't Hooft has given a vivid picture of the circle of his friends and advisers with whom he maintained close contact, many of whom later appeared in key positions in the WCC and related churches. These direct contacts were not limited to church leaders but included numerous dignitaries of public life and of the international community. Church-based advisers included Reinhold Niebuhr, George Bell, Pierre Maury, Suzanne de Dietrich, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Karl Barth, Martin Niemöller, and Hanns Lilje. Visser't Hooft had come to know many of these persons during his years in the World Student Christian Federation. Visser't Hooft, W.A., *Memoirs* (London: SCM Press and Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973).

<sup>19</sup> Financial support at the initial stage of the WCC came largely from sources outside the official budgets of churches and their agencies. Personal giving by individuals with means and vision and by foundations led by persons of the same caliber, provided a substantial part of the income.

<sup>20</sup> The LWC still existed on paper until 1947 even if it had been defunct from the late 30s. Its elected president in 1947 was Bishop August Marahrens of Hannover, its vice-president Archbishop Erling Eidem of Uppsala, and its executive secretary Hanns Lilje, who later succeeded Marahrens as the Bishop of Hannover, cf. Schjørring, Jens Holger, Prasanna Kumari, and Norman A. Hjelm, eds., *From Federation to Communion: The History of the Lutheran World Federation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997) 3ff

dictatorship had brought the churches in Germany to their knees and turned them from their central role in the ecumenical movement and inter-Lutheran cooperation to recipients of international relief.

Thus, already in the chaotic months of 1943–1945 preparations for postwar relief and reconstruction actions were underway among Lutheran churches, but most energetically in the United States.

## 2.2. AMERICAN LUTHERANS ASSUME THE LEAD

Lutherans in the U.S. rose in the postwar years of 1945–47 to unquestioned leadership in both international Lutheran relief operations and the pursuit of Lutheran cooperation for the unity of the church. The entry of Americans brought a fundamental change to the international and ecumenical profile of Lutheranism. It had up to then been dominated by the more or less homogeneous culture of the established churches of Germany and the Nordic countries. Now a nationally and ethnically much more pluralistic worldwide church community that was tied together by a common confessional tradition rather than by the secure North European culture and government alliance began to appear.

Roots of the postwar change can be traced back in the history of the Lutheran immigrant churches of 19th and early 20th century America when those churches began to move closer to one another and to identify with the main stream of American Protestantism. The readiness to accept the economic and social challenges of the postwar world and especially the facing of the devastation of their parents' and grandparents' homesteads added momentum to their launching of international relief activities during and after World War I.

Even as the turbulent time of World War II approached, American Lutherans were still dispersed in several independent church bodies, each of which had a different historical and national background. They represented differing theological emphases, their patterns of worship differed from one another, and most of them had their own hymnals. Many of them still used the language of their European parent church, even if World War I had given a push to them to shift their services into English. The search for Lutheran unity had emerged as an existential concern among them between the two wars.<sup>21</sup>

Up to World War II, Lutheran churches in the U.S. had had their primary international contacts through their involvement in overseas mission work and through theological education. German and to some extent Nordic universities and theological schools had served as a citadel for their theological education. Other significant avenues of international influence had been the continuing flow of immigrants and, since World War I, in the 1930s, of refugees of whom a significant number were persons of Jewish descent from Germany. Organized ecumenical and inter-Lutheran contacts represented only a marginal part of the prewar international relations of the American Lutheran churches.

The outbreak of World War II suddenly provided new incentives for them to step out from their national and ethnic confines into the mainstream of American life, to accept large-scale responsibility for the victims of the war in Europe, and to move

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<sup>21</sup> In addition to E. Clifford Nelson, ed., *The Lutherans in North America*, cf. Nelson, E. Clifford, *Lutheranism in North America 1914–1970* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1972) and Granquist, Mark, *Lutherans in America: A New History* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015).

as one confessional community into closer partnership with the worldwide church. By the end of World War II its concentration on international relief action became a trademark of the American Lutherans among their ecumenical partners.

The coming of World War II to an end led Lutheran churches in America to make a leap forward, away from their subsidiary position at home to the joint acceptance of wider international responsibilities. Postwar relief emerged as a focal concern which brought most of them into intensified inter-Lutheran and ecumenical cooperation. Several factors led to this. The first was the impact of the news about the damage and destruction in Europe and the recognition that a large part of the population in the worst hit areas belonged to churches of the Lutheran confession, to the churches of their ancestors. Another factor was the unprecedented scope of response to church appeals for relief which was manifested both by the unanticipated participation of local congregations and by generous giving from outside church structures. A third factor was the presence of a group of visionary leaders in the right spots at the right time to unite the challenge of the postwar chaos and the local responses into a movement of Lutheran cooperation and unity in America.<sup>22</sup> As a result, the main Lutheran churches in the U.S. came together to form one of the leading American church coalitions for international refugee service and relief and reconstruction operations in Europe.

Looking at the leaders of inter-Lutheran activity in the U.S. during and after World War II, the diversity of their background in church life and the modesty of their social and political experience are conspicuous. Several of them were seasoned pastors of local congregations, all of them had experienced effects of the Great Depression of the 1930s, most of them had some church-wide experience, some were in leadership positions, but few had any international experience. A second group of Lutheran leaders were based in theological seminaries. Most of these institutions had thus far only modest ecumenical relationships or any international contacts apart from some German links. Hardly any Lutherans appeared among those Americans who had an internationally recognized role in the worldwide ecumenical movement or on forums dealing with social or political affairs.<sup>23</sup>

The prime motivation for these persons and this new thrust at the end of the war arose from a shared passion and enlarged vision for the mission of the church. Cooperation with other Protestant churches and with the worldwide ecumenical movement became part of the regular agenda of Lutheran churches in the postwar years. Many of their younger leaders had been deeply involved in the work of the churches among refugees. Several of them had personally participated in overseas humanitarian activity. Some were seasoned missionaries who had experienced the impact of the war in remote parts of the world. The overarching concern of postwar American Lutheran leaders was the gathering of their churches together as a visible part of the worldwide Lutheran community and as a living cell of the universal Church committed to the catholicity of the Lutheran confession and to the manifestation of its faith in concrete action for suffering people and devastated churches.

Critics of these American Lutheran involvements have later implied that the per-

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<sup>22</sup> Two agencies provided possibilities for effective cooperation, the National Lutheran Council and the American Section of the LWC. The leading persons were Alfred Th. Jørgensen, Ralph H. Long, Abdel Ross Wentz, Nils M. Ylvisaker, Lawrence B. Meyer, P.O. Bersell and Paul Empie.

<sup>23</sup> Americans among the influential persons whose names were readily on the lips of theological scholars and students in the years before World War II included John R. Mott, Amos N. Wilder, Kenneth Scott Latourette, Henry Pitney Van Dusen, John C. Bennett, and many others.

sons in charge of Lutheran relief activity in Europe and of building inter-Lutheran cooperation between churches in Europe and North America had hidden interests in their high-powered activism, such as building a power bloc of confessional Lutheranism against ecumenical endeavors<sup>24</sup> or gaining political control over inter-Lutheran cooperation in support of the governmental policies of the U.S. However, none of the key persons of Lutheran churches had shown signs of extremist political motivation. None of them, with the exception of the representative of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, seemed to have easy access to the U.S. State Department or to the circles of foreign policy elites. The Lutheran churches in the U.S. were at that time still seen from the outside, and also perceived by themselves, as latecomers to the American church scene. Therefore, they did not have the prestige and the national influence of the churches of the early immigrants and of socially recognized or other influential sectors of American Protestantism.

Postwar American Lutheran theologians and church leaders assumed their places in worldwide inter-Lutheran and ecumenical cooperation largely on the basis of their own personal commitment and capacity and as a fruit of the joint postwar spiritual drive in their churches. As a result, Lutherans from the USA found their way into the World Council of Churches in its founding years and thus paved the way for broader Lutheran participation in the common pursuit of Christians for the mission and unity of the worldwide church.

### **2.3. TROUBLES IN SWEDEN**

The Church of Sweden, Lutheran by its confession, was at the time a state Church.<sup>25</sup> Its legal head was the King. Its constitution, Church Order, and its finances were fully under the control of the government and the Parliament. This applied also to the official international relationships of the church such as membership in international ecumenical organizations. Participation in international church actions as a state church was possible only with the approval of the government within the limits permitted by the Swedish Constitution. The bishops and the clergy had, however, considerable freedom to lead and be part of voluntary activities of the members of the church.

At that time, the membership of the church covered some 99% of the population of Sweden. The Archbishop of Uppsala was the primate of the church. His position entailed a dual loyalty: legally he was accountable to the government and the King; spiritually he was the chief pastor of the church bound by the confession of the church.

In practice, this meant that the official church was virtually bound to loyalty to the government in respect to its foreign policies. In peace time, this loyalty was no burden to the archbishop. His task was not directly related to the day-to-day politics for which the government and local political authorities were responsible. During war and other serious international conflicts, however, the public roles of the church and of its primate were far more delicate.

Archbishops during the twentieth century have had to make personal choices

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<sup>24</sup>Martin Niemöller emerged as the main spokesman for those in Germany who were opposed to the coming together of Lutheran churches as a distinct confessional body within the Protestant Church of Germany (Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland).

<sup>25</sup>A change took place when the Swedish Parliament approved the separation of the church from the state in 2000.

between loyalty to the national government and faithfulness to the confession of the church and the demands of membership in the church universal. It is evident that voluntary functions and organizations of fundamental concern to the church, such as mission and service across political frontiers, have played a crucial role in the Church of Sweden. Yet, the church-state relationship did affect the public role of this church during World War II and the subsequent Cold War.

The largest of the church-related Swedish organizations that were active during the war years was called *Till Bröders Hjälp* ("Aid to Brothers"). It raised considerable funds for the assistance of the Lutheran Church of Finland during the Finnish "Winter War" (1939–40) and later during the Finnish-Russian War (1941–44). It also provided significant underground assistance to the Church of Norway during the Nazi occupation (1940–45). Out of these efforts grew a major agency, which was later co-opted to be a part of *Diakonistyrelsen*, the official diaconic structure of the Church of Sweden.

Another active organization was the Swedish branch of the Lutheran World Convention with its operational base in southern Sweden. Its functions had shrunk before and during the war, paralleling the decline of the world organization under the impact of the Hitler regime. In the postwar situation, the roles of the two organizations began to change.

The flourishing *Till Bröders Hjälp* ran into deep crisis in 1945–1946 as a result of the mismanagement of funds by two of its executive leaders, Thore Borgwall and Allan Svantesson, and because of allegations against the organization by the liberal and left-wing media who charged its leaders with prewar and wartime Nazi sympathies. It finally closed its operations and office in 1946.

At the end of the war, the Swedish branch of the LWC, which had suffered from the uncertainty of the future of international Lutheran cooperation, began to rise in response to the fresh American Lutheran initiatives. With new leadership, it received a new name, Lutherhjälpen, ("Church of Sweden Aid") which in 1947 became the official relief and development agency of the Church of Sweden.<sup>26</sup>

Surely, the problems of the Church of Sweden, which slowed it from joining with full strength in the postwar international Lutheran and ecumenical refugee and relief actions, were painful. They overshadowed the depth of commitment of Swedish Christians to the common cause. At the time when Lutherans in the U.S. came to negotiate the creation of a new international pattern for postwar relief and reconstruction work, the crisis of the Swedish agencies was not yet over.

## 2.4. PROBLEMS IN AND WITH GERMANY

The troubles of the Church of Sweden cannot be compared with the difficulties that plagued the German churches at the end of the war. Nazi censorship had not been able to stop the news conveyed to the outside world about the threats which the Hitler regime posed to the German churches. Information about the struggles of the Confessing Church and various expressions of opposition among them to Nazi ideology kept leaking to the outside world. Hints about a split within the Confessing Church aroused consternation and confusion among church leaders outside Germany. Frag-

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Ryman, Björn, *Lutherhjälpens första 50 år: 1947–1997* (Stockholm: Verbum, 1997). An abridged English language summary, "Lutherhjälpen: Church of Sweden Aid 1947–1997, is found in *Svensk Missions Tidskrift*, Vol. 85, No. 2, 1997.

mentary news about the concentration camps and the gas chambers, nevertheless, confirmed the grimmest impressions of Hitler's rule.

Awareness concerning the threat of Nazi ideology to the church and to the confessing of Christian faith grew palpably in the worldwide church even during the war and became clearly evident at the first postwar worldwide conferences of Christians. The recognition of Nazism as a major threat to world peace remained one of the few common convictions between the allied partners even as a new polarization was already in the making.

Much of the agonizing search within German churches for appropriate ways to stand against the policies and practices of their dictatorial regime remained, however, out of reach for the outside world and the international ecumenical community. Opposition to Nazism within the churches ranged across a wide spectrum of alternatives from active resistance to sustained struggle for the survival of Christian communities. The reading of the complex wartime history from different vantage points affected significantly the postwar roles of the leaders of the German churches and of their ecumenical partners. The difficulties of coping with the past became evident in the postwar planning for both Lutheran cooperation and for German participation in the ecumenical movement.

Questions about the role of the president of the LWC, Bishop August Marahrens, during the Nazi period and about his recognition or rejection as church leader in the postwar period provide a vivid illustration of the problem. His status as the head of the LWC threatened to become a roadblock for the much-needed international Lutheran cooperation. In order to understand the decisions before and during the decisive meetings leading to the transition from the LWC to the Lutheran World Federation, it is necessary to recall the role of Bishop Marahrens in the German Church struggle from 1933 to 1947.

August Marahrens (1875–1950), Bishop of the Hanoverian regional Church (Landeskirche) from 1925 to 1947, was elected president of the LWC when it met in Paris in 1935 and was one of the most visible Lutheran leaders in Germany throughout the Nazi era. Marahrens was an active member of the Confessing Church, which fought against Nazi ideology in general and the Nazi efforts to control the churches, from its beginning in 1933. August Marahrens was the chairperson of the Confessing Church from 1934 until 1936, when it split into two wings, one strongly under the influence of Karl Barth and Martin Niemöller and the other, largely Lutheran, led by Hanns Lilje and himself.

After the outbreak of war, Marahrens had been uncertain about remaining as president of the LWC, as his term was in any case to end at the assembly originally scheduled for Philadelphia in 1940 which never took place. Alfred Th. Jørgensen of Denmark, a member of the executive committee of the LWC, had advised him against resignation, because the decision to elect a new president would then belong to the executive committee. That committee, however, could not meet because of the war, and subsequently the LWC would be without a president. Marahrens decided to remain in office. Hanns Lilje was the executive secretary.

During the war criticism against Marahrens began to increase both within the Niemöller wing of the Confessing Church and internationally, reaching a peak at the Treysa conference of the church leadership in August 1945, at which time the "Evangelical Church in Germany" (EKD) was constituted as a federation of churches. The critics challenged Marahrens' decision to adjust to the administrative measures of the government-controlled church (Reichskirche) by which he had aimed to protect local



congregations from closure. The critics also blamed him for Nazi sympathies because he had publicly defended the German army's campaign against Bolshevik rule and refused to support the plan for the assassination of Hitler. His main reason for opposing the assassination plan had been theological, following the traditional Lutheran teaching concerning the relationship between church and governmental authority and its limitation in respect to both. As an additional argument against assassination, he had come to the conclusion that an assassination would make Hitler a martyr in the eyes of the majority of the German people and would extend and strengthen the influence of Nazi ideology long beyond the end of the war. He expressed this argument in writing to Ernst Sommerlath, professor at Leipzig, on March 5, 1947 – only after the end of the war.

Lutheran leaders from the U.S. were poorly informed about what went on in the German church during the last years of the war since lines of direct communication were cut. The accusation that Marahrens was a Nazi sympathizer dominated in post-war ecumenical circles. Only Niemöller's personal history and the views of his wing of the Confessing Church were widely communicated in international and ecumenical news media. The role of the Lutheran wing of the Confessing Church and its resistance received far less attention. In the immediate postwar atmosphere, the American leaders seemed to accept the Barth-Niemöller interpretation of the church struggle as a whole and thereby emphatically joined in the prevalent wave of allegations against Marahrens.

The American delegation that met him at the end of 1945 in Hannover demanded that he plead guilty to the charges made against him by Niemöller and his followers. Marahrens refused. The political and theological debate about the different dimensions of opposition vs. faithfulness to a brutally unjust political order continued among Germans and outsiders for years. Even so, already in December 1944, the American Section of the LWC had resolved that Marahrens should be relieved of his duties as president of the LWC. The decision was made before any direct discussions with Marahrens or other German leaders had taken place, actually before the American delegates sent to Germany on a fact-finding mission left for Europe.<sup>27</sup>

Under pressure from the Americans, Archbishop Erling Eidem of the Church of Sweden had reluctantly consented to request Marahrens "on behalf of the Lutherans in the USA and Sweden," to give up his position as the president of the LWC. Marahrens then submitted his resignation from the presidency of the LWC on October 31, 1945. His letter of resignation stated only his intention to be freed from the position of president; it did not mention his membership on the executive committee of the LWC.

A most awkward consequence of the conclusion hastily drawn by the Americans concerning Marahrens' position was that neither Marahrens nor Lilje received an invitation to the speedily convened meeting of the LWC executive committee in December 1945 in Copenhagen. Eidem, who had been asked to convene the meeting, did not act before late November before issuing such an invitation.

The interim executive secretary of the LWC, the American Sylvester C. Michelfelder, was responsible for the agenda and administration. He had interpreted that Marahrens' resignation had presupposed also resignation from the executive committee. The committee members in Copenhagen had agreed with that interpretation

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<sup>27</sup> A detailed account of these developments is found in Chapter 11, "The Rebirth and Reconstructionism of World Lutheranism, 1944–47" in Nelson, E. Clifford, *The Rise of World Lutheranism: An American Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982) 350ff. Cf. also Schjøring, Kumari, Hjelm, op. cit., 20–23 et passim.

and acted accordingly. Eidem, whom the Copenhagen meeting had elected president of the LWC, although he was absent, did not contest Michelfelder's interpretation. Marahrens had, however, asked to be relieved only from the presidency, not from membership on the executive committee. When Eidem received the minutes of the Copenhagen meeting and noted that only four of the twelve members of the committee had been present, he declared the meeting invalid. Nevertheless, Marahrens received no invitation to the more carefully prepared meeting in Uppsala in July 1946. Lilje had meanwhile submitted his resignation as executive secretary of the LWC.

These actions did not stop the controversy over Germany. Marahrens had maintained clearly the confidence of the Hanover Church while continuing to serve as its bishop until its 1947 synod. German church leaders expressed their mutual disagreement with the procedure whereby the German member churches of the LWC had been excluded from decision-making at the Uppsala meeting and had not been asked to nominate a successor to their seat on the executive committee. This incident left a long-lasting wound in the otherwise cordial German-American relationships and a seed of suspicion about the respect of Americans for internationally fair procedures in dealing with complex church-political situations.

Only long after the end of the war has a reassessment of the roles of church leaders during the Nazi era been possible. Sensitive archives have been opened. Positions, of which it was difficult and even dangerous to speak openly, have become known, and supporting documentation has become available. Thus it is that Bishop Marahrens' positions and actions have also come into a new light. No traces of his having joined the Nazi-sanctioned German Christians have been found. Instead, his problematic statements and also his admission of mistakes and misjudgments are on record.

The case of Marahrens stands as an illustration of the success of the tactics of Nazi authorities aimed at splitting the church. What happened to him provides an example of the distortion of church-state relations under a totalitarian regime into an extreme polarization which tolerates only simplified yes and no answers.

Although Archbishop Eidem showed signs of uncertainty about the plans for a new Lutheran world organization at the time when the probability of the establishment of the World Council of Churches increased, Marahrens' made it clear to him that the new opening for cooperation between the Lutheran churches in Germany, Sweden, and the U.S. had to be grasped. Other member churches of the old LWC had hardly any say at this stage of the deliberations about the fate of the paralyzed LWC and about its successor. The agreements reached in Sigtuna, Sweden in March 1945 and in Uppsala in December 1945 led all of those involved to propose unanimously the formation of what was to be the Lutheran World Federation.

## **2.5. AMERICANS ACT**

The history of the American initiatives for the new international Lutheran relief and reconstruction program in Europe, which in the course of the next two years led to the founding of the Lutheran World Federation, illustrates the end-of-the-war scene and the obstacles to cross-border cooperation. Parts of this history have the characteristics of a suspense story in which, after many turns, the pieces finally fall into place.

The story begins in 1944 with an initiative of the American Section of the Lutheran World Convention. Its leaders decided to make a head start by preparing an international operational campaign to provide aid to refugees and a wider relief and

reconstruction program in Europe. They even invited the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod (LC-MS), which had a longstanding record of refusing to participate in most cooperative efforts with other Lutherans, to join the planned relief campaign so that their joint operation would represent the whole of American Lutheranism. The invitation received a positive response to the extent that the LC-MS decided in September 1944 to authorize its Emergency Planning Council to cooperate with the American Section of the LWC on European relief. The agreement of the LC-MS was announced, however, with the reservation that the LC-MS would withdraw from the joint action, "if the cooperation were to go beyond 'externals.'"

An adventurous fact-finding mission marked the opening of the relief and reconstruction program. It was prepared without fanfare, but with farsightedness and courage. The aim was to have a viable plan of inter-church cooperation ready when the war would come to an end. At the time of the exploratory mission, fighting was still in full swing in and around Germany, in the Baltic area, and even in Finnish Lapland. Three seasoned men: P.O. Bersell, president of the Augustana Synod and of the National Lutheran Council, Ralph H. Long, the executive director of the National Lutheran Council, and Lawrence B. Meyer, the executive director of the Emergency Planning Council of the LC-MS, were chosen in the autumn of 1944 for an expedition to Europe. Obtaining the required travel permits from the U.S. government and the military and from the countries to be visited and the subsequent establishing of contacts and plans for meetings was an elaborate and time-consuming process; however, the clearances did finally come through.

The tasks of the team were (1) to evaluate the situation and needs of Lutheran churches in Europe, (2) to contact Lutheran church leaders in Europe about a joint program of reconstruction and rehabilitation, (3) to explore possibilities of cooperation with other Christian leaders and the World Council of Churches, (4) to contact US Army and Navy Chaplains and staffs about the Lutheran ministry to American servicemen and (5) to consult those in charge of the prisoners of war about American Lutheran participation in the Christian ministry to such prisoners.<sup>28</sup>

The record of the mission reveals the setting and the excitement involved in the expedition.

*"On a bleak winter day, February 28, 1945, the three commissioners left Washington, D.C., in a U.S. army transport command airplane for Europe via Labrador and Iceland. The journey was described by Bersell as 'hazardous'. German V-1 and V-2 bombs were still falling on London when the Americans reached the British capital. It was clear to them that, despite the dangers of travel, they were being afforded a welcome and perhaps unexpected opportunity to realize the fivefold purpose for which they had been commissioned. ... After nine days of meetings in Britain, the survey team obtained a flight to Stockholm aboard a converted Boeing Flying Fortress. This part of the journey took them on a cloudy, moonless night over the North Sea and German-occupied Norway. Once in Stockholm they plunged immediately into a round of discussions with government leaders (including King Gustav V and Count Folke Bernadotte) and*

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<sup>28</sup> The story of the six-week fact-finding mission from February 28, 1945 is recorded in an article of *The Lutheran Standard*, May 19, 1945 and more thoroughly in *The Lutheran Companion*, March 23, 1955. The original copy of the "Protocol" of the mission is in the E. Clifford Nelson Papers, St. Olaf College Archives, Northfield MN. A thorough summary of the mission is found in Nelson, E. Clifford, *The Rise of World Lutheranism: An American Perspective*, 351-358.

*churchmen from Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Finland. They received information on need for church relief, orphaned missions, and reconstruction of Church property, as the devastation in the northern Norwegian province Finnmark and Finnish Lapland was nearly total because of the 'scorched-earth policy' of retreating Nazi forces."*

The most crucial talks were carried out on March 17, 1945 in Sigtuna, Sweden. The American team met a six-member Swedish group led by Archbishop Erling Eidem, still the vice-president of the LWC.<sup>29</sup> After cumbersome talks, in which the positions of the Americans and Swedes initially differed sharply, the group reached an agreement on several crucial issues.

The first was the organization of a joint postwar relief activity by Lutheran Churches. The Swedes had suggested that they concentrate on relief in their neighboring areas, mainly Finland, Norway, and perhaps in Poland and the Baltic area, whereas they expected the Americans to assume responsibility for Germany and the rest of Europe. The Americans disagreed. Their preference was to launch a genuinely international, worldwide Lutheran relief, refugee service and reconstruction program. The Swedish proposal looked to them like a distant reflection of outmoded comity agreements in mission. In their view, such a plan would inherently weaken a comprehensive response to the needs, shun away from the reconciliation of people and churches on opposite sides in the war, and undermine the search for unity among Lutheran churches. The American view prevailed. With the outcome of the Sigtuna meeting, the ground was laid for the service and mission approaches of the future Lutheran World Federation.

The second issue of fundamental importance was the question of a coordinated Lutheran approach to the ecumenical movement and of a united Lutheran voice concerning the structure of the WCC, which was to be decided at its first assembly in Amsterdam in 1948. The American proposal was that the Lutheran churches which were committed to membership in the WCC should have their membership through their joint worldwide confessional group. The Swedes, however, supported a pattern in which each church that fulfilled the basic membership criteria ought to have the status of a member church in its own right, without regard to its confessional tradition. On this question, the participants in Sigtuna were unable to reach a consensus.

The third was the future of the LWC. Should it be revived? How should those carrying the stamp of compromise during the Hitler era be dealt with? Or should another structure be built for bringing the Lutheran churches of the world together? Or would the founding of the World Council of Churches make a confessional world organization obsolete? The conclusion was that a new pattern of international, worldwide Lutheran cooperation was urgently needed. While it would continue the work for which the LWC had been founded in 1923, it would have to face new tasks prompted by the suffering and devastation caused by the war and by the changed situations of churches and in the international community. What the new pattern of worldwide Lutheran cooperation would be was still left open in Sigtuna.

At this time, it was obvious that the American Lutherans had emerged as the

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<sup>29</sup> Besides Eidem, the group consisted of Edvard Rodhe, from 1946 Bishop of Lund, Per Pehrsson, Dean of the Cathedral of Gothenburg, Lars Wollmer, pastor of the Lund Cathedral parish, editor Yngve Rudberg, Secretary of the Bishops' Conference and later Bishop of Skara, and Thore Borgvall, a businessman, active in the church-related relief organization "Till Bröders Hjälp" but dismissed in September 1945 because of misuse of funds.

unquestioned leaders of international Lutheran relief operations and of the pursuit of Lutheran cooperation for the unity of the church. The two other groupings, that had been influential in the LWC, namely the Germans and the Scandinavians, were handicapped by their own situations.

How far the group in Sigtuna discussed the perspectives of the emerging postwar era and the vistas of the political future of Europe is not revealed by the available archival documentation. It is, nevertheless, safe to assume that through his ecumenical and governmental contacts, Archbishop Eidem was well informed at the time of the meeting about the negotiations underway between the allied leaders. After all, the Sigtuna meeting took place only five weeks after the allied conference at Yalta. The beginning of an open distrust between the Soviet and American leaders was apparently obvious to him.

Eidem was known as a cautious leader who avoided issuing public statements on the role of the church or about his own views regarding political issues of the day. He had chosen the way of quiet diplomacy as his way to communicate the interests and positions of the church to political authorities. This posture had deep roots. He had not been in favor of formal protests against the church policies of the Nazi regime. He had chosen to express his opposition of them by consistently declining all invitations from Germany to events that would have given an impression of his recognition of the Nazi regime or of the legitimacy of the church leaders who consented to Hitler's policies. He had, though, in 1934 asked, after consulting Bishop G. K. A. Bell of Britain, for a private audience with Hitler. In that audience he spoke on behalf of the ecumenical movement and the Church of Sweden expressing their joint disapproval of the Nazi policies, and pleading with Hitler to reconsider them. Although this particular effort had been, according to him, a total failure, Eidem maintained and further developed his approach. It is therefore conceivable that at the outbreak of the Cold War he wanted to avoid rash public statements or actions which would bypass careful analysis and place him prematurely at odds with the neutrality of Sweden in the midst of the evolving ideological polarization. Personally, he was known to be deeply worried about the spread of anti-religious, atheistic communism in the footsteps of the expansion of Soviet influence. His convictions, and even his caution, apparently impressed the Americans, although his hesitations sometimes frustrated them.

The American fact-finding team continued from Sweden to Geneva, where its members had extensive discussions about the place of the Lutheran relief action within the ecumenical programs that were planned by the World Council of Churches in Process of Formation. These talks contributed decisively to a close partnership between the WCC office and the American Lutheran leaders in the development of the postwar relief and inter-church aid programs. The cordial welcome by the general secretary of the WCC, W.A. Visser't Hooft, laid the ground for coordinated ecumenical relief operations in Europe, in which the emerging LWF was a significant partner.

## **2.6. COMMON PLANS EMERGE**

The fact-finding mission produced significant results. Its discussions in London, Sigtuna, and Geneva had cleared the way for coordinated Lutheran participation in the ecumenical and inter-Lutheran relief and reconstruction work in postwar Europe. They thus made a decisive contribution to the reactivation of the work initiated under the auspices of the LWC for worldwide Lutheran unity. Plans were now clear enough for speedy implementation.

The first step ahead was the sending of a representative of the American Section of

the Lutheran World Convention to Europe with Geneva as the center for operations. The main tasks of the envoy now were, first, to establish a center for joint Lutheran involvement in relief and reconstruction work, second, to link the Lutheran efforts with the ecumenical program of the World Council of Churches, and third, to coordinate the preparatory work for bringing Lutheran churches together for a first postwar assembly in continuation of the work of the LWC.

Immediately after the return of the American Lutheran team from Europe, the American Section of the LWC met on April 18 in Chicago with two Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod representatives present. After receiving the report from the fact-finding mission, the American Section invited Sylvester Michelfelder, a pastor from Toledo, Ohio, to be its liaison person in Geneva for a one-year period. His responsibilities were to include the coordination of the relief operations of American Lutherans in Europe and preparations to resuscitate the work of the LWC worldwide. Furthermore, he was to serve as a co-opted staff member of the WCC in the Process of Formation<sup>30</sup> for its material aid programs, thus providing a link between Lutheran relief operations and the newly formed Department of Reconstruction and Inter-Church Aid of the WCC. Later, in December 1945, he was appointed by the LWC to serve as interim executive secretary for the LWC, succeeding Hanns Lilje of Germany who had resigned. The focus of this assignment was the preparation for the founding assembly of the LWF. Michelfelder's appointment at the time of that founding assembly as the LWF's first executive (general) secretary was a natural follow-up to his pioneering work in bringing Lutheran churches together across the dividing lines left by the war.

The American Section of the LWC formalized at its Chicago meeting the cooperation that had evolved during the fact-finding mission between Swedes and Americans, by appointing Ralph H. Long and Franklin Clark Fry to an American-Swedish liaison committee. Furthermore, it endorsed the invitation issued by the WCC to Stewart Herman to join the staff of the Department of Reconstruction and Inter-Church Aid as its associate director for its program in Germany.

These personnel decisions reinforced the leading role of Lutherans of the USA in the worldwide cooperation of Lutheran Churches and the formation of the new organization, the Lutheran World Federation. The outstanding troika of Ralph H. Long, Franklin Clark Fry, and Sylvester Michelfelder, complemented by the younger Stewart Herman, with his experience of Germany, was instrumental in bringing the diverse flock of Lutherans together across the emerging iron curtain and from all the continents. They carried within themselves the heritage of a rising Lutheranism in America, a strong sense of Lutheran identity, and a firm ecumenical commitment.

Their combined vision of the unity and mission of the Church Catholic and of the place of Lutherans in it carried weight. Their influence for the profile of world Lutheranism in the ecumenical movement and in its coming confrontation with the emerging Cold War was decisive.

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<sup>30</sup> During the formation of the WCC, three alternatives were debated regarding the future structure of the organization: (1) a council of churches without further qualification beyond the basis as stated in the WCC constitution; (2) a council of churches with explicit reference to the geographic-regional balance of the constituency; (3) a council of churches basically formed by confessional groups of churches. The third of these options was strongly advocated by Michelfelder. The final result was a compromise between all three: a church accepted as a member of the WCC must belong to a confessional group.

**Franklin Clark Fry** (1900–1968) of the United Lutheran Church in America (ULCA) graduated from the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia in 1925 and was ordained the same year. He was elected president of the ULCA in 1944 and president of the newly-formed Lutheran Church in America in 1962. He served in several Lutheran and ecumenical positions, e.g. as president of Lutheran World Relief from 1946, president of the LWF from 1957–1963, and chairperson of the WCC Central Committee from 1964 to 1968.

**Stewart Herman** (1909–2006) of the United Lutheran Church in America had studied before the war in Germany and served as pastor of the American Church in Berlin, 1938–1942. He was interned after the U.S. had joined the war but returned to the U.S. in 1943. After a brief period with U.S. military intelligence, he volunteered to enter the service of his church for refugee and reconstruction work in Germany. In 1945–1948 Dr. Herman worked in the refugee and reconstruction division of the WCC in Process of Formation and in 1948–1952 as director of the refugee services of the LWF.

**Ralph H. Long** (1882–1948) was a pastor of the American Lutheran Church and a member of the American Section of the Lutheran World Convention. From 1930 until his death in 1948 he served as the third executive director of the U.S. National Lutheran Council. In this position he supervised the Council's fund-raising campaign Lutheran World Action (LWA), which was targeted to assist, e.g., war refugees and orphaned missions. At the LWF founding assembly in 1947 he was elected treasurer of the LWF.

**Sylvester Michelfelder** (1889–1951) was an ordained minister of the American Lutheran Church who served his church as a parish pastor from 1914. He served five years as a superintendent of the Lutheran Inner Mission until in the summer of 1945 he was positioned in Geneva. In December 1945 he was elected executive secretary of the LWC and in 1947 executive secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, in which position he served until his death.

Three elements stood out in Michelfelder's initial working agenda. They were (1) the refugee and reconstruction activities in those European countries that had suffered the greatest damage, of which Germany required by far the most attention, (2) negotiations with Lutheran church leaders regarding the closure of the pre-war Lutheran World Convention and the planning that led to the founding of the Lutheran World Federation, and (3) participation in planning the structure of the World Council of Churches with the conviction that the confessional character of member churches was to be clearly recognized in the constitution of the Council.

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After the fact-finding mission, joint planning for Lutheran relief programs in Europe and for the revival of the LWC or its replacement by a new organization continued speedily. Participation was expanded to include Danish, Finnish, Norwegian, and German churches from the different allied occupation zones. After a rather messy sequence of meetings and discussions including a hastily gathered LWC Executive Committee meeting in Copenhagen in December 1945 which was attended only by four of the twelve elected members, and which Archbishop Eidem, the vice-president of the LWC, afterwards declared invalid, the last formal meeting of the LWC Executive Committee was convened in Uppsala on July 24–26, 1946. Eleven of the twelve members elected in 1935 attended although two out of them, who came from the Russian occupied zone of Germany, arrived when the meeting was already over. The one missing from the twelve was Bishop August Marahrens of Hannover, who

had submitted his resignation as the president of the LWC. Those in attendance were Archbishop Erling Eidem, vice-president and chair of the meeting, Dr. Alfred Th. Jørgensen (Denmark), Bishop Max von Bonsdorff (Finland), Professor Olaf Moe (Norway), Bishop Hans Meiser (Germany), and from the U.S. Dr. Franklin Clark Fry, Dr. Ralph H. Long, and Dr. Abdel Ross Wentz. The two late arrivals from Germany, Professor Ernst Sommerlath and Professor Karl Ihmels gave their approval to the decisions by signing the Minutes.

The Uppsala meeting, chaired by Eidem, arrived after hard labor at a unanimous decision to form the Lutheran World Federation as an organization to continue and develop further the work that the Lutheran World Convention had carried internationally from 1923 to 1936. It approved a draft constitution for the new LWF which in its sections on Doctrinal Basis and Nature and Purpose closely followed the constitution of the LWC and agreed to submit it to the founding assembly of the LWF. The meeting accepted the invitation of the Church of Sweden to hold the assembly in Lund on June 30 – July 6, 1947. It further appointed for the preparatory work a four-member international Program and Commissions Committee, which consisted of Ralph H. Long (USA), Anders Nygrén (Sweden), Hans Meiser (Germany) and Sylvester C. Michelfelder (USA, Geneva). After his initial hesitation about a new organization, Archbishop Eidem proved a determined supporter and leader of the founding process. Michelfelder and Herman had been instrumental in establishing communication between German, Nordic and American Church leaders through the whole process of preparation for the Uppsala meeting and the Lund Assembly.

The Uppsala meeting in July 1946 reflected the uncertainties of the world situation. The choice of the location for the forthcoming first assembly of the Lutheran World Federation had been made between the USA and Sweden. The reasons for opting for a neutral country were presumably more pragmatic than ideological. Travel permits and visas for participants would have been more uncertain for the USA. Both the church and the government of Sweden showed an active interest in hosting the assembly and in the prospects of receiving participants from different sides of the past and looming conflicts. While there was a groundswell of concern in the USA for the people and churches of the war-torn regions, Lutheran churches played only a marginal role in the public life of the USA. The future of Lutheran churches in Eastern Europe was still full of question marks, even if the chances for the survival of the Baltic churches after the Soviet occupation seemed to most at best faint, if not totally lost. The fear of the spread of totalitarian anti-Christian communism, “godless Bolshevism,” was viewed as the most serious challenge for the Lutheran churches of Europe and North America. The ideological and political frontiers were still fluid.

After the Uppsala meeting, the road to the first assembly of the Lutheran World Federation in Lund was open. Leadership of the international preparatory work was firmly in American hands and the national and local preparation was in the hands of the deeply committed Swedish church leaders and congregations. The most pressing challenge ahead was the drawing of Lutheran churches together for aid to the churches and people suffering from the destruction of World War II.



# CHAPTER THREE

## LUTHERAN CHURCHES FORM A WORLD FEDERATION

### 3.1. LUTHERANS COME TOGETHER

The founding assembly of the Lutheran World Federation opened on June 30, 1947 with a festive Eucharist in the Romanesque Cathedral of Lund, Sweden. The primate of the Church of Sweden, Archbishop Erling Eidem, preached the sermon. The prestigious University of Lund provided generous space for the proceedings of the whole assembly. The dignified setting communicated an air of stability and endurance to the participants, most of whom came from quite different circumstances, many from countries ravaged by the war and from areas of continued turmoil and rapid transition.

The 163 official delegates represented 47 member churches and came from 21 countries. Of the official delegates, 105 came from Europe, of whom 26 came from churches behind the descending "Iron Curtain"; and 44 came from North America. Only 14 delegates came from the South, commonly called "Third World," of whom seven were expatriate missionaries. In addition, 337 visitors from 18 countries were registered participants in the assembly. "The Lutheran Church in the World Today" had been chosen as an unpretentious theme for the gathering.

It was a visible event. All the heads of state of the five Nordic countries had sent their greetings. The primate of the Anglican Communion, the heads of other churches and synods, several Christian world organizations, numerous mission societies and agencies and national councils of churches sent their messages. The media publicity in general and in church circles in particular was impressive. The significance of the assembly was noted in local congregations, especially in the churches hit hardest by the war. The flow of material aid, which had aroused hope since the end of the war, seemed to be assured of expanding with the help of the new international organization of churches. Moreover, the new federation was to increase the flow of information and the sharing of spiritual inspiration between the Lutheran churches that had been isolated from one another during the war. The sense of belonging to a wider community of Christians sharing a common faith across national, ideological and cultural boundaries was widely treasured in member churches. The ominous threat of the rising East-West tension added weight to the perspectives of unity and of mutual support across the "curtain."

Thus, the Lund Assembly became a sign of a new era for Lutheran churches as a worldwide community and for their common mission in a troubled world. In retrospect, it seems that the divisive experience of World War II and the danger of a new ideologically motivated world conflict prompted Lutheran churches to draw together in order to give a united response to both the material needs and the spiritual longing of afflicted peoples.

In the minds of the delegates, the turmoil of the world community suddenly became an invitation arising out of the gospel of Jesus Christ to mission rather than as a threat to the church. Witness and service to afflicted peoples and nations came to the center. The spiritual and theological tradition of the Lutheran Reformation appeared to the participants as a stronghold, not only for the life of the church in general, but now, with surprising relevance, for meeting the postwar uncertainties and the ideo-

logical threats ahead. The enthusiasm, which the official report mirrors, was echoed amply in local churches in many countries.

A renewed vision of common participation by Lutherans on all continents in the one mission of the church of Christ had touched the assembly. The value of the inherited Lutheran confession as a gift of God for the whole church found new dimensions. The experience of oneness strengthened the commitment of Lutheran church leaders in their mission and service to cross all boundaries that separate peoples and nations from one another. Thus, the assembly reflected joy and hope. Doors were opening for a rediscovery of faith as the source for joint action in the war-torn world. Even the threatening signs of a new confrontation between world powers seemed to strengthen the shared commitment to the vision of one common mission and service as an inherent strength of Lutheran churches of the world. A collective spread of confidence characterized the Lutheran world gathering.

The number of churches represented in Lund looks modest compared with Christian world assemblies of more recent decades. Bringing them together in 1947 against many obstacles, however, was a significant achievement. The composition of the list of delegates by regions was quite different from those of the assemblies that took place toward the end of the Cold War. The political status of much of Europe was still chaotic. Occupied Germany was still considered as one country. The Baltic countries had been occupied and annexed by the USSR, although they appeared on the list of delegates as independent countries. Exile churches with their centers in Sweden and Germany were accepted as proper representatives of the Baltic Lutheran Churches, while no delegates came directly from the Baltic countries. The organizers of the assembly had not succeeded in establishing any contact with the Lutheran churches inside Soviet Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The position of Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland with regards to the "Iron Curtain" remained uncertain – until early 1948. Austria and Germany had both been divided into four occupation zones. Romania and Yugoslavia were missing from the list. The possibilities of participation varied among the churches that were in areas under Soviet occupation or under its controlling influence. Full delegations came from Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland. From the Russian zone of Germany, the Saxonian Church had the largest delegation, while the others were able to send fewer delegates than the number authorized by their churches or none at all. No one was able to predict either what the working conditions for the churches under Soviet influence would be under increased political restrictions or what the possibilities for their participation in future inter-Lutheran and ecumenical gatherings were.

The Americans and the Swedes had carried the main role in planning for the Lund Assembly and for a new start for worldwide Lutheran cooperation and for Lutheran involvement in the ecumenical movement. The vision for the need of a new organization had arisen almost as a byproduct of the mass movement of inter-church aid and concern in the USA and Sweden for orphaned missions. However, the real breakthrough had come when Archbishop Eidem, forcefully encouraged by the Lutheran leaders from the USA, convened the members of the old Lutheran World Convention at Uppsala in 1946.

At Lund, the delegates from the triangle of North America (44 delegates), the Nordic area (42 delegates) and Germany, East and West (34 delegates), came to form the majority of the assembly. Although other Lutheran churches seemed to have only little influence on the decisions concerning the structure and the programmatic plans of the new organization, their presence made a significant impact on the tone of the assembly.

### 3.2. AMERICANS OUTLINE THE COMMON TASK

The presentations of two leading Lutherans from the U.S. who reported extensively on the preparations, presented a vision for the nature and task of the LWF and proposed a course for the work of the assembly.

The first of the presentations was the official report of the executive (general) secretary Sylvester Michelfelder. After summarizing the preparatory stages for the assembly, which had been driven by “the desire of fellowship” and “a new urge to come to the rescue of the needy,” he gave an account of his work from July 1945 as the Lutheran representative to the Reconstruction Department of the WCC and as a coordinator of joint Lutheran postwar relief. His focus was on the demands of the massive devastation of Europe and on the challenge of ten million refugees and displaced persons for the relief work of churches. He inserted in his down-to-earth report a statement, which was quite characteristic of his no-fuss style:

*“Satan has ruled the world and has sown his seeds throughout the world. Some of these devils have been overcome as liberation armies have advanced, but seven other devils have come to plague the world: hunger, disease, death, fear, unbelief, despair, and godlessness. From Geneva one looks upon the tragedy on the stage of Europe and wonders if anything worthwhile can survive.”*

In the latter part of his report, he turned to his vision of a common way to the future of Lutheran churches which he believed was God-given. His first point was the imperative of the unity of the whole Church, with the pursuit of unity among Lutherans being a part of that. The postwar situation gave a sense of urgency for moving from affirmations to action: “Lutheran churches embrace [today] almost half of the Protestant Christianity, [therefore] they must together assume the largest share of duty.” There should be no place for Lutheran provincialism. “As our one world seems to be falling apart,” Lutheran churches must “witness and work as one body” holding to their common confession. “We dare not allow Satan to divide and rule...” “Unity must be the watchword.” It was a powerful appeal.<sup>31</sup>

Michelfelder’s second point dealt with the ecumenical responsibility of Lutheran churches and with their participation in the World Council of Churches, which was then under formation. He threw his weight behind the view that Lutheran churches “must” be represented confessionally: “There is no time for a ‘watered-down’ or a ‘least common denominator’ compromise ... pretending that there is a unity of confessions.” The coming of Lutheran churches together into the WCC was, in his view, a must for Lutherans.

His third point dealt with the “almost impossible” task of the Lund Assembly. It was to be viewed as “an opening of windows toward heaven and doors to paths of duty”. He referred to the multiplicity of concrete steps ahead. He spoke not only of common witness and of the numerous tasks of practical cooperation, but he put a special accent on the “warring Church.” The term he used was an echo of the notion of *ecclesia militans*. For Michelfelder, the “warring” was very concrete: “The world is aflame with hate, materialism, secularism, nihilism, and new ‘isms,’ (which) are de-

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<sup>31</sup> Sylvester C. Michelfelder, ed., *Proceedings of the Lutheran World Federation (Lund, 1947)*. (Philadelphia: United Lutheran Publication House, 1948), 35–41.

claring war on the Christian Church." It is not far-fetched to recognize in his statement the threat of ideologies: the Nazism defeated in World War II, and the other rising in the form of anti-Christian communism as a product of the expansion of Soviet influence. He systematically refrained from discussing political theories and programs. He was vocal in addressing theological, faith-based convictions with which he interpreted the prevailing state of the world.

It would be a mistake to trace in these statements an inclination to call for the LWF to line up with the Western side in the Cold War against the Soviet-led Eastern side. Michelfelder was very clear that the signs of hostile powers rising against the Christian message and the church are in sight on all continents. He made this point very clearly in his correspondence about the options for the church in the ideologically bipolar world of the Cold War. He attacked those who proposed for the church and the ecumenical movement a search for a "third way" between the capitalism of the West and the communism of the East. In his view, it was not the business of the church to work out alternatives for political ideologies. He maintained that according to the Lutheran understanding, the church is called to be present in the West and in the East. Its task is everywhere basically one and the same.

The second of the programmatic presentations was the keynote address of Ralph H. Long on "The Place of the Lutheran World Federation in the World Today." With it he summarized the history of the pursuit for Lutheran unity since the founding of the LWC at Eisenach in 1923 until the convening of the first assembly of the LWF in Lund in 1947. He reviewed the discussions about the need for a new world organization and of its purposes as they were expressed in the proposed constitution. He outlined the plans for the LWF, how its purposes would be put into practice both in the cooperation of the member churches and as a partner in the worldwide ecumenical endeavor.

Long placed a special accent on the unity of faith and confession. This unity was a presupposition for a united witness that would reach the centers of life, the centers of national and international affairs, as well as the settings of local churches and congregations. In his view, the influence of the many "forces that would divide and destroy the unity" could not be countered without a church that is able to present its message with one voice. More important than a common organization is the common faith. By divisive forces, he alluded apparently not only to doctrinal and other internal controversies within churches, but also to the divisive influence of political conflicts.

The signs of the emerging Cold War appear in his address in a variety of ways. The threats to the church include the depletion of spiritual values, the disregard of sacred things, and general contempt for the Church of Jesus Christ. He also mentions the old spirit of nationalism which divides humanity and severs the ties of faith and friendship. A new dimension of perennial problems is the scope and even the form of the sufferings inflicted. The scope of the conflicts of the postwar era is practically universal. It is justified to speak of the "distress of nations." Some churches are "in such a distress that their very future is in danger." It is conspicuous that Long, as most of the other speakers, does not name the sources of hatred and distress, and that he prefers to refer only generally to the destructive and divisive forces on every continent.

Tensions between churches and fears concerning a Lutheran world organization had surfaced already at the gatherings of the Lutheran World Convention between the two World Wars. Different experiences of the war, of the Treaty of Versailles, and of the paralysis of the League of Nations had generated bitterness, suspicion and hostile attitudes between nations on both sides of the Atlantic. They had also infected attitudes in churches with strong national or ethnic identities.

Many delegates who travelled to Lund were concerned about possible eruptions of aggressive attitudes between delegates from countries that had been on opposite sides during the war. German delegates had discussed the problem in Hamburg on the way to Lund as American delegates had done during the voyage across the Atlantic Ocean. The absence of the signs of the prewar and wartime grievances among the participants in Lund was experienced as a miracle. Even if the openness and mutual acceptance experienced at the assembly could not with one stroke heal all the wounds of the war and wipe out misgivings and suspicions between nationalities, the grievances and tensions seemed to have lost their hold over the Lutheran gathering in Lund. The affirmations of the goal of unity and of the common commitment to the mission of the church and postwar relief were made with such unanimity that many delegates described the significance of the assembly in Pentecostal terms.

Long made it clear in his address that the LWF ought to avoid developing into a partisan instrument of any one political bloc or group, or even that it let itself be suspected of such intentions. Reasons for the caution were both a pragmatic view of the immensity of human need in Europe and other war-torn regions, and theological, in line with traditional confessional Lutheran teaching. The task of the LWF presupposed stretching out across political and ideological boundaries and restraining the hold of divisive political forces within the constituency of the LWF. Furthermore, the understanding of the role of a church organization, national and international, within the web of local, national and international political forces had to take the Lutheran teaching seriously. The political role of the church arises out of its confessional identity. The church is not accountable to political authorities and must not become servile to political goals and programs.

What the international political role of the LWF would be was answered in Lund only with a few examples. Time was not yet ripe for spelling out a comprehensive response to the ideological pressures which the church faced at that time. The consolidation of the unity of the church and of the worldwide Lutheran community as part of it was to be the center of its response. Vigorous participation in postwar relief, refugee and reconstruction work across political boundaries was a logical consequence of the affirmation of unity.

Long ended his address with a bold call "to shake off dull complacency, formality, and indifference" and to a "living faith and heroic God-inspired action." The way ahead for the LWF "requires vision, high courage, devotion and intelligent application." These were refreshing words from one of the most experienced senior church leaders of American Lutheranism. No reference to rules of procedure or to prerogatives and recognized mandates characteristic of established institutions appeared in his address.

These two programmatic presentations gave an outline for the substantive work of the assembly and a structured framework for its proceedings. The two American church leaders had worked together on the Lutheran relief program and the planning of the new organization for close to two years. Thereby, the directives that they offered to the delegates were coherent and persuasive. Their assessment of the state of the world, their vision of the place of the Lutheran Church in the ecumenical fellowship, and their suggestions on how cooperation should be put into practice in the LWF coincided in their analyses. They outlined agendas for the three sections of the assembly, on "Confessing the Truth in a Confused World," on "Performing Her Mission in a Devastated World," and on "Facing the Problems of a Troubled World."

### 3.3. PARTICIPANTS SET THE TONE AND CHECK DIRECTIONS

Although Michelfelder and Long gave initial guiding signals, the Lund Assembly was a world event, not an American event. The meditations and keynote addresses by church leaders coming from other countries and continents made a distinct impact on the whole agenda and on the perspectives of the assembly.

In his address of welcome, the Swedish Archbishop Eidem underlined the importance of having the assembly already in 1947, when the state of Europe was still chaotic, without waiting for easier travel conditions. There was an urgency to widen and deepen the bonds of unity between the Lutheran churches and to promote commitment to a “universal Christian understanding and cooperation.” He also pleaded for patience in the midst of the obvious enthusiasm of the gathering. “...we must not expect extraordinary and overwhelming results, either in the form of declarations of principle or in the solving of many practical problems.” Was he perhaps weary of the overpowering enthusiasm of the Christians from the New World? On the other hand, did he simply reiterate his convictions about the nature and methods of expressing the corporate responsibility of the church in the public sector?

A voice from outside the core group of the planners for the assembly that made a singularly powerful impact on the mood of the gathering came from Bishop Lajos Ordass of Hungary (1901–1978). He brought with his presence and with his address a disturbing challenge to the worldwide Lutheran community from the midst of the emerging confrontation that was underway in Hungary between the government and the Lutheran church. His personal contribution placed the LWF face to face with the arising conflict between East and West that was to be a part of the context of the LWF in its participation in the witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Although Ordass did not in his public address to the assembly name those who were imposing restrictions on the church, it became clear to everybody that the church in Hungary was heading towards a very difficult time and that a persecution of Christians was looming as a concrete possibility. In private conversations, Ordass had encouraged three of the Hungarian participants in the assembly not to return to Hungary because they would, in his view, serve their church more effectively from outside the country.<sup>32</sup> “We Must Work While It Is Day” was the topic of Ordass’ address. With the growing increase of communist influence in Hungary, the listeners tended to assume that night was already falling over the Hungarian church and that the admonition to work in the theme of the address was for those in the “free world” who still believed. This is, however, not what Ordass said. He expressly rejected the notion that Christians should not or cannot work where “the old enemy is at his work.” He made it clear that members of the Hungarian Lutheran Church do not think that they can no longer work. He lifted up the message of Advent to the delegates: “Now it is high time to awake out of sleep ... the day is at hand ... let us put on the armor of light.” He affirmed that the harvest is in the hands of God. The freedom to carry on the witness to the gospel is not in the hands of the “enemy.” It comes from the command of the Master, from Jesus Christ. His message conveyed a confidence in the power of God’s own action in and through the church under all conditions, even under extreme hardship and persecution. It added a dimension to the planning of the work of the LWF

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<sup>32</sup> Pastors Béla Lesko, George Posfay and Vilmos Vajta, as described in an oral report of George Posfay during his term of service on the staff of the LWF.

“in a confused and troubled world.”<sup>33</sup>

Ordass’ election to the executive committee of the LWF, and subsequently to the position of vice-president of the organization, was the first explicit action to set the profile of the LWF in relation to the Cold War for several years ahead.

Archbishop Eidem made several pertinent points in his opening sermon. The task ahead is “to keep and bestow” the love that is characteristic for followers of Jesus. The source of strength is the peace of Christ. The goal of our task is to praise God with gladness and devotion. Holding to this foundation, the concrete tasks for the church will open as gifts from God. The love and the forgiving goodness which a Christian and the church meet in the person of Christ is the “model and guiding star” for discovering responsibilities in personal relations and in duties to the community, the nation, and humankind. The peace of Christ, given through grace and received in faith, binds the church together in a communion, which goes beyond time and space. The peace of Christ creates the Holy Catholic Church. “Thanksgiving befits...us particularly in these times filled with heavy and tragic memories, with spiritual and physical needs, with its uncertain and menacing outlook for the future”.

The Bishop of Oslo, Eivind Berggrav, who had been arrested and confined to home arrest during the Nazi occupation of Norway, delivered a sermon at the festive evening service in the Lund Cathedral on July 4 with the title, “The Universal Communion of the Church.” With his message, related to the words of St. Paul “If one member suffers, all suffer together with it...” (1 Corinthians 12:26), he brought the experience of the Norwegian Church struggle into the assembly proceedings. He pointed out that an attempt by secular powers to destroy the foundations of Christian institutions, Christian freedoms, and Christian social responsibility, is a blow to the whole church and to all its separate units. It is the duty of the church, also of Lutheran churches, to take a stand against subjecting individual conscience by exercising authority or violence. He pointed to the Lutheran teaching: “If the secular powers invade the territory of the spirit and take conscience captive, where God alone will lead and govern, then *we must not obey them.*” What the listeners heard was not just a reference to experience but an admonition to be prepared to meet what the Stalinist rule promised to Christians and churches.

One more keynote speaker touched the theme of the Church’s encounter with the political world, Bishop Hanns Lilje of Hannover, Germany who spoke on “The Lutheran Church and its Task in the World.” He had a history of participation in the LWC and in the ecumenical movement before World War II. He had been active in the Lutheran wing of the Confessing Church during the Nazi era and had been arrested by the Gestapo and imprisoned in 1944–45. In mid-1947, he succeeded August Marahrens as Bishop of the Hannover Church (Landeskirche). The shadow of the struggles in Germany, conflicts within the Confessing Church, his arrest and the divisive controversies about his predecessor’s role during the Hitler regime followed him as he re-entered the leadership of his church and of ecumenical organizations. In consequence, his address was low-key in comparison with those of other key figures of the assembly.

Lilje pleaded, first of all, for a realistic view of the world situation and of the role of the church in the midst of political tensions and conflicts. The state of affairs in Europe,

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<sup>33</sup>Michelfelder, ed., op. cit., 141–142. The wordings of the topics of the Sections of the Assembly, in a “confused world”, “devastated world”, “troubled world”, pp. 44, 61, 86, reflected the realism and caution about triumphalism and any inherent reliance on secular optimism.

according to him, gave no reason for optimism. Peoples are widely vexed by fear and afflicted by hunger and poverty. During the war, the church was powerless. In its weakness, in its disobedience to its Lord and in its cowardice, it became co-responsible for the darkness and chaos, not only in Germany, but worldwide. The weakness has not yet been overcome: "A church is truly Lutheran only if it fearlessly proclaims the judgment of God over all nations and if it, above all, humbly and penitently submits to this judgment itself."

Lilje went on to state that "the church today bears tremendous responsibility over against the world. The world of nations, whether it knows it or not, whether it says so or not, is actually waiting for the help and guidance, which only the church can give." Assuming this responsibility is possible only through the inner renewal of Christians, pastors and congregations. He testified to the opening of new doors for witness and service, for meeting both spiritual and physical hunger and for overcoming an all-pervasive despair even in face of destructive powers. The cloud that loomed over the divided Germany and the whole of Europe overshadowed his presentation.

Professor Anders Nygrén's address was on the topic "The Testimony of the Lutheran Church," touching on central issues regarding the identity of the churches of the Lutheran confession. He was, without doubt, the person who gave the most profound theological contribution to the assembly.

In his address, Nygrén spelled out basic emphases of the Lutheran Reformation. He warned that the church loses its testimony to the gospel when "her teaching concerned in the first place not what God has done for us, but what we must do." "The eschatological hope [has] ceased to be a living reality within the church." He pointed out that in Luther's teaching the eschatological power comes back. God in his wrath, to which the postwar confusion and chaos testify, and in his grace, which carries the newness of the age (*aeon*) of Christ, is actual reality in this world. The renewal brought by the divine gift of the gospel, transcends human destiny. Nygrén was able to make Luther's insights and teaching present and alive in the context of the assembly. He coined a phrase, with which he pointed to the direction of the renewal of the church and to which theologians around the LWF returned for decades to come, "Always forward to Luther!"

At the time of the Lund Assembly Nygrén was regarded as one of the leading Lutheran theologians in the world with his thought widely known beyond the confines of Lutheranism. In his person he combined a highly learned scholar, whose theological thinking was in steady dialogue with the theses of both ancient and modern philosophy, and an unpretentious, easily approachable Christian, for whom academic discipline added depth to his personal commitment to the worship and witness of the one holy catholic Church as manifested in the life of the local congregation. His international experience had two foci. He had followed closely the rise of Nazism during his visits and research work in Germany in the early and mid-thirties. He had written books on the early phase of the Church Struggle and presented a thorough analysis of what was at the stake in National Socialism. He had alerted his own church and the leaders of the ecumenical movement to the fundamental rejection of Christian values that was promoted by Hitler's regime and to the wider trend of secularism that was opening the way for ideologies opposed to the Christian accountability to God, both in personal and social life. The second focus had been evident in his participation in the Faith and Order movement where he had been a sharp critic of both theological liberalism, which did its best to relativize and emasculate the transcendent God, and conservative Christianity, which made the Christian message into a political instrument. Nygrén brought his theological and philosophical insights and his discipleship of Martin Luther into the center of the work of the LWF assembly. His fingerprints are most apparent in the report of Section I.



### 3.4. ORIENTATION OF THE LWF ELABORATED BY ASSEMBLY COMMISSIONS

Ideas, concepts and plans for the LWF for the years ahead were developed in the three Assembly Commissions and their drafting Sections. Their reports (1) summed up the common understanding of the confessional foundation and the ecclesiological dimensions of the LWF as a worldwide community of churches; (2) drew together the challenges of the LWF mission, which included the needs for a joint strategy for the overall mission of the Lutheran churches, common practices to support “orphaned missions,” and the development of social services and inter-church aid; and (3) presented an agenda of study and action to enable the LWF to deal with the problems of the international community. The reports of the Assembly Commissions and Sections I and III deserve special attention as the positions expressed in them reflect the position and attitude of the LWF in relation to the Cold War.

The topic of Section I was “Confessing the Truth in a Confused World.” The report summarized the essentials of the Lutheran confession laying bare the traditional concepts and emphases of Lutheran confessional teaching, such as the relations between faith and works and the law and the gospel, the doctrine of two kingdoms, and the authority of the Bible. The report interpreted their meaning in the social and political context of the postwar world. The contours of the world situation, the state of churches and the ecumenical movement, and the particular hardships of the manifold victims of the war, overshadowed by the new threats of conflicting ideologies, established the existential setting for the report.

Further, the report gave a current outline of the Lutheran understanding of the nature and the functions of the church and of its place in the public domain. Furthermore, the report conveyed an assurance of the hope which came from the gospel and which made Christians able to endure the conflict between good and evil that had been manifested in the human condition. The hope came, the report stated, through “the message of the stupendous invasion of our human existence by God in Christ” and how “God had introduced into the present age something entirely new.” The report referred repeatedly to “the new age” (*aeon*), which Christ had inaugurated by his coming into the world, in which the “old age” still remained present until the final consummation at his return.<sup>34</sup>

This part of the report of Section I ended with a call to a face to face encounter with the trends which had obscured for the church the vision of the “new era” of Jesus Christ and thereby had opened doors to the destructive forces of the “old era.” The report stated “Step by step human life had been compressed within the confines of this present world ...the Christian message itself was distorted and reduced to a purely this-worldly affair ...life in this world was regarded as something, with which God had nothing to do.”

The report reaffirmed the teaching of the early church that God is concerned with the whole of human life, so that there is within it in fact no purely secular sphere. The report warned of false conceptions which support both the theory of the full autonomy of the secular sphere, and of the ordinances of God’s creation, conceptions which have led to sanction the self-glorification of the state and which are misrepresentations of

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<sup>34</sup> The notions of the old and new “*aeons*” (ages) were a central theme of Anders Nygrén’s *Commentary on Romans*, Carl C. Rasmussen, tr. (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1949). Paperback edition Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975.

Luther's doctrine of the two Kingdoms. These statements arose against the line of thought which had led a faction of German Protestantism, *Deutsche Christen* ("German Christians"), to adjust to Hitler's orders and to his anti-Semitism during the Nazi era, and which line of thought threatened the church under any dictatorship. The roots of the glorification of political rulers were, according to the report, in the secularized this-worldly "theology," in which "the Word of God, both as Gospel and Law, loses its meaning."

The report of Section I was a lively presentation of the main thrust of the assembly: to interpret the intellectual and spiritual confusion of the postwar world and to chart the coming task of the LWF in light of the biblical foundation of Christian faith the life of the church. It aimed at providing a doctrinal framework for the worldwide community of Christians who are affiliated with the LWF and are committed to the unity and mission of the one, holy, catholic church. A common confessional identity was to be the foundation for the role of the LWF within the pluralistic and increasingly politically and culturally divided world and for its partnerships within the world Christian community.

The theme of Section III was "Facing the Problems of the Troubled World." Its task was to articulate areas of responsibility for the LWF in the immediate future. It agreed to place the following concerns on the working agenda of the LWF:

- "The rights and freedoms of man [i.e., person] must be recognized and observed in society."
- "Men [i.e., human beings] and nations live under the Law of God." "Racial discrimination and persecution" must be eradicated in every nation and internationally. "Every person has the responsibility to contribute to the highest standards of community life... the Gospel of Jesus Christ has significance not only for the individual but also for the community."
- "Every nation must yield a measure of national sovereignty in the interest of the common good."
- "The process of international collaboration must be strengthened."
- "More effective measures must be taken to remedy impartially the devastation and dislocation resulting from the war... Reconciliation must become a consistently operating principle in human relations."

The comments on these concerns listed in the report of Section III, express an explicit support to the United Nations as an appropriate instrument for the protection of human rights and for the codification and enforcement of international law. They lift up the responsibility of churches to participate in the eradication of all forms of racism in their own lives and in all societies. They advocate concrete measures to achieve international and social justice. They warn of the dangers of unrestrained nationalism, of the imperialist practices of powerful nations, and of unlimited expressions of economic privilege. The comments include a call to churches to contribute to the reduction of cleavages between the rich and the poor with attendant social and cultural contradictions and to serve as instruments of peace and reconciliation as part of their mission and international relief operations. They reaffirm the priority of meeting the human and social needs of the war-torn nations and of replacing the legacy of hostility with trust and international cooperation. According to the report, all these concerns are rooted in the God-given moral law and in the reconciling action of God through Jesus Christ. They require an organized international response from the LWF and pre-

suppose bold cooperation with other international organizations, with governments and people of good will.

This listing of crucial concerns had a formative influence for the shaping of the structure and function of the LWF. The way they were spelled out in Lund 1947 arose from the context of those years. In retrospect, it is noteworthy that the concerns expressed in Lund appeared on the agenda of the LWF and of other ecumenical organizations throughout the following decades and most of them reappeared in the varied encounters of churches with the Cold War.

The three section reports together, and the related specific resolutions approved by the assembly, provide a comprehensive picture of the theological and ecumenical identity of the LWF at its origin and of its place and role in the postwar international scene.

### **3.5. ASSEMBLY ACTS**

The formal actions of the assembly centered on the adoption of a constitution, the election of leadership, the approval of the reports of the assembly commissions, and the identification of priority tasks for the LWF.

The constitution, as developed at Lund, represented, on one hand, visible continuity with the Lutheran World Convention in its statements on the doctrinal basis and the nature and purposes of the LWF. On the other hand, it included significant emphases which made the new organization unequivocally an organization of Lutheran churches, and which gave to the LWF a character of both a theological forum for the pursuit of the unity of the church, and of an instrument for joint action by Lutheran churches.<sup>35</sup>

The diversity concerning basic ecclesiology (the theological understanding of the Church) among participating churches and other bodies forced the assembly to be satisfied with a compromise in the articles of the constitution that dealt with the unity of Lutheran churches. The ecclesiological significance of the LWF remained ambiguous. The final wording of the ecumenical function of the LWF left the approaches of its member churches to the ecumenical movement fully open, as if faithfulness to the Lutheran confessions did not apply to participation in ecumenical endeavors. On the other hand, the LWF constitution regards certain mandates – e.g., “To cultivate unity of faith and confession among the Lutheran churches of the world” and “To develop a united Lutheran approach to responsibilities in mission and education” – as binding conditions for membership in the LWF. The tension between the notions of “a free association of Lutheran churches” and of a community of churches (communion) committed to pursue the unity of the church as a condition of the Lutheran confession, has remained characteristic of the LWF until today.

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<sup>35</sup>The choice of the term “free association of Lutheran churches” in article III of the constitution was chosen in order to keep doors open to membership for churches which were allergic for the diversity of theological traditions within the LWF. The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod was an example of such a church. For the same reason the constitution said nothing about “pulpit and altar fellowship,” i.e., intercommunion between the member churches. The ambiguity of the ecclesial significance of the LWF, deliberately left open at Lund, turned into a long-term problem especially in the development of ecumenical policies and of positions on controversial issues within the LWF, both doctrinal and ethical.

## **ARTICLES II AND III OF THE CONSTITUTION**

### **II Doctrinal Basis**

The Lutheran World Federation acknowledges the Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testaments as the only source and the infallible norm of all church doctrine and practice, and sees in the Confessions of the Lutheran Church, especially in the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and Luther's Catechism, a pure exposition of the Word of God.

### **III Nature and Purposes**

1. The Lutheran World Federation shall be a free association of Lutheran churches. It shall have no power to legislate for the churches belonging to it or to interfere with their complete autonomy, but shall act as their agent in such matters as they assign to it.
2. The purposes of The Lutheran World Federation are:
  - (a) To bear united witness before the world to the Gospel of Jesus Christ as the power of God for salvation.
  - (b) To cultivate unity of faith and confession among the Lutheran churches in the world.
  - (c) To promote fellowship and co-operation in study among Lutherans.
  - (d) To foster Lutheran participation in ecumenical movements.
  - (e) To develop a united Lutheran approach to responsibilities in missions and education; and
  - (f) To support Lutheran groups in need of spiritual or material aid (former e)
3. The Lutheran World Federation may take action on behalf of member churches in such matters as one or more of them may commit to it.

The constitution adopted at Lund gave the LWF a simple and compact structure. The highest authority for the policies and programs of the LWF rests with the assembly, which shall be held every five years and which shall consist of "chosen representatives of the member churches." The assembly elects the President, who is to be the "chief official representative of the Federation," and a fifteen-member executive committee, which includes the president and which is to "conduct the business of the LWF in the interim between Assemblies." The assembly and the executive committee may appoint special commissions for designated functions. They report to the executive committee.

The founders of the LWF wanted to make it an effective instrument for its member churches worldwide. The structure should be easily accessible to member churches and firmly under the control of their elected representatives. It was to be an efficient instrument for competent international decision-making and its administrative costs could be kept low. The recipe which the Lund assembly followed undoubtedly leaned on the American experiences of inter-Lutheran cooperation. In addition, it was natural for others to follow the action-oriented leadership patterns of the Americans because the vast bulk of the financing of the new LWF came from the USA.

The Lund Assembly elected the leaders of the LWF for the next five-year term. Professor Anders Nygrén – later to be Bishop of Lund – was elected president. The new executive committee consisted of four members from each of the three groups of influential churches: from the USA, Germany and the Nordic Churches, two from European “minority” churches (Hungary and France), one from the Latvian exile church, and one from India. The members elected were a group of senior church leaders or executives, most of whom had high academic credentials, and all of them men. Fifteen of them were ordained, seven of them at the time of election were bishops, and one a layman, a senior lay leader of his church. There was no talk at that time of quotas of any kind. If there had been, their purpose would have been to ensure a majority of church leaders and equally a majority of persons with academic theological competence for the executive committee. This was the beginning of the LWF in the postwar world in 1947.

Towards the end of the assembly, the newly elected executive committee presented to it the officers, whom it had elected from amongst its members. They were

First vice-president, Abdel Ross Wentz (USA)

Second vice-president, Lajos Ordass (Hungary)

Treasurer, Ralph H. Long (USA)

Executive secretary, Sylvester C. Michelfelder (USA / Geneva)

The election of Ordass as vice-president was to have a long-lasting influence for the profile of the LWF in general and for its role in relation to the Cold War in particular.

The approval of the commission reports indicates that the assembly by a broad consensus accepted their content as representing the main stream of Lutheran thinking on confession and on Lutheran social responsibility. Later assemblies made careful distinctions between “receiving,” “transferring,” and “adopting” statements.

At the end of the assembly, ten resolutions were passed, of which two dealt with the responsibility of the LWF for public affairs. One of them called the member churches to prayers of intercession for “the millions of refugees, expellees and displaced persons, and for other victims of war” and to generous joint support “to bring them spiritual and material help.” It requested the executive committee to develop emigration and resettlement plans and “to safeguard the religious life of those displaced persons who belong to the household of our faith.”

Another resolution, in response to the expressed commitment to work for peace and reconciliation and to the obligation to work ecumenically, authorized the executive committee to establish a working relationship with the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) formed by the WCC and the International Missionary Council.

The assembly resolved to establish five permanent commissions / departments for specific areas of responsibility under the authority of the executive committee. The areas were Missions, Work on behalf of Displaced Persons and Refugees, Relief, Youth Activities, and Social Welfare.

As the Lund Assembly closed, a new and visible link had been established between most of the Lutheran churches of the world. A call for a common march to the uncertain years ahead had been heard.

### 3.6. THE ECUMENICAL PROFILE OF THE LWF AFTER LUND

The profile of an international church organization arises out of its self-definition, constituency, leadership, and its priorities. For purposes of this study, the vantage points are the political history of the Cold War and the worldwide ecumenical movement. In the case of the Lutheran World Federation the assembly at Lund defined its nature and purpose: It was to be a federation of churches bound together by their common confession. It was to be a community of Christians of common faith to seeking the manifestation of the unity of the Church Universal. It was to be an effective instrument of its member churches for the priority tasks of witness and service to which faithfulness to the common faith called them.

The intention of the delegates to the assembly in Lund was to form a truly global community of Lutheran churches. In reality, the vast majority of the member churches and of the voting delegates at Lund were from Europe and North America. Delegates of churches present at Lund from the area already or becoming under the control of Marxist socialist regimes formed a very small minority. Even more so did the delegates from Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The new church organization did not touch much of the rising East and South.

The leadership of the LWF was largely in the hands of bishops and theologians from old and historically well-established churches. The team of officers consisted of a Swedish president, an American 1st vice-president, a Hungarian 2nd vice-president, an American treasurer, and an American executive (general) secretary.

In the eyes of other churches involved in the WCC, the LWF stood out with its extensive postwar relief program in Europe, particularly in Germany, and with its inclusion of some ten to fifteen million refugees and displaced persons. Its decision-making structure and its operational competence represented the highest standards of international governmental and nongovernmental organizations. With the strength of its capacity and leadership, the LWF represented a strong, even a wealthy partner, and therefore it was very warmly welcomed to ecumenical cooperation with no complaint about its confessional image. For the same reasons, doors opened early to the LWF for cooperation with the international governmental relief and refugee agencies in Geneva and in Germany, and it quickly became a recognized organization among many actors.

The credit for the rapid breakthrough of the LWF in the international circles of Geneva, and among church leaders and occupation authorities in Central Europe must be given to its American-style administration. Its executive secretary, Sylvester Michelfelder, led the office operations in masterly fashion, with great gusto, and contributed by his personality a special flavor of enthusiasm and determination. Yet it was no secret that the cultural peculiarities of Americans at times caused a lifting of eyebrows and sometimes even straightforward irritation among Michelfelder's European coworkers for whom Europe was the center of civilization.

In the context of world politics, the Lutheran world community was a small and marginal group. On the American scene, it represented a confessionally oriented and a newly arrived ethnic minority among churches. In Germany, its image was that of a quietist wing of anti-Nazi Protestantism, without the halo that the Confessing Church had received for its radical and costly resistance to Hitler. The Nordic member churches of the LWF represented a tradition of state churches void of a distinct political profile apart from their national orientations. The churches of the South were taking their first cautious steps to dissociate themselves from their colonial past. The churches in countries coming under communist rule were going through an agonizing period of

uncertainty concerning their very existence and were therefore unable to spell out their expectations from the new worldwide Lutheran community. The political leaders of the countries from which most of the representatives of Lutheran churches came to Lund in 1947, and most certainly the leaders of the two super powers, hardly noticed that a new international church organization had been formed. The contrast with the festive, yet non-political reception of the assembly by royal Sweden was conspicuous.

The experience of the church delegates gathered one year later, 1948, in Amsterdam for the constituting assembly of the World Council of Churches was very different. The delegates represented a much greater diversity of churches working in much more diverse cultural and political settings, even if the constituency of the new ecumenical world body, too, was dominated by the North and the West. The state church tradition had only a minimal impact, although Anglicans of Britain and Archbishop Söderblom of Sweden had been key figures in the early stage of the ecumenical movement. Several prominent leaders of the South already played a significant role in the formation of the WCC. The links of the emerging ecumenical movement with the worldwide student Christian movement played a visible role. This is why the anti-colonial voices from the midst of the movements for independence in Asia and Africa made an evident impact on the assembly.

From the point of view of the Cold War, a major difference between Amsterdam and Lund was the number of delegates from churches who came from countries under communist rule and who affirmed their commitment to Christian witness in that very setting. The difference was dramatized at the Amsterdam Assembly by the public encounter between two speakers, both of them key ecumenists of the era, professor Joseph Hromádka of Czechoslovakia from the East, and the political figure John Foster Dulles of the USA from the West. Their debate manifested the penetration of the Cold War into the life of the WCC. The ideological division in Amsterdam became a tangible factor within the ecumenical world community, while at Lund the emerging hostility between Washington and Moscow had been a cloud overshadowing the assembly but clearly outside the relationships between members of the community and without a recognized effect on the proceedings. At its beginning the LWF was seen as a safe and cozy community of church leaders and theologians from Northern Europe and North America and from their related mission fields, persons at ease in the Western world and civilization.

The causes for the difference between Lund and Amsterdam were apparently threefold. The world situation had changed profoundly from June-July 1947 to August-September 1948. Czechoslovakia, with the resignation of President Edvard Beneš in March 1948 and the communist accession to power had placed itself – with a label of “no return” – in the camp east of the Iron Curtain and had thereby come under Soviet control. Also in Hungary, the Marxist-socialists had consolidated their power. The division of Germany into two states had been virtually completed at the time of the Amsterdam Assembly when the British, French and U.S. occupation zones had formed the Federal Republic of Germany. The Soviet zone was to become the German Democratic Republic. Berlin had experienced the blockade by the Soviet forces and the breaking of the blockade by allied airlift had been successful. The grip of the Cold War over Europe had become within the year far more definitive with no end in sight. Stalin had returned to his unquestioned and widely feared dictatorship role. Moreover, signs of the expansion of the Cold War to other regions and continents were in sight.

The second reason was the interest shown from Moscow and Washington in the formation of the World Council of Churches. Visser't Hooft, the general secretary of

the WCC in Process of Formation, had made sustained efforts to ensure the participation of the Russian Orthodox Church in the ecumenical movement and, with the Amsterdam Assembly approaching, to persuade the Moscow Patriarch to send representatives to Amsterdam. Ecumenical relationships with other Orthodox churches already had a history of several decades. The prospect of a positive response from the Moscow Patriarch had looked probable in the months before the assembly. At the last moment before the assembly a negative word arrived from Moscow. It is obvious that the Soviet authorities had intervened and prevented his participation. Nevertheless, the efforts of the WCC contributed to some opening of communication between the WCC and the Moscow Patriarchate. A full account of what had happened between the state and church authorities in Moscow is still not available.

Meanwhile, in contrast to the Soviet Union, the U.S. government suddenly took active interest in the formation of the WCC. The personal envoy of President Truman, Myron Taylor, appeared in 1947 on the ecumenical scene. His mission to several ecumenical leaders was to make the WCC an ally of the West in the global struggle against international communism. Concrete proposals, which he aired in conversations with Visser't Hooft and other ecumenical leaders, were to invite the first WCC Assembly to hold its constituting meeting in the USA instead of the Netherlands, and to establish a permanent representation of the U.S. government to the headquarters of the WCC in Geneva. The officers of the WCC in Process of Formation politely turned both proposals down. This reportedly made President Truman furious. The LWF never received such interest either from the East or the West. From the point of the Cold War Lutheran churches were marginal to the world political scene.

A third reason may have had its roots in theological debates between Lutheran and WCC leaders about the role of the church in politics. The Lutheran teaching of the two kingdoms or regiments of God and an emphasis on the kingship of Christ over all creation did not seem to fit together. The latter was a prominent theme of the early ecumenical movement in the post- World War II era. It was customary to point to the Lutheran two-kingdom doctrine as a cause for legitimating nonresistance to the Nazi regime among Christians in Germany, the heartland of Lutheranism. Such an allegation represented, however, a distortion of the origin and intention of the two-kingdom teaching, the core of which was to interpret the inherent tension between the altar and the throne and protect the church from submitting the gospel of Jesus Christ to political control. The founding of the LWF aroused concern within the ecumenical movement about potential Lutheran “quietism” in the face of social injustice and of oppressive regimes for decades ahead.<sup>36</sup>

The character of the two-kingdoms emphasis as an instrument for preventing political or ideological domination over the ministry of the church, for affirming divine authority over the whole creation, and for rejecting the autonomy of any political system – secular or religious, democratic or totalitarian – before God, was for long unnoticed in this debate. The contrast between the two positions came to influence

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<sup>36</sup>The tension between the two emphases influenced the profiles of the WCC and the LWF for decades in their corporate attitudes and policies related to the Cold War, the decolonization of Africa and Asia, and the struggles for more just social orders on all continents. The tension gave rise to several LWF study documents on the doctrine of “two kingdoms” and the affirmation of the Lordship of Christ in contemporary social and ideological contexts. Cf. Asheim, Ivar, ed., *Christ and Humanity: Basic Questions in Ethical Orientation Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969) and Duchrow, Ulrich, ed., in collaboration with Dorothea Milwood, *Lutheran Churches – Salt or Mirror of Society? Case Studies on the Theory and Practice of the Two Kingdoms Doctrine* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, Department of Studies, 1977).



the attitudes of churches and Christian organizations towards the dominant political and ideological systems during the Cold War.

This divergence of the profiles of the WCC and the LWF concerning their roles during the Cold War remained visible for many years. It did not, however, prevent the intense cooperation that developed between the two organizations in the areas of postwar relief and international affairs, nor the later recognized relationship between LWF and the WCC within the group of Christian World Communions.

# PART TWO – CASE STUDIES

## *A Case Study of Hungary*

### CHAPTER FOUR

## CHURCH-STATE COLLISION IN HUNGARY 1947–1953

### **4.1. THE FIRST COLD WAR CHALLENGE TO THE LWF COMES FROM HUNGARY: BISHOP ORDASS IN FOCUS**

The first major challenge of the Cold War to the LWF came from Soviet occupied Hungary. Its peak was the period from the first arrest of Lajos Ordass, which took place on August 24, 1948, to his second arrest on September 8 and the subsequent prison sentence of October 1, 1948. Ordass was a bishop of the Lutheran Church from 1945 to 1958 and also a vice-president of the Lutheran World Federation from 1947 to 1952 and from 1957 to 1963. The international impact of his detention increased further, when it was followed on December 26 of the same year, by the arrest of Cardinal József Mindszenty, the Prince Primate, the Archbishop of Esztergom, and de facto the leading bishop of the Roman Catholic Church in Hungary.

The news of the detention of Ordass promptly reached the officers and the Geneva office of the LWF and also the World Council of Churches, which at that time was gathered at its founding assembly in Amsterdam and spread to churches all over the world. The detention of church leaders in Hungary received wide attention both in the press of non-communist world and in Protestant and Catholic churches worldwide.

The measures of the Hungarian government against the vice-president of the LWF brought home to Lutheran leaders the fact that the East-West conflict, the Cold War, was no longer a concern only of major-power politics. It had now also struck at the very center of the LWF. The Lutheran Church in Hungary, a solid member of the Lutheran World Convention since its founding in 1923 and one of the founding members of the LWF, had become an open battleground of the Cold War.

To Bishop Ordass and to his loyal supporters and also to most of the member churches of the LWF his arrest revealed the concrete intentions of the Hungarian communists to exercise control over churches. The verdict could be seen as a confirmation of the irreconcilable controversy between communist ideology and the faith of the church. The heart of Ordass' own position was the defense of the autonomy of the church based on her divine mandate in the midst of an escalating church-state conflict.

The turmoil around the arrests of both Ordass and Mindszenty coincided with the final communist takeover of Hungary and also with the tightening of the Soviet Union's hold over communist parties in Hungary and beyond. Hungary, occupied by the Soviet army, accepted communism in 1948 as its official ideology and subjected its government to actual control by the Soviet Union. Its neighboring country, Czechoslovakia, had by March 1948 gone through a similar procedure. These steps settled the remaining uncertainty about the geographical position of the Iron Curtain that

had come to divide Europe. They also affected the world map of the LWF, which from then on consisted of seven regions out of which the Soviet bloc countries of Eastern Europe formed one.<sup>37</sup>

These events took place when East-West tensions were becoming increasingly public and the last references to the wartime alliance between the USSR and the Western world powers had disappeared from political statements.<sup>38</sup> In 1947 the Soviet Union formed a new organization, the Communist Information Bureau (Cominform), the aim of which was to support and guide the communist parties all over the world and ensure that they would follow the leadership of the Soviet Union.<sup>39</sup>

During the same months the U.S. President, Harry S. Truman, declared the intention of his government to halt the spread of Soviet influence by means of a policy of the “containment” of communism. The U.S. launched the Marshall Plan which was to provide massive economic assistance to war-torn countries in Europe and also led in the establishment of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) for the joint defense of its member countries against the threats posed by the Soviet Union. Uncertainties about the intentions and objectives of both the Kremlin and Washington vanished.

The consequences of the descending Iron Curtain and of the redefined policy of the Kremlin became visible in Hungary and Czechoslovakia in 1947–48, although at the same time cracks also began to appear among Soviet satellites in response to Moscow’s intensified political centralization.<sup>40</sup>

The Kremlin wanted to impose on the Eastern bloc governments and societies a unified communist party discipline. It was to include a coordinated effort to control churches and religions in all Eastern European socialist countries. The countries of the Eastern bloc agreed to follow this model of the Soviet Union, which already in

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<sup>37</sup>Regional representation was a regular factor in ensuring a balanced representation of member churches at LWF assemblies and in its executive committees and commissions. Seven regions listed in the planning were henceforth: Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America, North America, Northern Europe and Western Europe. Questions arose occasionally about the correctness of including the Middle East and Australia / Oceania in the LWF Asia region.

<sup>38</sup> See Chapter 1, p. 18 above on Stalin’s speech of February 9, 1946, on Kennan’s “long telegram” and on the origins of the U.S. policy of the “containment” of communism.

<sup>39</sup>The Cominform was created formally as an instrument of the Soviet Union aimed at ensuring the grip of the Soviet Party in 1947 over the Communist parties both in the countries that had come under the control of the USSR and also in “friendly” countries outside the orbit of Soviet control. Its immediate purpose, however, was to provide a unified defense of the Socialist bloc against the divisive influence of the Marshall Plan. Yugoslavia, initially a member of Cominform, did not accept the uniformity demanded by the Kremlin, and was therefore dismissed from its membership. The Cominform was discontinued by Moscow in 1956. Meanwhile, Soviet leaders in 1949 had created another instrument, the COMECON (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance), to generate a joint Eastern counterforce to the rise of the economic influence of the West and to coordinate the industries and trade of socialist Eastern Europe. Cf. Leffler, Melvyn P. and Odd Arne Westad, eds. *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Vol. 1: *Origins, 1945–1962* (Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 39, 59, 218, 319; Vol. 2: *Crises and Détente*, 439; Phillips, Steve, *The Cold War in Europe and Asia 1945–1991* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2001), 35–36.

<sup>40</sup>The disagreement between Stalin and Tito was the first dramatic case. It led to the separation of Yugoslavia from the Moscow camp followed by the joining of Yugoslavia to the “Non-Aligned Movement.” The Tito affair was followed by a sharp tightening of party discipline, demanded by Stalin, and by numerous internal purges of communist leaders in Eastern Europe suspected of disloyalty. Zubok, Vladislav and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997) 114, 125–137; Merwyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, ed. *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, vol. I, 191–192, 198, 208–2016.

1943 had formed a governmental council for Orthodox Church affairs and another for other religious communities. The idea of a complete unification of socialist policies on churches was, however, left out of the plans because of the great diversity of religious affiliations within Eastern European socialist countries. A semi-official, at times quite informal coordination was sufficient for Moscow.<sup>41</sup>

In Hungary church affairs had been assigned during the immediate postwar years to the Ministry of Religion and Public Education.<sup>42</sup> In 1951, the Hungarian government established a State Office for Religious Affairs. Its primary task was to monitor church life and control the implementation of formal agreements on church-state relations. Its wider task was to bring Hungarian church affairs in line with Moscow's leadership.<sup>43</sup> At the time of the arrests of Ordass and Mindszenty the coordination of church affairs was, however, still incomplete.

These uncertainties about the plans of socialist governments concerning churches added to the initial difficulty of the LWF to decide what its response ought to be in relation to the drastically changing situation in Hungary and, more generally, what its role ought to be in relation to churches and governments in the whole of Eastern Europe. One task on which the LWF leaders unanimously agreed in the autumn of 1948 was the defense of Bishop Lajos Ordass against his prosecutors alongside overall moral support to him.

## **4.2. THE WAY OF HUNGARY INTO THE EMBRACE OF THE SOVIET UNION**

Each country drawn into the Soviet orbit had its own history, which obviously influenced its special place and its behavior as a Soviet satellite. Hungary was in its own way a very particular case at the side of Poland, the Baltic countries, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Its closest neighbor, Austria, with which it had had a long life together through the Habsburg dynasty, had escaped from being annexed to the Eastern bloc although part of it was occupied by the Soviet Union until 1955.

Over more than a thousand years Hungary had gone through numerous more or less violent hardships and transformations. They involved several conflicts with its neighbors, including a Tatar (Mongol) occupation in the 13th century, a long Turkish occupation, 1541–1686, complex relations with the Habsburg imperium, and the merger of Hungary into the Austro-Hungarian Kingdom (1867–1918), before the country attained national independence in 1918.

The deepest humiliation experienced by the Hungarian nation since the Turkish occupation, took place at the end of the World War I, when Hungary in 1920 was forced to sign the Treaty of Trianon, concluded by the major powers as part of the Treaty of Versailles. This required the newly independent Hungarian state to give up two-

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<sup>41</sup> A collection of reports on the meetings of the leaders of government offices on church affairs in the Soviet bloc countries is available for research at the institute for Comparative State-Church Relations, Berlin. The first such meeting was held in Budapest February 2–5, 1957, and the last in 1986.

<sup>42</sup> In Hungary the Ministry of Education since the 19<sup>th</sup> century had also had responsibility for religious affairs.

<sup>43</sup> The collection of reports on the meetings of the leaders of government offices on church affairs in the Soviet bloc countries is available, among other places, at the Institute for Comparative State-Church Relations, Berlin.

thirds of its territory and more than half of its 20 million population to neighboring countries. Three million native Hungarians, without being moved from their homes, found themselves suddenly to be minority citizens of Romania, Czechoslovakia, and the country to be Yugoslavia. These ethnic Hungarians had represented a minority in the lost territories of pre-World War I Hungary. After Trianon, independent Hungary emerged as an ethnically relatively homogenous state, a rarity among the multinational states of the region, of which original Hungarian residents and the Hungarian immigrants from the ceded areas jointly formed 98% of the population.<sup>44</sup> The trauma of Trianon remains among Hungarians and still continues to influence the religious and cultural life of the country.

Uncertainties about the future of the divided country and also about the consequences of migrations and forced transfers of population groups before and after Trianon led Hungary to political chaos. During 133 days in 1919, the country even had its first experience of living as a proletarian republic. After that, the Hungarian Communist Party functioned illegally for twenty-five years in a clandestine existence and under severe repression. During this period, the party leader, Mátyás Rákosi, and several other party leaders spent considerable time in prison. The Hungarian Communist Party also lost most of its membership in those years, largely because of arrests and defections.

In 1922 Admiral Miklós Horthy became regent and the head of state, his regime lasting until 1944. His conservative, semi-feudal, authoritarian nationalist government succeeded in lifting Hungary from post-war depression to civil order and to a moderate economic growth. The development took place largely at the cost of the rural poor, who suffered from a lack of access to land and were forced to endure further impoverishment. Pre-World War II Hungary was a deeply divided class society.

Although Horthy did not share the Nazi ideology, his regime brought Hungary to a wartime alliance with Germany against the Soviet Union. Nazi occupation (1944–45) was a response to Horthy's efforts to negotiate a separate peace with the Western powers and to disengage from its alliance with Germany. It led Germany to occupy Hungary and to impose Nazi policies and practices in all their brutality. Consequences included participation in the deportation of hundreds of thousand Jews either to concentration camps in Germany or to immediate execution. More than half a million Hungarian Jews lost their lives as victims of the less than one year of occupation. The horrors lasted until the Soviet army defeated the German troops in fierce and destructive battles. The last German units left Hungary on April 4, 1945, when a new occupation of Hungary, by the Soviet army, was already underway.

The Roman Catholic Church since its arrival in Hungary around the year 1000 and its faithful partner, the Habsburg dynasty, which ruled from the 14th century to 1918, exercised formative influence on the identity of the nation. The Reformation, beginning in the 1520s, made a significant contribution to the intellectual and spiritual life of the country elevating the standards of education and pouring new vitality into theological scholarship. The peak of Protestant influence in Hungary coincided with the years when Protestantism was the majority religion of the country – from the middle of the 16th century until the latter half of the 17th century. The Roman Catholic

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<sup>44</sup>The vast majority of other ethnic groups of Habsburg Hungary became citizens of the neighboring countries. The largest non-Hungarian group of people in independent Hungary were Jews, of whom more than half had already become fully integrated as Hungarian citizens. A wave of Hungarian national anti-Semitism came to a climax with the rising influence of Hitler's Germany.

Counter Reformation, which shook Hungary towards the end of the Turkish occupation (1541–1699), was fiercer than in most countries. It brought the Roman Catholic Church, with the support of the Habsburg regime, back to her leading position among religious groups and left a long-lasting rift between Catholics and Protestants. The edict of tolerance signed in Vienna in 1781 brought a formal peace and freedom to non-Catholic churches, but it did not heal the rift. Catholic-Protestant cooperation was a rarity even during the years of World War I and the German occupation.

Admiral Horthy's reign with its public emphasis on "Christian Hungary" nourished ethnic nationalism and fostered anti-Semitism. The Treaty of Trianon diminished ethnic and religious pluralism in the remaining independent Hungary. It stimulated the rise of conservative nationalism among the people who were now ethnically more homogeneous than ever before.<sup>45</sup> Hungary succeeded in a remarkable way in maintaining its national profile and cultural identity all the way through World War II until the subsequent political and social changes. The long-lasting tensions between Hungary and her various antagonists, neighbors and past occupiers, played a decisive role in Hungarian culture and its political atmosphere through the Horthy years. It also re-emerged during Communist rule as an interplay between the declared multi-ethnic socialism and the Magyar national heritage.

The arrival of the Soviet army marked the end of the horrors of Nazi rule in Hungary. The immediate legacy of the war, especially of its last year with the damages caused by the German occupation and by the battles between the German and Soviet forces, was horrific. Budapest was in shambles, the Danube bridges were in ruins, the transport system was largely defunct, the economy of the country was in a state of collapse. In Budapest alone, 25,000 people perished during the bombings and 10,000 houses, a quarter of all dwellings in the city, were destroyed. The massive devastation visible in collapsed buildings, the shortage of everyday necessities, and the behavior of the occupying soldiers – robberies and rape, provided a poor stage for celebrating the end of World War II and the starting of national reconstruction.

The first interest of the Soviet occupiers, when the fighting was ended, was on feeding the occupying army, on ensuring local food production, and on taking care of the remaining industries for the benefit of the Soviet economy.

After the armistice in 1944 Hungary was ruled by the Allied Control Commission which was headed by Marshal Voroshilov, one of the prominent leaders of the Soviet army. In this commission the Western allies had only a nominal role since according to the agreements of the allied powers the actual occupying partner was as a rule to play the main role in each national control commission. These commissions were to supervise the elections in each of the occupied countries and to guide the elected parliament in establishing a democratic government. In practice, this meant that in Hungary the Soviet Union had the primary role.

The allocation of Hungary to the Soviet sphere of interest by the allied powers had taken place already in 1943–1945 with no heed to the voices of the people. This

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<sup>45</sup>The strength of the churches in Hungary during the Horthy years had an ideologically dark side. With the exclusion of ethnic minorities other than Hungarian, i.e. Romanians, Serbs, and Slovaks, from core-Hungary by the Treaty of Trianon, Jews, who had been integrated into the Hungarian society and played a recognized role in the cultural life of the country, then formed the only significant ethnic minority. The rise of nationalism between the World Wars paved the way for the rise of anti-Semitism in Hungary and led to passivity towards the holocaust of the war years. Hanebrink, Paul A., *In Defense of Christian Hungary: Religion, Nationalism and Antisemitism, 1890–1944*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).

arrangement was to last until a final treaty would restore the peace. For three years, Hungary had to live in a limited and supervised democracy under Soviet occupation.

On December 22, 1944 a provisional National Assembly had been established and it had appointed a provisional government consisting of representatives of the Communist, Social Democratic, Peasant, and Independent Smallholders parties, chosen according to Moscow's directives. Formally, communists with their two cabinet members were officially a discreet minority out of eleven cabinet posts, although two others were in actuality crypto-communists. This provisional government remained in office for less than a year, until free elections were held in November 1945.

The armistice of 1944 was followed by a short period of economic recovery and the reestablishment of ordinary life, generated by the reconstruction plan which was launched by the Communist Party and supported by the other parties. This plan gave hope for a broader recovery of productive activities within the national economy. Factories were running and small, often family-based businesses prospered. The promise of an early withdrawal of the Soviet army following the Yalta and Potsdam decisions of the major powers gave hope for an early return of orderly life.

The holding of democratic elections in 1945 was a further sign of hope. This event did not, however, stop the persistent advance of Soviet influence, which was instrumental in bringing the country into communist hands in less than three years by means of shrewd political manipulation accompanied by the Soviet military presence.

The elections of November 1945 were the only free elections in Hungary during the 45 years of Soviet domination. The winner was the anti-Communist Independent Smallholders Party with 57%. The Communist and Social Democratic parties each had only 17% of the votes. The coalition government, formed by Zoltán Tildy, consisted of the four national Independent Front parties. The Communists and the Social Democrats each had four of the eighteen ministerial seats. This disproportionate arrangement was imposed by Marshal Voroshilov, the President of the Allied Control Commission, and each party was forced to accept the arrangement.

The rise of the Communist Party was a complex procedure. Supported by the Soviet Union, its strategy included infiltration of other parties, especially the Independent Smallholders Party, in order to split the party ranks. Former agents, informers and individuals with a fascist or otherwise compromised past, were suitable candidates for these functions.

The Party also made several concessions to its own demands, e.g. toward churches and toward private enterprises, in order to reduce popular fears of limiting religious instruction or of profiting from modest private investment. These efforts were made in order to eliminate widespread suspicion among churches concerning the aims of the communists regarding religious activity and among small entrepreneurs.

This relatively prosperous period ended with the Peace Treaty of 1947. People had been led to expect the withdrawal of the Soviets after the signing of the Treaty, but this did not happen. Instead, it meant a declaration of a dictatorship by the proletariat in Hungary, a step towards becoming a socialist state under Soviet supervision.

Direct consequences of this development included enforced state control of the economy, collectivization of agriculture and forced industrialization, and a tightening of the political atmosphere in Hungary. A wave of purges and arrests of "traitors" to the party and also of church leaders took place, an indication of a transition to brutality. Some of the church leaders, including Lajos Ordass, József Grösz and József Mindszenty, were condemned to long prison sentences or house arrests.

Massive migrations of refugees and different population groups in and around

Hungary made impossible an effective national control of the situation. The migrations involved population exchanges and the relocation of ethnic Hungarians from Slovakia as well as the expatriation of ethnic Germans. The conditions for the armistice included the expulsion of ethnic Germans who represented a significant minority group in Hungary. On the other hand, a group of Hungarian leftists, who had escaped Nazi persecution by fleeing to the Soviet Union, returned. The flow of Hungarian refugees to the West, largely via Austria, reached its first peak already in 1949.

Possibilities for facing the effects of all the changes and for open discussion of the political future were meagre during the prevailing postwar chaos. Apart from the need for a radical land reform, which was welcomed by the majority of the population, a widespread uncertainty about the future of the impoverished country set the tone for national life.

What was the reason for the conspicuously dissimilar treatment by the Kremlin of the different European countries that had ended up under the Soviet sphere of influence?

Both Hungary and Czechoslovakia were treated “softly,” by Soviet standards, with markedly pseudo-democratic procedures. The Baltic countries were annexed immediately to the Soviet Union and they experienced the heavy hand of Moscow right from the end of the war. Also, Poland was abruptly brought into line with Moscow and its ties with Germany were cut. The government and the people of Bulgaria, who had an enduring sympathy for the USSR based on the past Russian role in liberating the country from its centuries-long Turkish control, welcomed a strengthened alliance with the Soviet Union. The differences tolerated by the Kremlin reflected its postwar desire to portray to the international community an image of respect for international agreements and international law in order to ensure a respected role within the U.N. and in other international organizations.

The Kremlin’s attitudes towards Slavic and non-Slavic countries were not identical. Differences also occurred in the Soviet attitudes towards countries now in the Soviet sphere of influence even though their dominant cultural roots lay in the West, e.g. East Germany and Poland.

Churches in countries occupied by the Soviet army experienced a welcome period of unexpected freedom in the immediate postwar years, which echoed Stalin’s orders to military leaders not to interfere with church activities and not to attack priests or pastors in the occupied areas.

The personalities of the leading control commission members and their relation to their local counterparts also had a tangible effect on the political atmosphere in the occupied countries. Whatever differences were experienced – a tension, even a rift – between the claims of the committed Marxist-Leninists and the actual practice of communist leaders was manifest within the Soviet sphere of interest from the early years of the Cold War onwards.

Hungary provides an important example of the tensions within the destinies of several of its early communist leaders, who publicly and with a high profile cooperated with Soviet occupiers but tried quietly and persistently to guard Hungarian national interests and independence. Others were eager to comply to the extreme with the rules, which they assumed Stalin’s Kremlin expected from them. They tended to turn to ever harder measures to implement the revolutionary goals of communism.

By 1948 Moscow’s tolerance for ideological flexibility with the Hungarians seemed to have vanished. Several Hungarian communist leaders were called to Moscow in 1948 “for self-criticism” and for prompt compliance with the Kremlin’s orders. One of them was Mátyás Rákosi, the General Secretary of the Communist Party and the



Prime Minister of the Peoples' Republic of Hungary in 1952–1953. Purges were carried out at all levels of society once the government supported by the Kremlin had gained control. Power struggles escalated. The execution of the secretary of state László Rajk in 1949 was the most notorious case. Thus after a few months of relative freedom and of hopes for national independence, the people of Hungary found themselves in an ever-tightening embrace of the occupier and under a forced imposition of a Soviet-style Marxist society.

An example of the new trends of the Hungarian government after 1948 was land reform. When the reform was originally launched in 1945, a maximum of 100 acres (40.5 hectares) of land was allowed any landholder. This meant the end of the large holdings of wealthy landowners and the loss of the economic base both of the aristocracy and of the Roman Catholic Church.

Only three years later a new law was passed aiming at a total collectivization of agriculture and the nationalization of all means of production. It meant that all privately-owned land exceeding 30 acres (12 hectares) was to be handed over to the agricultural collectives. For all intents and purposes this marked the end of independent farming. Farmers, who after 1945 had more land than the allowed maximum, were after 1948 considered "kulaks" and were consigned to rural poverty or general unemployment. As a result, agricultural production fell drastically and the proportion of people living in poverty grew larger than it had been before the war.

Another example of this development was the nationalization of the economy. The aim was to close down all private enterprises, large and small, allowing for no realistic possibility of alternative patterns of production within the public economy.

Also "wild" local groups representing various versions of Marxist thought ranging from purified ideology to radical anti-Nazi activism appeared after the end of the war. They had played a part in some of the locally initiated "people's courts." They, too, were included in the targets of the ideological purge.

The clean-up of the society by the government of Prime Minister Mátyás Rákosi reached dimensions unique among the new Soviet satellites. It extended from the elimination of all ideologically dissenting thought to the disciplining of "unreliable" persons in positions of influence from all segments of the society including education, culture, and the churches. It touched the everyday life of the vast majority of the population. The Hungarian historian Miklós Molnár has written:

"The ordinary citizen witnessed the great trials (of political leaders) with indifference: what mattered was the 'small ones.' In fact, Rákosi's regime excelled in that very area. The figures are staggering. In six years, between 1948 and 1953 nearly 1,300,000 people came before the tribunals, which issued 695,623 condemnations ranging from a fine to capital punishment, an average of 116,000 per year. It is worth remembering that this was a country of 9.5 million inhabitants. In just one year, 1952, 77,000 detention sentences were pronounced and thousands of people were interned on the basis of administrative decisions. The number of political executions and political prisoners incarcerated, beaten and tortured is not known,"<sup>46</sup>

Together with the radical societal changes such as land reform and the collectivization

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<sup>46</sup>Miklós Molnár, *A Concise History of Hungary*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 303–304.

of agriculture, nationalization of banks, and limitations to private enterprise not to mention the cultural aspects of a totalitarian regime – total control of publicity and ideological uniformity of education – the cited numbers indicate policies that touched upon people and structures from all groups of society. Churches, however, did not seem to be a primary target. In fact, the government tried to avoid any impression of persecution or of showing intolerance of church institutions. The main concern was to prevent the churches and their educational institutions from becoming cells or centers of anti-communist activity and obstacles for the progressive change to a new society.

The Hungarian government remained a faithful partner of the Soviet Union. The hold of Stalin over the satellite members of his “empire” kept Hungary firmly on the narrow path of the Soviet model of Marxist socialism.

### **4.3. THE HUNGARIAN LUTHERAN CHURCH DURING THE TRANSITION TO COMMUNISM**

All churches in Hungary had shared the damage and the hardships of the war. The reported total of destroyed or severely damaged churches, parsonages, and other properties of the Lutheran Church was massive. In addition, the church had lost many pastors during the war and others became refugees during the first years of the Soviet occupation. In the worst hit areas regular church life had come to a total halt. The loss of life, both civilians and soldiers, and the fate of the half a million Jews who vanished as victims of the Nazi occupation, inflicted on the Hungarian churches and on the soul of the Hungarian people long lasting wounds.

The immediate response of the Lutheran Church in Hungary to the postwar situation, 1945–1948, centered on the restoration of the life of local congregations including their worship and teaching, on the revival of church-wide diaconic and relief services, and on the widening and deepening of her international and ecumenical relationships thereby manifesting her life as a living member in the body of the universal Church of Christ. Once the immediate fighting was over the Lutheran Church accepted with an astounding vigor the opportunities which the approaching peace offered, as unstable as it proved to be.

In the midst of scarcities and long-term uncertainties she launched an ambitious plan for the reconstruction of her congregational and national functions. There was a shortage of pastors and church workers but against all odds the church was able to restore her regular life of worship, to restore many damaged church buildings, fill vacancies, elect new bishops and lay leaders, launch her diaconic and relief actions and restart theological education, all without serious political interference. Ravaged congregations emerged rapidly from the ashes. Their gathering was possible, and their witness and service met no other obstacles than what the loss of pastors and members and what the material destruction and general impoverishment had caused.

The months from the spring of 1945 until the second half of 1947 proved to be a period of relative calm with regards to the relationship between the Hungarian state and the Lutheran Church. The emergence of a team of active, internationally oriented pastors and lay leaders, who were committed to work closely together for the postwar restoration of church life, was a major factor in the success of the rapid recovery of the Lutheran Church. The team represented an impressive group of persons ranging from experienced pastors and lay leaders to dedicated students and scholars. Within this group the parish pastor Lajos Ordass of the Kelenföld congregation in Budapest

emerged as its natural leader. He was known already from the last phase of the war and from the time of the German occupation as a pastor of courage and integrity and as a learned theologian who had a contagious vision of the mission of the church.

Lajos Ordass was elected in July 1945 at the age of 44 to the office of the Bishop of the Bányai Diocese succeeding Sándor Raffay, who retired at the age of 79. The installation service took place on September 27, 1945. Ordass was immediately entrusted with the care of the foreign relations of the Lutheran Church in Hungary and was in 1956 made the leading bishop. Actually, Bishop Zoltán Túróczy would have been in line to succeed Raffay, on the basis of his seniority. He was much more widely known in Hungary than Ordass as an outstanding preacher and evangelist, but because a local people's court had given him a long-term prison sentence for the content of his sermons during the Nazi occupation, he was not considered.

International assistance to the Lutheran Church in Hungary was initiated in 1945, at the right time for pressing needs. It consisted of funds for the repair and reconstruction of churches, parsonages and other essential church properties, subsidies to the salaries of church personnel and direct food and medical aid. The assistance from U.S. Lutheran churches covered the largest part while the churches of Sweden and Denmark participated with a smaller share in their inter-church assistance to Hungary and to several other East European churches.<sup>47</sup> Postwar relief in 1946–48 flowed through various channels. It paved the way for the international church action later coordinated in the framework of the LWF and the World Council of Churches.

Bishop Ordass emerged as a key person to interpret the situation and the needs of the Lutheran Church in Hungary to foreign churches and agencies. The record of his activity for the protection of Jews during the Nazi occupation and his internationally recognized competence contributed to his weight in the emerging international church organizations and in partner churches.

The planning for international church assistance was difficult for the contributing agencies, because their direct contacts with the Lutheran Church in Hungary were at the outset minimal until the end of 1945, and thereafter increasingly controlled by the Hungarian state authorities. This difficulty is reflected in the uncertainties of the initial requests of the Hungarian church leaders to sister churches abroad, and by confusion among the foreign partners about relief priorities.<sup>48</sup> The representatives of foreign church agencies were frequently denied entry visas to Hungary and the representatives of the Hungarian churches were granted travel permits very selectively. Communication between the government offices and the churches with their related agencies was at that time still minimal. Thus relief operations in 1945–1947 had to be carried out largely in an improvised pattern. Yet, the international support received was both financially and morally significant to the Lutheran Church in Hungary.

The expansion of the communist influence in the country was an issue of concern for the churches of Hungary from the very end of the war. It became increasingly threatening

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<sup>47</sup> Financial support came primarily from the American Lutherans through the National Lutheran Council and the American branch of the Lutheran World Conference. The postwar internal problems of the Church of Sweden limited severely the scope of its material assistance to churches in Eastern Europe, contrary to her spiritual and moral involvement. (See Chapter 2.3., pp. 30–31)

<sup>48</sup> Initial estimates from Hungarian Church offices for the reconstruction of church life was 10 million US\$. In response to the questions from both the U.S. and Geneva-based church agencies the request was rapidly revised to 1.4 million. Malkavaara, Mikko, *Luterilaisten yhteyttä rautaesiripun laskutuessa (Lutheran Contacts at the Fall of the Iron Curtain)*, Helsinki 1993

when the Soviet armed forces remained, contrary to the formal agreements, in the country after the 1947 Peace Treaty, and when the Allied Control Commission was closed down.

Ordass was aware of the trend. After having received in February 1947 the necessary exit permit from authorities for his travel to Geneva and the United States for meetings of church construction and relief agencies, Bishop Ordass decided to prolong his stay and make an expanded lecture tour in the USA and Nordic countries before attending the founding assembly of the LWF in Sweden in June-July. He met a wide range of church leaders and theologians and also Hungarian students of theology studying abroad, all of whom he informed about the situation of the church in Hungary. He was particularly impressed by Bishop Eivind Berggrav of Oslo, who shared his experience during the Norwegian church struggle under German occupation 1940–1945. He also visited Archbishop Aleksii Lehtonen of Finland, with whom he could share impressions of the Soviet influence on its neighboring areas.<sup>49</sup>

Ordass met most of the key persons who set the tone for the preparatory work for the LWF and who received from him an inside analysis of what the Hungarian churches were likely to be up against under the advancing communist rule. It was a strategic tour as it ensured spiritual and material support to the Hungarian Lutheran Church through the chaotic revolutionary period.

These contacts and his participation in the preparation of the LWF assemblies in Lund 1947 and Minneapolis in 1957 made possible the development of a well-informed international network whose solidarity the Hungarian Lutheran Church under Ordass' leadership could count on. Members of this network included, e.g., the Swedish bishops Gustav Aulén and Bo Giertz, and Franklin C. Fry, the President of the United Lutheran Church in America.

Ordass took a deliberate risk of a long absence from his diocese, because he considered live links with sister churches and his participation in the LWF Assembly in Sweden critically important for his church and because he expected the communist authorities to limit travel permits further and possibly even to prevent his participation in the Lund assembly. After his return to Hungary he gave an extensive report of his discussions and meetings abroad to the pastors and lay leaders of his church.

Ordass arrived in Lund in June 1947 as an insider of the founders' group of the LWF. He was received as the internationally best known and trusted Lutheran church leader from amongst the Lutheran minority churches in Eastern Europe.<sup>50</sup> Consequently Ordass accepted moral responsibility for strengthening the cooperation of Lutheran minority churches within the Eastern bloc and for the increase of their share in the international Lutheran community.

After returning from Lund Ordass immediately took the initiative to organize in Hungary in early 1948 a conference of the leaders of the Lutheran churches of Eastern Europe. The plan had the support of the general secretary of the LWF. The Hungarian authorities, however, blocked the preparations by refusing entry visas for the invited foreign participants.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Personal notes by Risto Lehtonen, 1947.

<sup>50</sup> The term "Lutheran minority churches of Eastern Europe" was used in the LWF from its beginning until the 1970s for all Lutheran churches within the socialist bloc except for the Lutheran churches in the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) where Lutheran churches were viewed as "folk churches."

<sup>51</sup> The first conference of the "Lutheran minority churches" in Europe took place first in Austria 1956. Ordass was not able to participate. Terray, László G., *He Could Not Do Otherwise: Bishop Lajos Ordass, 1901–1978*, trans. Eric W. Gritsch (Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, UK: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997), p. 58.

In March 1948 Ordass once again attended LWF and WCC meetings in Geneva. On his flight from Budapest to Geneva via Zürich he sat next to a Senior of the Methodist Church in Hungary, János Tessényi, who asked for a confidential conversation with him after landing in Zürich. The message of Tessényi was that before his travel to Switzerland he had been called to the office of the Hungarian security police who after discussion and questioning had given him his final travel permit together with orders to follow Ordass and to report on his contacts and conversations in Geneva. Meanwhile Tessényi had decided to defect and travel to the USA without returning to Budapest. This was a definitive sign to Ordass that he was suspected by the security police of Hungary for disloyalty to his government. He informed the LWF General Secretary Sylvester Michelfelder and other trusted colleagues in Geneva and in Budapest about the incident. After returning to Budapest he began to avoid moving alone in the city including coming or leaving his office. He wanted to have a reliable witness with him if kidnapped on the street.

The political scene in Hungary was unsettled until the summer of 1948. The influence of the Communist Party increased significantly in spite of its gaining only 22% of the votes in the parliamentary elections of August 31, 1947. The state of the country was still chaotic as a new wave of a Hungarian version of Stalinism was rising. The Ministry of Interior and the Security Police came under communist control at the direct influence of the occupying forces. Pressure on churches concerning the administration and nominations of bishops and of the official lay leaders (general inspectors and superintendents) increased. Uncertainty and rifts concerning the responses of churches to increased government demands also began to appear among leaders and members of the Lutheran Church.

In the midst of the many uncertainties the student organization of the Lutheran Church in Hungary, was, however, still able to host an international Christian student conference in Gyenesdiás in the summer of 1948. The local organizing was in the hands of László Dezséry, at that time still a student pastor of the Lutheran Church. The conference brought together some 100 participants of whom 20 came from outside Hungary. The visa applications from Eastern bloc countries had been turned down by Hungarian authorities. Bishop Ordass welcomed personally the participants. The executive secretary of the LWF, Sylvester Michelfelder, had earlier indicated his intention to participate, but was unable to come.

Meanwhile Ordass concentrated on strengthening the foundations of the daily life and witness of congregations and the national church. Central to this was worship, pastoral care, and bold persistence in biblical teaching that transcends political ideologies. He had come to the conclusion that in the coming encounter with the government the heart of the matter for the church would be her faithfulness to the confession of the church.

The calm of the church was coming to an end.

#### **4.4. TURNING POINT: ARREST OF LAJOS ORDASS AND ITS CONSEQUENCES FOR THE CHURCH**

The September 8, 1948, arrest of Lajos Ordass and his subsequent indictment on October 1 for a two-year prison term, marked a dramatic turn, a moment of trauma for both the Lutheran Church in Hungary and the Lutheran World Federation. It left long-lasting traces in the relationships between the Lutheran Church in Hungary and

the Communist government. It affected profoundly the leadership of the LWF, both because the person affected was a vice-president and because it revealed uncertainty on the part of the leaders of the new world organization concerning its responsibilities when a member church comes under harsh political pressure.

The concrete cause for the open conflict of the Lutheran Church with the government of Hungary in 1948 was the government proposal for a Concordat, a statement of agreement to redefine church-state relations in Hungary. The government offered it to churches in Hungary for voluntary acceptance.

Ordass had actually learned about governmental plans months before they were officially presented to the Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed churches. He was particularly concerned about the intention of the government to nationalize all church schools. In his view the giving up the over four hundred schools owned and run by the Lutheran Church would obliterate an essential part of the mission entrusted by Christ to his Church. Furthermore, he suspected that the Concordat would be the first of a series of limiting measures to control the ministry of the church. He was preparing himself and the Lutheran Church for a battle for the right of churches to their schools. The support he received for this position from the majority of the congregations of his diocese was in the beginning overwhelming.

There was in the proposed Concordat more at stake for the Roman Catholic Church than for the Lutheran Church. Besides owning and running some 2,800 church schools, the Roman Catholic Church was one of the biggest landowners in Hungary and thereby linked to the long history of feudalism in Hungary. Mindszenty's public acknowledgment of the need for land reform came too late. His indication that the Catholic Church was preparing for such reform did not free her from landownership. The loss of land foreboded a drastic fall of the financial base of the Catholic Church. It was far simpler for the Lutheran Church to welcome land reform than it was for the Catholics. Furthermore, Cardinal Mindszenty was a guardian of the ecclesial-cultural heritage of the Habsburg empire and of the traditional alliance between the altar and the throne. This made him an active political adversary of socialist order and of the separation of church and state.

Moreover, the historic juxtaposition between Catholics and Protestants in Hungary since the Reformation, sharpened bitterly by the Counter-Reformation, had not yet been resolved. The second Vatican Council had not yet taken place. Lack of communication between the different churches in Hungary and their very different sizes complicated their possibilities for negotiation with the political authorities.

Resistance to the nationalization of private schools brought Ordass and Mindszenty, nevertheless, closer to each other. Yet, even then, their responses to the Communist rule differed. Ordass was in the first place a defender of the church following the perennial Lutheran two-kingdoms teaching on church and state, while Mindszenty was a belated defender of the inherited Habsburg era imperial order of society, within which the Roman Catholic Church had been at home. These differences limited their possibilities of giving a joint response to the immediate claims of the Hungarian government and more widely to the escalating Cold War.

The Reformed Church in Hungary took a different stand in relation to the proposed Concordat. Advocacy of the contextuality of the church and the minimization of the value of tradition allowed her more flexibility toward the claims of the government concerning church structure and forms of ministry than was found among Lutherans and Catholics. Moreover, the advice of Karl Barth, a prominent theological adviser of the Reformed Church, on the Christian assessment of communism, encouraged Reformed Church leaders to seek boldly a way of peace with the Marxist government and

to aim at cooperation with it on common social and ethical objectives.<sup>52</sup> Consequently Albert Bereczky, the Bishop of the Reformed Church in Hungary was the first church leader to sign the Concordat voluntarily, on October 7, 1948, without objections or without requests for further negotiations.<sup>53</sup>

The government reacted to the resistance of both Cardinal Mindszenty and Bishop Ordass by deciding unilaterally to make the Concordat a binding pattern for church-state relations in Hungary. It resorted to the use of pressure on those who had not volunteered to sign it. In the case of the Lutheran Church the government chose to pursue the replacement of Lajos Ordass from his bishop's office and from his position as the main international spokesperson of the Lutheran Church first by Zoltán Túróczy and, two years later, by László Dezséry. Ordass had risen in the eyes of the communist government to the state of being a conspicuously stubborn and dangerous international leader of church-based opposition.

The harshness of the response of the leading bishop of the Lutheran Church to the Concordat seems to have taken the government by surprise. The content of the proposed church-state agreement on the whole was very moderate compared with what had happened in the Soviet Union all the way from the October revolution until World War II and the alliance with Britain and later with the U.S. The government promised with the church-state Concordat a broad religious liberty, e.g. separation of the church from the state, freedom for all church functions ranging from worship to diaconic activities, and the care of old people to youth work. The proposal also included promises for independent theological education and compulsory teaching of religion in state schools and continued financial state support to churches. The main restrictive point of the Concordat was to guarantee that churches would not resist socialism nor become centers of opposition to the government. The moderation of the Concordat offered by the government was clearly in line with Stalin's pragmatic postwar position on churches in contrast to the Marxist-Leninist doctrine of religion as an opium for the people, and of the church as a vanishing institution that has no place in socialist society.

Furthermore, the government apparently wanted in its relation with Lutherans to evade questions regarding faith and of religious conviction. It was determined to avoid allegations of violating human rights and of limiting religious freedom at the very time when the United Nations took its first steps and when the Universal Declaration on Human Rights with its explicit reference to religious liberty was hailed globally. The government had to find another way to silence Ordass.

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<sup>52</sup> Karl Barth had pointed out in a letter that the Nazi ideology and Marxism-Leninism are in essence two fundamentally different ideologies in spite of the fact that both were totalitarian in character. The church had no other option than to resist Hitler's Nazism since it twisted the content of Christianity in its attempt to cleanse it from every trace of its Jewish background in order to transform it into a religion of the Aryan race, while Soviet Marxism aimed at leaving the church to die on its own as a remnant of the dying class society without any interest in interfering in its vanishing faith. Out of his hasty description of the difference between the two ideologies, "progressive" Christians drew a more popular conclusion according to which the cause for an actual conflict was that a church would build itself up as a base for political resistance to the social objectives of Marxism on the way to a classless society. This view opened the way to the identification of individual Christians with Marxist socialism. Cf. Barth, Karl, *Against the Stream: Shorter Postwar Writings, 1946–52* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1954) pp. 101–105, "The Reformed Church behind the 'Iron Curtain'".

<sup>53</sup> The differences of inherited schools of thought on the social teaching of the church made it virtually impossible to find a common Christian/ecumenical response to the totalitarian claims of Stalinist communism in the early days of Hungary's shifting to socialism. The roots of the theological differences that surfaced in Hungary can be traced back to the times of Reformation.

A fabricated charge was presented by the government against Ordass for mismanagement and embezzlement of aid funds which the Lutheran Church had received in foreign currencies from the U.S. and Sweden. The demand by the prosecutor was for a ten-year prison term. The choice for prosecuting him for actions, which were universally recognized as a crime and which had nothing to do with ideological or religious positions, was designed to get Ordass neatly out of his bishop's office and in the process to destroy his personal credibility within the Lutheran Church and among the general public. The funds referred to in the charge included grants for general relief, for reconstruction of church properties, and also for the costs of his five-month tour in Europe and the USA in 1947. Stories about lavish use of church funds by Ordass for his private benefit were circulated in the Hungarian press.

Church agencies in the U.S. and in Sweden promptly provided audited reports of their contributions which tallied accurately with Hungarian bank reports. The court obviously had no other choice but to acknowledge the lack of credibility of the charges made. The final verdict announced on October 1, 1948 was for two years in prison, the loss of civil rights for five years, and a fine of 3,000 forints. Compared with the purges of revolutionary periods of the Soviet Union, and also with the later terror in Hungary, the verdict against Bishop Ordass was unexpectedly moderate.<sup>54</sup>

In October, 1948, soon after the arrest and prison sentence of Ordass, László Dezséry, now pastor of a local congregation, circulated to the congregations of the Lutheran Church in Hungary an *"Open Letter on the Matter of the Lutheran Church in Hungary."* With its publication he dissociated himself from the company of the supporters of Ordass. He tried to map a way for the Lutheran Church away from the political conflict between the state and the church. His theological interpretation of the mission of the church differed fundamentally from that of Ordass and also of Túróczy. He called for a total turn of the church from service to capitalism and American imperialism in order to seek a proper place for the church to serve the poor and oppressed in the framework of revolutionary socialism.

The language of parts of Dezséry's "Open Letter" was provocative and out of place in traditional church circles. Yet, his main emphases included the need to rediscover the gospel of the poor, the recognition of God's purposes within the revolutionary transformation of society, a vision of the church in discipleship of Jesus, and an openness to the beginnings of a new era for the world in which social justice built by socialism would overcome the collective selfishness of capitalism.

László Dezséry was not alone with these ideas. He failed to convince the mainstream of the Lutheran Church both about the need of such a radical renewal of its mission and his recognition of the value of advancing socialism. His supporters came from among students, from committed socialists, and from political activists who shared his concern for the relevance of the church in a socialist society as well as from those who shared his frustration with the politically irrelevant facade of churches and

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<sup>54</sup> Upon his return to Hungary in July 1947 Ordass had given a detailed report on his meetings, discussions, on the financial assistance given to the Lutheran Church in Hungary and on the coverage of his costs during his travel. In view of the court proceedings in Budapest, the LWF office in Geneva and the American Lutheran Church offices provided a detailed account including comprehensive statements from banks in the U.S. and in Budapest for all the funds transmitted. The documentation indicated that the allegations of misuse and of the private leakage of relief funds to Ordass were unfounded. Eight years later, during the political thaw of the Khrushchev era, the communist government of Hungary released Lajos Ordass on October 8, 1956 from all the 1948 charges and declared that the court action had been invalid on the ground of the inadequacy of information. Malkavaara, op. cit, p. 249 and Terray, op. cit., p. 117-118.



of their inherited structures. Many of his critics labelled him as a political opportunist, some even as a communist agent. As a person he was modest, with a desire to listen to “ordinary people” of all walks of life, himself sometimes plagued with uncertainties about the future, yet genuinely committed to the ministry of the church. Ordass, who had first considered Dezséry as a potentially close colleague, was disturbed to find him slipping into the camp of the enemies of the church. Their ways parted.

Harder measures to eliminate the remaining influence of Bishop Ordass and to silence other “reactionaries” in the Lutheran Church were seen by the revolutionary regime as necessary as it moved increasingly towards hardline Leninism. The whole leadership of the Lutheran Church had to be brought under a tightened political control. The authorities issued brutal threats ranging from prison sentences to death penalties for persons known to side with Ordass, and simultaneously it offered generous gestures of tolerance and good will towards those who affirmed the goals and values of Marxist communism and who were prepared to cooperate with the “revolutionary” government.

Ordass’ imprisonment opened the way for the government to increase its influence on the church. It increased pressure on the synods and took a visible role in controlling the elections of bishops and of lay leaders.

On December 8, 1948 the synod of the Lutheran Church in Hungary accepted the controversial Concordat with the state. The agreement was signed on December 14 jointly by Bishop Zoltán Túróczy and the Lay President of the Northern District, Zoltán Mády. Túróczy, who had already in June received an amnesty from his prison sentence, had under government pressure moved from the Eastern Tisza Diocese to become Bishop of the Transdanubian Diocese in the South, where he was installed on December 16, 1948. On December 22 Lajos Vetö, who had appeared to be a trustee of the communist government, was installed as Bishop of the Tisza Diocese.

Direct official communication between Hungarian government representatives and Hungarian church leaders was on the whole minimal during the Stalinist years. Statements and formal decisions were declared publicly, but prepared either without any contact with the church or in informal behind the scenes talks between selected participants such as progressive church leaders.

Meanwhile in the autumn of 1948, a government representative had asked Bishop Túróczy to sound out Ordass’ reaction to an option of amnesty to him on the condition that he and his family leave Hungary. The answer had been a flat ‘no’. At the beginning of 1949 the authorities made one more offer, according to which Ordass would be pardoned, granted a state pension, and possibly be allowed to serve as a pastor of a congregation, on the condition that he announces his withdrawal from the office of bishop. Túróczy was again asked to convey this message to him. After a prolonged meeting of the two in the prison, with an interim break for Ordass for meditation and further consideration, Ordass once again turned down the governmental proposal. This occasion amounted to an abrupt break of confidence between Ordass and Túróczy.

After a failed attempt to force a total silence on the Lutheran Church, the government launched a broad and vicious slander campaign against Ordass and his supporters. Finally, in 1950, it demanded that the church appoint a special disciplinary court to dismiss Ordass from his office.<sup>55</sup> The proceedings between the government and the church proved exceedingly painful. The Assembly (General Synod) of the

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<sup>55</sup> The constitution of the Lutheran Church in Hungary includes the composition and mandate for a special court of the church to be appointed by the church for disciplinary matters concerning bishops.

church voted down the first proposal of the general inspector of the church, Iván Reök, for the composition of the special court. After varied punitive steps and threats by governmental authorities, a new list of members of the court was finally approved by the Synod. The verdict of the court of April 1, 1950 to dismiss Ordass was passed by the twelve-member court with four votes in favor and with eight abstentions. The Hungarian media, by then fully guided by the government, hailed the church court dismissal of Ordass as an impressive expression of the collective will of the Lutheran Church in Hungary. What actually had happened during the court proceedings was not publicly revealed until an envelope containing a detailed report was found in the estate of a former member of the special court.<sup>56</sup>

After dismissal from the bishop's office, Ordass was promptly released from prison on May 30, 1950. He was kept strictly guarded by police during his deposition. Contrary to the expectations of the government and despite its massive campaign of disinformation about Ordass, the final verdict of the court aroused a sudden new wave of appreciation of him as a church leader and of increased respect for his faith both within Hungary and in the world-wide church.

On June 27, 1950 László Dezséry was installed as Ordass' successor as Bishop of the Bányai Diocese. Further actions by the government followed fast. The theological faculties were dissociated from universities in June 1950. The Journal of Evangelization, a church publication, was banned in March 1951. The Deaconess Organization was dissolved in November 1951. The State Office for Church Affairs was established in May 1951 first with István Kossa and soon János Horváth as its head. The last round of rendering the Lutheran Church more manageable by the government reduced the number of dioceses from four to two and arranged the early retirements of Bishops Szabó and Túróczy. With all these changes the government had succeeded to silence its last visible opposition among church leaders. Also, some of the moderate rulings of the Concordat were forgotten, disillusioning those who had signed it on behalf of the church. Meanwhile the popular support of Ordass among pastors and members of the church dropped significantly in these years.

A sneaking paralysis threatened the public life of the churches during the years of revolutionary terror in Hungary. Church-related functions and organizations were closed down. Pastors of influence were removed from prominent congregations and sent to remote villages, and lay leaders (inspectors) of the church were changed to cleanse the church administration of "reactionary" influence. The government's hand was visible in the elections of bishops and lay-leaders by which it wanted to secure a smooth accommodation of the church to the "new society."

The most severe damage for the church was caused by the government's deliberate spread of mistrust among people, including churches, and by inciting further the tensions and disagreements which it found among church leaders and theologians. Secret agents of the security police had a major role in this campaign.

The government succeeded thereby in deepening the already dawning divisions within the Lutheran Church. Even Ordass in his isolation had to cope with the silence, which hit him especially hard by cutting his contacts. Pastors and friends, who had the courage still to visit him at his home, which was guarded by the security agents, took personal risks.

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<sup>56</sup> The verdict was declared void in 1956 by the Supreme Court of Hungary and after that rescinded by the regular court of the church.

In spite of multiple acts of harassment of the church by national and local authorities and by the omnipresent secret police, the life of the church continued in the congregations, in families, and in the quiet witness of the faithful. Many Christians simply chose to lie low under the totalitarian controls. Many found it simply unnecessary or meaningless to express publicly their personal views or convictions because they saw that their voice had no place and virtually no effect in the locked up political atmosphere. Yet, there was no vacuum of faith or of convictions in the church. The silence that prevailed, was forced upon the church. The proclamation of the Word of God continued in churches, in families and homes, and in casual gatherings of friends. Children were baptized, young people were confirmed, church choirs had their practices, and religious education continued in schools even though the government did not keep the promises it had given to the churches. The availability of books and publications was, however, sharply restricted.

In spite of the appearance of deepening rifts within the leading ranks of the Lutheran Church in Hungary and of the increasingly successful control of the administration of the church by the communist government, the quiet pulse of the life of the church continued beyond the reach of the government.

#### **4.5. STRUGGLE FOR THE DIRECTION OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH IN SOCIALIST HUNGARY**

In the struggle of the Lutheran Church in Hungary for a consistent role under communist rule, three bishops – Lajos Ordass, Zoltán Túróczy, and László Dezséry – stand out as representatives of different options. Their positions in relation to the transition of Hungary from an authoritarian-conservative order towards socialism under the Soviet umbrella deserve attention. Each one of them influenced the self-understanding of the church from their own vantage point.

**Lajos Ordass** was born in 1901. He was installed Bishop of the Central (Bánya) Diocese in 1945, imprisoned in 1948–1950, deposed by a church court from the bishop's office in 1950, brought back into that office when rehabilitated by the state and church in 1956, deposed again in 1958, and lived in isolation until his death in 1977.

For Ordass the starting point for the witness of the church in any situation of political conflict was her divine mandate. It had been given to the apostles and conveyed through them to God's people, the church. Its essence was the authorization and the sending of the church to continue the intervention of God for the life of the world as revealed in Jesus Christ. This mandate calls the church to faithfulness in carrying out her God-given mission. The fulness of salvation is to be conveyed to all people whatever their personal and social context. Whenever this mandate gives rise to tension or conflict with the secular society and its ideology, the integrity of the church comes to a test. The church may well be brought to spiritual struggle and readiness to suffer.

For Ordass, the "way of the cross" was inherent to the integrity of a church leader. He had closely followed the events in the Church of Norway and the actions of her leading bishop Eivind Berggrav during his confinement to home arrest by the Nazi occupiers. Similarly, he had also followed the testimony of Dietrich Bonhoeffer during the struggles of the Confessing Church against Nazi rule in Germany. Ordass anticipated and was prepared to deal with a wave of restrictions and closures to the ministries of the Lutheran Church in Hungary by the Marxist-Stalinist regime of the country.

For Ordass the reality of evil in the communist system was manifest in its program of preventing the proclamation of the saving news of the gospel and its control of the structures needed to support and serve the main tasks of the church. A basic element of the task which God has entrusted to the church was, in Ordass' view, to function as the conscience of society. He refused to regard any society as a "Christian society" and none as being outside the interest and responsibility of the church. Thus it was that he repeatedly refused to be called an anti-Communist.

Ordass drew his conclusions regarding the role of the church in a Marxist society largely from the Lutheran teaching of the two kingdoms or regiments. God's intervention through Christ was not a forceful conquest for the establishment of a political kingdom of God on earth. The task of the church is not to establish a political order nor to take over the running of society, nor to offer an alternative form of society nor to accept the responsibility for the functions which belong to civil authorities. Instead, the task of the church is to convey the message of the gospel, the redeeming love of God for the whole society, and as the conscience of society to call the "earthly rulers" to their accountability to God the Creator.

For Ordass the divine mandate of the church through the ages has manifested itself in the communication of the gospel by word and deed, and in the celebration of the sacraments. God's action in the world draws the people of God together and opens them to God's call to show his love in all walks of life. Both individual persons and whole communities are involved in actualizing this self-giving love. The basic weapons of the church against evil are the preaching of the gospel, the provision of Christian education, love for the neighbor, service to the needy, defense of the oppressed, and suffering in the footsteps of Christ – all for the life of others.

The structures and orders of the church were seen by Ordass to be part of the instruments authorized by God to enable the carrying out of her divine mission to the world within differing cultural and political contexts. This conviction arose from his initial resistance to the governmental plan to nationalize church schools. Church schools in Hungary had traditionally played an integral role in the teaching mission of the church.

Ordass consistently denied being anti-communist and affirmed a conditional readiness to cooperate with the Marxist government and to develop mutual respect between the state and the church. His condition was that the state recognize the independence of the church in fulfilling her God-given mandate to communicate the gospel. He was convinced that in matters of faith and mission the church is accountable to God alone and not to civil authorities. In conflict situations the church is bound by its God-given mandate even if this is contrary to the laws of the society.

The rise of a totalitarian anti-religious regime in Hungary was for Ordass an existential test of the faithfulness of his church and also of his personal faith. Ordass lifted high the apostolic and catholic character of the Lutheran confessional heritage when he rejected the trend which he found among Reformed church leaders, who in his view were ready to adjust to government policies even at points which for the Lutheran tradition were "non-negotiable." He also rejected the Roman Catholic tradition which demanded direct political authority for the church and which had no fundamental objections to alliances between "altar and crown." The church had the right to protect herself from becoming an instrument of the government.

Ordass was committed to the ecumenical movement and to the pursuit of unity in mission and service. Therefore, partnership in the Lutheran World Federation and in the World Council of Churches was fundamental to the church in Hungary. An

international sharing of experiences of Christians in revolutionary Hungary would be part of the mission of the Lutheran Church. No church ought to be left alone in its God-given mission in any context.

**Zoltán Túróczy** was the eldest of the three bishops. He was born in 1893, ordained in 1915, installed as Bishop of the Northern Tisza Diocese in 1939, imprisoned in 1945–1946, installed as Bishop of the Western Diocese in 1948, “resigned” (under political pressure) in 1952, installed as Bishop of the Northern Diocese in 1957 and deposed in the same year. He died in 1971.

Túróczy was most widely known for his preaching and for his devotional books. He was an outstanding leader of the evangelistic movement within his own church. He had active contacts with evangelistic circles and pietistic movements far beyond the borders of Hungary. He had an especially close link with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and with Finnish pietism. He never identified himself fully with Anglo-Saxon patterns of evangelicalism. His spiritual and theological views arose clearly from the Lutheran tradition and its Catholic roots. Simple guidance for life in Christ and sharing the Christian experience of everyday spiritual struggle were characteristics of his preaching. His special strength was his exceptional knowledge of the Scriptures. He was alert to events and currents within society and he saw the role of the church primarily in evangelistic terms which crossed the lines of different social and political camps.

For Túróczy the center of the church, her non-negotiable foundation, was the Word and the sacraments. They were for him the source and strength of evangelistic preaching. Other functions belonged to the *adiaphora*, which meant for him that their form could vary. He even saw the order of the church, beyond the ministry of Word and sacraments, as belonging to functions that were variable according to changing contexts. In his view it was possible – even necessary – for the church leaders to consider with leaders of the civil society the advisability of changes in the structure and programs of the church as long as any proposed changes did not touch the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the sacraments.

The one and only essential office and function within the church was the office of the ordained pastors as ministers of the Word. All other recognized functions and ministries of the church arose from biblical teaching, were derived from the one ministry of the Word, and kept changing in differing contexts. Túróczy frequently said that “when one door closed, God opened other doors for the gospel.”

The offices of ordained ministries as far as their institutional structures were concerned did in his view not belong to the non-negotiables of the church. He maintained that the Bible did not offer clearly defined patterns for the order and the ministries of the church. The different offices of bishops, pastors and deacons were practical contextual instruments for the church.

On this basis Túróczy concluded that the nationalization of church schools was not a threat to the main function of the church. His personal attitude toward the interference of the communists with the appointment of bishops underlined his conviction that the proclamation of the Word and the administering of the sacraments were the center of the divine mandate. Who administered appointments and such matters was of secondary importance for him.

Túróczy did not change his view, when he realized that the government did not keep the promises given in the original Concordat concerning the obligatory teaching of religion in the nationalized schools, and even when he was twice deposed from the bishop’s office and once forced by the government to move from one diocese to an-

other. For him the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ was his primary and lasting calling without regard to whatever position in the church he occupied in fulfilling that vocation. For him neither ordination to the pastoral ministry nor episcopal consecration granted to the person a guaranteed social position nor a special divine authority in earthly matters. What mattered was the ministry of the Word.

Until the end of his life Túróczy was faithful to his calling as preacher, evangelist, and pastor and was highly respected for the consistency of his ministry. He was also noted in both church and governmental circles as a patient and peaceful partner in controversial discussions. He did not like head-on confrontations. Instead he tried usually to find a way around explosive issues to a reasonable and honest compromise and *modus vivendi*. He did not draw headlines in political or church media for sharp opinions. In spite of his deliberately avoiding open confrontations with the anti-religious politicians, the communist leaders never trusted him to be a loyal supporter of the government. He remained through his career a faithful shepherd in the church and a person with question marks among the communist authorities.

Differing convictions and temperaments were also factors which separated Túróczy and Ordass in their attitudes towards the efforts of the revolutionary government to remove Ordass from the leadership of the Lutheran Church.

**László Dezséry** was born in 1914 and was the youngest of the group of three. He was installed as Bishop of the Bányá diocese in 1950, resigned in 1956, reinstated in 1958 and resigned within two hours in order to make it possible for the authorities to depose Ordass. He died in 1971.

Dezséry in his youth had been a passionate nationalist. He came during his school years under the influence of the popular anti-Semitism of Hungary which caused him during the Hitler era to view both Germans and Jews as the main enemies of Hungary. In his student years he developed an increasing interest in the international perspectives which socialism offered for the future. During the war, however, he woke up to the threat of Soviet expansion. After the war, he joined the Social Democratic Party which later, during the Soviet occupation, merged with the Communist Party.

After completing his theological education Dezséry was ordained in 1939. He served as a campus pastor for universities and other institutions of higher education from 1945 to 1949. He had been an active member of the Student Christian Movement both in Hungary and internationally. He supported the election of Ordass as the bishop of the Bányá diocese in 1945. He was a delegate to the ecumenical World Conference of Christian Youth in Oslo in 1947 and he cooperated with Ordass when he organized the international Christian student conference hosted by the Lutheran Church in Hungary in 1948.

In October 1948, soon after Ordass' imprisonment, Dezséry published a widely circulated pamphlet of thirty pages entitled *An Open Letter about the Lutheran Church*. It was a decisive sign of the turn in Dezséry's position concerning church-state relations in Hungary. He expressed his commitment to a carefully defined scheme for cooperation between the church and the government in the building of socialism in Hungary, emphasizing that his convictions regarding a new order for society were theologically based. In 1949 he was installed as the pastor of the Óbuda congregation in Budapest. The following year with strong governmental support he was made Bishop of the Bányá diocese, the office which he held from 1950 to 1956 and for a moment in 1958. After his resignation he was employed in the Hungarian press.

Dezséry represented a radical leftist view concerning the place and role of the church in society. For him the revolution meant the beginnings of an era of God's

judgment on all the injustice of Western imperialism and its capitalist system, a system that served the interests of the powerful and rich at the cost of the underdeveloped and poor of the world. This judgment was also aimed at Christians and the churches who with their accommodation and silence served the privileged.

For the Hungarian churches the future opened in rediscovering the person of Jesus Christ and following him in the transformation of society. Dezséry painted a bold vision of a rediscovery of the mission of the church in the struggle for justice and humanness now underway in the revolution. Reading carefully his programmatic statements and sermons reveals his passionate commitment to the Christ who seeks disciples from the midst of the harshest social conflicts and calls them to follow him. His repeatedly brutal criticism of churches which had built up their hierarchical structures in order to ensure their credibility and political power, frequently refer to the prophetic emphases of both the Old and the New Testament.

In Dezséry's radical vision, the tradition of the Lutheran confession had its place. Its social significance, particularly, was crucial for him. The target of his criticism was at the outset the hierarchical structure of the dominant churches with their demand for authority, not only spiritual but also political. The church in its acceptance of capitalism reflected for him its fall to the temptations of power and glory instead of its response to the persistent call of Christ to identify with the weak and powerless and to bear the cross.

Yet, there were elements in Dezséry's vision which, according to his theological critics, contradicted the confessional center of the creeds. Most obviously, his emphasis on the eschatological value of socialism and his subsequent call to identify the mission of the church with the goals of socialism opened a way for a secular ideology to define the calling of the church, thus giving socialism – plainly or subtly – a divine value.

Moreover, ordinary persons in the pew were probably not too impressed by what they thought were efforts to make the church more acceptable to the new political rulers, both local and national. Trusted pastors and bishops were disciplined at random and the elected lay leaders were replaced by politically acceptable persons who often had no experience of the life of the church. How could Marxist socialism replace the gospel of Jesus Christ as a way to the fulfilment of life? For ordinary church-members Dezséry's vision of an alliance between Marxist socialism and Christianity was not attractive.

Dezséry, however, was not alone with these concerns. He had a following within the younger generation. He also had ecumenically honored predecessors, who were developing parallel interpretations of the mission of the church by emphasizing God's judging and saving actions in global and political struggles. Professor Josef Hromádka of Czechoslovakia was one such person. Similar voices arose in later years in many countries including radicalized Christian students and youth of 1960s and 1970s in Western Europe and North America. For a short while he drew the attention of the militant communist government as an acceptable ally in his leading position in the church. Later, however, the confidence shown him by the communist government evaporated.

After resigning from the bishop's office, he inquired from Ordass about possibilities to continue to serve as a pastor in a congregation. Ordass replied that his case needed to be examined and any irregularities brought into the open. Dezséry's conclusion was that he would not be accepted. He found work with the state radio. Later he publicly expressed bitterness about having been excommunicated. He gave

up his membership in the Lutheran Church, but until the end of his life he continued to maintain his Christian convictions.

For Dezséry the inherited structure of the church was a product of class society and reflected the values and interests of the socially and economically privileged. His basic understanding of the church had originally been based on the catholicity of the people of God, which in his experience had been lost in Hungary in the accommodation of the Lutheran Church to the privileged class of capitalist society. His message in the famous *Open Letter* reads like an anticipation of the revolutionary manifestos of the radical student and youth movements of the 1960s and 1970s in France and Germany.

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The options for the three bishops regarding relations between church and state during 1947–1952 arose from the midst of the struggles of the Lutheran Church in Hungary at a turbulent time in the history of the country. An understanding of the mission of the church is central to all these options, although each of the bishops had his own emphasis. The lack of agreement on crucial points reflects both the personal histories and separate theological and church-political convictions of these men. Each of them had supporters within the Lutheran Church of Hungary. Each in his own way influenced the political leaders of the country by broadening their perspective on church-state relations in Hungary. The stands they took represented emphases – schools of thought – which have appeared within and between different historical traditions. These differences were deepened by the Cold War. Yet, none of their views regarding the role of the church within a society in transition succeeded in creating a convincing consensus within the Lutheran Church of Hungary. Instead, their respective options came to fuel a long-lasting and divisive struggle.

The conflict-ridden search for a direction for the Lutheran Church in Hungary reached out to the LWF and the ecumenical movement, leaving its perplexing traces especially on the development of the role of the LWF in Eastern Europe and on its services to the member churches in communist dominated countries.

#### **4.6. LWF'S RESPONSE TO HUNGARY**

The officers and staff of the Lutheran World Federation were well aware of the change of the political scene of Europe and of the expansion of communist influence in Soviet occupied areas. The future of several countries on the border between East and West was still open at the time of the LWF founding assembly in 1947 in Lund. The implications of the descending "Iron Curtain" were still new issues for the churches represented at Lund and for the ecumenical movement as a whole. The political potential of the new international church organizations was also unknown. The figure of Bishop Lajos Ordass of Hungary, who had been elected a vice-president of the LWF had drawn the attention of the assembly participants, and also of their churches to the uncertainties of the political map of Europe and to the unclear future of churches especially in Eastern Europe.

Signs of the tightening of the situation of the Lutheran Church in Hungary began to appear by mid-1947, marking the end of the postwar ideological thaw. The political control of the country was beginning to rest in the hands of the Communist Party. The wartime alliance between the USA and the USSR had been buried, as witnessed by the



1946 speeches of President Truman and Joseph Stalin. During the months after the Lund Assembly, Ordass provided the LWF office with ongoing information regarding the emerging threats to the Lutheran Church in Hungary. What the political development in Hungary was to mean for churches and for the LWF was still a mixture of concern and speculation.

Under the clouds rising over the political situation in Europe, American and Scandinavian Lutherans had joined in a major joint effort to provide material and spiritual relief to churches in the war-torn countries including those within the Soviet sphere of interest. The postwar relief activity initiated in 1945 became the largest operational program of the LWF at its founding in 1947. The country receiving the largest portion of refugee and reconstruction assistance through the LWF was Germany, in which the number of refugees and displaced persons reached by 1948 a total of approximately 13 to 15 million. The guidelines of the program were founded on the principle that services were to be provided on the basis of local human need, both material and spiritual, without regard to the prevailing religion, race or political convictions of the recipients. The service program emerged at that time as the most visible part of the LWF actions that crossed boundaries set by the Cold War.

The Lund Assembly's experience of the oneness of the church had added momentum to the service of people, nations and churches separated from one another. Additional financial support, especially from American churches, to the already initiated relief actions provided increased encouragement. A collective spread of confidence in the effectiveness of the new international Lutheran community to serve the mission of the church by word and deed and to cross political boundaries characterized the beginnings of the LWF.

In the case of Hungary, which at the end of the war found itself within the Soviet sphere of interest, the ecumenical relief programs were prepared separately for each receiving Hungarian church. The largest church in Hungary was the Roman Catholic Church which had an estimated six million members and which at that time was fully outside the ecumenical network of churches. The next largest church was the Reformed Church which had around two million members, and the third largest was the Lutheran Church with an estimated 500,000 members. The leaders of the WCC and the LWF in Geneva agreed that the newly formed refugee and relief department of the WCC should assume main responsibility for international church assistance to the Reformed Church as well as to the few smaller Hungarian church communities, while the LWF under the leadership of Sylvester Michelfelder was to assume responsibility for the aid programs for the Lutheran Church.<sup>57</sup>

The concern for Hungary and its Lutherans had been placed on the agenda of the young LWF during the first round of joint postwar relief and reconstruction programs launched in the USA and the Nordic countries of Europe. The church in Hungary needed special attention because of the vulnerability of the country in its postwar setting and also because of the spiritual vigor of its leaders in their hard-pressed situation. The necessity of a fast relief action to Hungary was obvious to the LWF leaders.

The attention given to Bishop Ordass as an unbending church leader had inspired support to his church and facilitated effective fund-raising actions within the Ameri-

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<sup>57</sup> The WCC existed before its formal founding in 1948 as an organization "in the process of formation". It had programs and offices for inter-church aid and for refugee work from the end of the war. Sylvester Michelfelder served as a joint staff member of both the WCC and the LWF during their preparatory period, in effect until the 1948, and in close contact with the leading WCC staff until his death at the end of 1951.

can and Scandinavian churches. During 1945–1947 the scope of the international assistance to the Lutheran Church grew rapidly, thanks both to Bishop Ordass's personal contacts with American and Nordic church leaders and to Michelfelder's enthusiastic support of Ordass and his church.

The Hungarian experience in 1948, after the arrest and imprisonment of Bishop Ordass, quickly brought the LWF face to face with concrete realities. Instead of Ordass, the harsh measures of the hard-line communist rule now turned to direct the new leadership of the Lutheran Church, persons whom the radical authorities found to be a lesser nuisance than the stubborn, imprisoned man. The international community that supported Ordass through the LWF and the Lutheran church leaders in the U.S. were fearful that the continuation of their international financial support to the Lutheran Church in Hungary would be interpreted as a sign of approval of the deposition of Ordass. Ultimately, the donors feared that the foreign grants would end up strengthening the credibility of the revolutionary government and that the funds intended to support the life of the Lutheran Church of Hungary would be used for governmental purposes. Consequently, the flow of funds from American churches for the support of Lutherans in Hungary was blocked.

The situation also posed qualitatively new demands on the self-understanding of the LWF and particularly on the functions of its Geneva office. It became a sharp test of the LWF's nature as a community of churches. Immediate questions that arose for the LWF included: What should be decided about the large-scale financial assistance that had been planned together with the now imprisoned Ordass? Would the continuation of international financial support to the Lutheran Church in Hungary be seen as a closing of eyes by the LWF and the international Christian community to the illegitimacy of the actions of the new regime in Hungary? What should and could the LWF do to support the life and witness of a church that had run into visible conflict with the government of its country? Would the control of the Lutheran Church in Hungary by Hungarian authorities lead the LWF to exclude the Hungarian church from the Lutheran world community? Consequently, the American leaders of the LWF supported the boycott and the Nordic churches concurred with the Americans. Some individuals in these churches, however, did express doubts about the wisdom of the blockage.

For a while the episode caused a certain amount of tension between the leaders of the WCC aid operations and the LWF with its American general secretary concerning the proportion of the promised financial aid to the Lutheran Church in Hungary in relation to the total amount of funds available for relief in all the war-torn countries of Europe. The situation was further complicated by the fact that LWF representatives received no entry visas to Hungary, while the staff of the WCC had open doors. Also, the Reformed Church had been the first church voluntarily to sign the Concordat with the government on church-state relations and no questions were raised by the WCC. On the other hand, the Hungarian government did not resort to drastic measures to change Reformed Church leadership as it had in its treatment of Bishop Ordass.

Despite such tensions, quiet cooperation between the LWF and the WCC continued without publicity. Part of the relief aid intended for the Reformed Church was re-channelled in accord with the wishes of the Hungarian Reformed leaders to Lutheran congregations and to individual members of the Lutheran Church. Furthermore, individual members of the supporting churches in Sweden and in the USA sent gift packages of food and other necessities for church work via selected individuals in Hungary. It is noteworthy that previously declared policies concerning the oneness

of faith and the oneness of the church were quietly bypassed within the LWF when previously taken theological and ethical positions proved cumbersome in a politically divided setting.<sup>58</sup>

While the position of Stalinist-Marxism was not a surprise to church leaders in Hungary, to Michelfelder and his staff it was in its bluntness a shock. The situation required the LWF to prepare a rapid yet carefully considered and internationally valid official response. The shock came at a moment when the only recently established LWF was burdened to its limits by building its world-wide organization and by launching the international programs approved by the Lund Assembly. The Geneva office was not well prepared for such additional responsibilities. The predominantly American staff members had been recruited with postwar functions of the Geneva office in mind rather than problems caused to member churches by political turmoil.

Sylvester Michelfelder, the executive secretary of the LWF, emerged in this situation as an unquestioned leader in formulating the role of the LWF in relation to the actions of the Hungarian governmental authorities regarding the Lutheran Church, such as the imprisonment of her leading bishop.

The first step of the Geneva office was to obtain accurate information about the legal basis of the charges against Ordass. The reply received from Hungarian authorities blamed Ordass for failing to provide a proper report of the use of funds granted by U.S. donors, for personal misuse of funds granted to the Lutheran Church in Hungary, and for involvement in fundraising for his private interests. The charges were based on the knowledge of his activities during his tour in Europe and North America in February-June 1947. This information was immediately cabled by the LWF office to the church offices in the USA and Sweden with a request for an audited bank report on donations, contributions, and transfers and also of the bank channels used in the USA, Sweden and Hungary. A similar report was requested from the bank in Budapest which had handled the funds received by the Lutheran church. The bank reports received provided unchallengeable testimony to the Hungarian court of the faultless handling of the foreign contributions and of the innocence of Ordass.

The Hungarian court refused to withdraw its malicious prosecution. The sentence of Ordass was, however, reduced to two years in prison, withdrawal of civil rights for five years, and a fine, in contrast to the ten-year prison sentence initially demanded by the prosecutor.

Refugee relief and reconstruction aid, material and spiritual, directed across boundaries to war-torn churches and societies in Europe, was the most substantive and far-reaching response of the LWF to the deepening division of Europe during the initial phase of the Cold War. In the case of Hungary, however, this function came

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<sup>58</sup> Michelfelder expressed, in an earlier report, an uncompromising conviction about the position of the church when confronted by an ideological division such as the East-West conflict. He was reacting in that report to proposals discussed in preparatory consultations of the WCC, according to which the church and the ecumenical movement should find "a third way" between capitalism and Marxism, thereby avoiding becoming an instrument of political ideology. Michelfelder held that the search for such a third way was nonsense. According to him, there is only one faith and one church; they are the same in the East and in the West. This statement proved crucial at the time, when the connections between churches in socialist countries and in the capitalistic West began to open. The task of the LWF was then seen to be to accept the churches on both sides as part of the one church and to serve them in mutual strengthening of the one Faith. This task is different from trying to build up a political ideology and system that offers a third way. Thus the LWF refused to become an instrument of any anti-ideology or to offer as a "third way" another political system. It seems that Michelfelder ignored or had forgotten his earlier statement when the church was faced by the temptations of two differing ideologies.

to a halt when the LWF placed the Hungarian Lutheran Church under a boycott that covered virtually all relief assistance. In 1949, under Michelfelder, the financial assistance to the church through the LWF was almost totally frozen, in contrast to the assistance raised earlier during 1948 and also in contrast to the assistance of the WCC to the Hungarian Reformed Church. Some efforts were, however, provided to support those who were known to be Ordass' supporters, e.g. through bilateral channels from Sweden and Denmark.

As a result, the church came into an increasing isolation from her sister churches. The boycott also reduced further the autonomy of the Lutheran Church, which had already been damaged by government interference in the elections of bishops and lay leaders of the church.

In April 1949 in Paris Stewart Herman of the LWF staff met Bishop Lajos Vetö who was attending a communist-inspired peace conference. He learned from Vetö that the Hungarian authorities were still considering possibilities for releasing Ordass provided that he would agree to retire from the bishop's office. Ordass had already once turned down such a proposal when conveyed to him by Bishop Túróczy.

Now, government representatives, while hinting at a proper pension for Ordass, had asked Bishop Vetö to serve as a mediator and to sound out the views of LWF leaders concerning such an act. Vetö on his part expressed to Herman his own interest in a normalization of the relationship between the LWF and the Hungarian church. He was aware that such a normalization was impossible as long as Ordass remained in the bishop's office. Herman's reply to Vetö was totally negative. He told Vetö that the pensioning of Ordass would be considered a "betrayal" of Ordass by the Hungarian church. Herman referred to Ordass as "an outstanding symbol of Christian courage" and that "no one [among LWF member churches] believed any of the charges that had been held against him".

This discussion confirmed to Herman the impression that the new leaders of the Hungarian church were anxious to end the deadlock in its relationship with the LWF, which had deepened since the signing with the government of the Concordat on church-state relationship in December 1948. The Lutheran Church also badly needed the financial assistance promised to her by the LWF, but which had been blocked by the LWF and by American Lutherans because of Ordass' imprisonment.<sup>59</sup>

In July 1949, shortly before the Oxford meeting of the LWF executive committee, Bishop Vetö and the general inspector of the Lutheran Church of Hungary, Iván Reök, appeared in Geneva. They met briefly with Michelfelder, who was about to leave for England, and then had lengthy discussions with Stewart Herman. The visiting Hungarians told Herman that after their return to Budapest they were scheduled to visit Ordass in prison and to suggest that he "voluntarily accept a pension and abdicate his office." Herman had replied to their plan "in strongest words...that they should in no sense give Ordass or anybody else the impression that they had received any encouragement from us [the LWF office]".<sup>60</sup>

The next public reaction of the LWF was the issuing of the following statement adopted by the LWF executive committee at its meeting in Oxford 1949 and circulated to international media:

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<sup>59</sup> Report of Stewart Herman, Head of the Resettlement Division within the LWF Refugee Service, of April 30, 1949 to the Executive Secretary of the LWF, Sylvester Michelfelder. LWF Archives.

<sup>60</sup> Memorandum sent by Herman to Michelfelder July 12, 1949.

*The Executive Committee of the Lutheran World Federation is meeting under a deep shadow of sadness because of the unjust trials and afflictions which our honored vice-president, Bishop Lajos Ordass of Budapest, Hungary, has suffered since this Committee met last year. In spite of the inquiry and remonstrance which we addressed to the government of this nation in September, 1948, Bishop Ordass was convicted on fraudulent charges two months later. We know that his sole offense was that he served God rather than man. He refused to yield to demands that would have weakened the Church, particularly by lessening Christian influence on the minds of the young. We have a thorough knowledge of the case of Bishop Ordass and we testify to our complete confidence in his integrity. The Lutheran Churches of the world remember this heroic Christian with affection and in constant prayer.*

After the Oxford meeting Michelfelder wrote to the Presiding Bishop, József Szabó, about the resolution concerning Ordass' imprisonment and included in the letter the conditions for LWF aid to the Lutheran Church in Hungary:

- a. There must be an accounting of the use to which all the dollars were put.
- b. There must be official approval of the government that the church may ask and receive subsidy in dollars from the Lutheran Churches of the U.S.A.
- c. In making requests after the above conditions are fulfilled there must be detailed information as to the purpose for which these new funds are to be used and why they are necessary.
- d. Permission must be given for an official visit of American committee representing the Lutheran Churches of the U.S.A. to confer with the leaders of the Lutheran Church of Hungary.<sup>61</sup>

The dependence of the LWF in matters of financial aid to the National Lutheran Council of the USA was made plain in this message to Hungary.

Following the Oxford meeting Michelfelder and his associate, pastor Martin Dietrich intended to travel to Hungary, but the Hungarian authorities did not grant them an entry visa.

In response to the obvious freeze between the LWF and the Hungarian government and church authorities, Michelfelder prepared for the executive committee meeting to be held in 1950 in Tutzing, Germany a further statement with sharpened criticism of the Hungarian government and of the leaders of the Lutheran Church in Hungary. The executive committee, however, felt that this first draft of such a statement would further endanger the work of the Lutheran Church in Hungary and finally agreed on a new statement drafted by three members of the committee:

*Since last year's meeting of the Executive Committee of the Lutheran World Federation, its esteemed Vice-President, Bishop L. Ordass has been released from prison but at the same time he has been dismissed from his office as bishop. The Committee is deeply moved at all that has befallen him and in particular the circumstances of his dismissal*

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<sup>61</sup> Michelfelder to Szabó, August 5, 1949.

*from office, and it expresses to him its unbroken confidence and sincere sympathy. We are grateful to him for the faithfulness with which he has served the Lutheran Church and we shall not cease, in common with all our brethren, to remember him and his church before God in prayer.*<sup>62</sup>

With this statement the LWF refrained from criticizing the Hungarian government and the new leaders of the church while affirming the solidarity of the Federation with its vice-president Lajos Ordass. Michelfelder considered the rejection of his first proposed statement to be a sign of the executive committee's lack of confidence in him, although the committee expressed its continued approval of his leadership.<sup>63</sup>

In succeeding years, further statements followed. It was apparent that these statements had little effect on events in Hungary, although they did make the events widely known to LWF member churches, the ecumenical movement, and to wider segments of the public through the Western media.

During the years 1948–1950 there was practically no direct communication between the LWF and either the leaders of the church or with the Hungarian authorities, apart from events surrounding the actual arrest and sentencing of Ordass. The state authorities were hidden to the LWF by a seemingly impenetrable wall during the whole Stalinist era. Even the formation of the State Office for Religious Affairs in 1951 changed the situation only marginally.<sup>64</sup>

Additionally, official communication between the church leaders and the government in Hungary became increasingly difficult because Ordass remained the center of concern for the LWF and because most LWF assistance for the reconstruction of church life had been discontinued. Bishops Lajos Vetö and László Dezséry made several unsuccessful efforts to reopen communication with Michelfelder and his colleagues. Further, strict communist government control of both exit and entry visas added to the difficulties of arranging meetings between Hungarian church leaders and the LWF office in Geneva. The lack of an active response by the LWF to the complicated situation of the Lutheran Church and the freezing of international aid generated among local congregations a sense of disappointment at the role of the LWF, especially in congregations which LWF staff had visited to estimate the reconstruction needs.

In spite of the deadlock of official links neither the Hungarian church nor the LWF were ignorant of events and concerns of each other. A variety of channels of information, such as media and personal contacts between relatives and friends in and outside Hungary, helped to prevent total isolation.

Press reports and articles published in Hungary provided one view regarding the positions and actions of the new leadership of the Lutheran Church in Hungary. Some of these were quoted or commented on in the LWF Information Service. They included several papers by Dezséry and Vetö from 1948–1952. The LWF on its side produced numerous articles and official reports which it circulated to member churches. Hungary became a major point of interest for the LWF Information Services and also for the Ecumenical Press Service of the WCC especially at the most critical turning points.

The earlier proposal by Ordass concerning the appointment of the Hungarian del-

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<sup>62</sup> Report of the LWF Executive Committee meeting at Tutzing 1950.

<sup>63</sup> Michelfelder to Abdel Ross Wentz, June 20, 1951, ALWF/ES/III.1.Hungary, Malkavaara, pp. 387–389.

<sup>64</sup> The first head of the State Office for Religious Affairs was István Kossa. He was succeeded by János Horváth.

legates to the 1947 LWF Assembly in Lund proved helpful. He had suggested that the official delegation of the Lutheran Church in Hungary should include only two persons who resided at that time in Hungary. He foresaw that the three others, who were well recognized in the Hungarian church through their personal ties to Hungary and through their family, friends and former colleagues, would be needed by the church for the flow of informal communication between the inner circles of the Hungarian church and the LWF. An exception to the rules for the appointment of delegates to LWF assemblies was quietly approved by the LWF office in order to prevent further isolation of the church from her international partners and the outside world. This is how the three non-resident delegates, Vilmos Vajta, George (György) Pósfay, and Antoine Radvánsky, became key advisors to Michelfelder on Hungary for many years.<sup>65</sup>

Another source of information on Hungarian church life were the participants from LWF member churches in the international peace conferences fostered by the Soviet Union. Churches of the eastern bloc countries including the Hungarian churches participated in them regularly. They made possible informal discussion between church leaders and representatives in the context of the socialist countries of Eastern Europe. Some participants or observers from LWF member churches outside the Eastern bloc also participated in them, often on their personal initiative. These conferences inspired East European theologians and church leaders led by Professor Josef Hromádka of Czechoslovakia to establish the Christian Peace Conference in 1958. The Soviet sponsored peace movement turned into another source of valuable information on the church situation in Marxist controlled countries. The images of the life of churches, provided by LWF related participants in this endeavor differed markedly from the prevalent politically controlled Western images of “communist dominated churches” and from the Eastern images of “reactionary Lutheranism” and of “an American dominated anti-communist LWF.”<sup>66</sup>

During the deepening crisis of LWF-Hungary relations, the LWF officers and the Geneva staff received important news reports and in-depth analyses of the political and church situation in Hungary from LWF sister organizations involved in Hungary, such as the WCC, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), and the United Bible Society. All of these organizations dealt with the impact of the Cold War on Hungary from their specific vantage points and from within their own tradition. At critical moments their often differing findings broadened the perspective of LWF officials. These mostly informal meetings on the common ecumenical campus of the WCC at Rue de Malagnou, Geneva, had a significant influence on the thinking and

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<sup>65</sup> The delegates who resided in Hungary were the Presiding Bishop, Lajos Ordass and the Dean of the Theological Faculty in Sopron, Lajos Janossy. The three others, as indicated, were George Pósfay, Vilmos Vajta and Antoine Radvánsky. Radvánsky was a nephew of Albert Radvánsky, the General Inspector of the Lutheran Church who in 1948 was arrested in the company of Ordass and Sándor Vargha, the General Secretary of the church. The younger Radvánsky had served during the war as the Lutheran secretary of the Ecumenical Council of Hungary and left in 1945 as a refugee to Switzerland. He worked as a journalist, first in Geneva and later in Paris. In his Geneva years he became one of the most active links for inside information between Ordass and the Lutheran and ecumenical organizations in Geneva. Both Pósfay and Vajta served the LWF in staff capacities over several decades. Through their family contacts in Hungary they were able to broaden the flow of informal inside information on church life to international forums. Malkavaara 1993, Terray 1997.

<sup>66</sup> Report letters from Stewart Herman of April 26 and July 12 and from Albert Grenier of the Lutheran Church of France of December 21, 1951 to Michelfelder and an article by Arne Sörensen of March 28, 1951 (translation in Geneva April 12, 1951) in *Vensterbladet*, Denmark.

behaviour of the LWF team as it coped with the political and theological concerns activated by the tightening of the Iron Curtain. It is evident that some policy shifts of the LWF during the Stalinist era had their roots in these ecumenical discussions.

Mounting issues encountered by LWF work with member churches in Eastern Europe and by wider trends necessitated the establishing of a staff position to serve Lutheran minority churches in Europe. The office of the Secretary for Lutheran Minority Churches in Europe, later the Europe Secretary, came to be key to the development of the role of the LWF in relation to East Europe and to the USSR through the rest of the Cold War era. The first person invited to this position was Igor Bella (1949–1955) from the Slovak Lutheran Church in the USA.<sup>67</sup> His joining the LWF Geneva staff did not change the overall orientation of the Federation because he shared Michelfelder's overall views on the threat of communism to the churches of Eastern Europe and also because the short time he had as a member of Michelfelder's Geneva team allowed him to bring his most recent experience with the churches of the region into the joint work plan of the Geneva team of the LWF role in Eastern Europe.

Sylvester Michelfelder died unexpectedly of a heart attack during a visit to the U.S. on December 30, 1951. His recently appointed associate, Carl E. Lund-Quist, was promptly appointed as the executive secretary of the LWF, first as an interim until the forthcoming assembly in Hannover, and then by the new executive committee for the next five-year term.<sup>68</sup> (The title "executive secretary" was changed to "general secretary" at the time of the LWF Assembly in Helsinki, 1963.) After the loss of Michelfelder, a sparkingly dynamic leader, Lund-Quist did not want to precipitously prepare changes to the LWF policies in general, even less in relation to the Lutheran Church in Hungary. The preparation of the forthcoming assembly continued. Michelfelder's intention to make the conflict between the LWF and the Hungarian government and church a major issue was, however, rejected by the executive committee at a 1960 meeting in Tutzing, West Germany. Lund-Quist was apparently content with the calming down of the conflict and was not keen to re-open a public confrontation regarding the dismissal of Lajos Ordass with the Hungarian government and the new church leaders.

In the inner circles of the LWF another controversial question was raised concerning the forthcoming 1952 assembly. The heart of the matter was whether the new government supported leaders of the Lutheran Church in Hungary would be the only representatives of the church at Hannover. Ordass' absence from Hannover at the end of his term as vice-president of the LWF was regarded a closed case. Michelfelder, before his untimely death, had wanted to discuss with his advisers the possibility of not inviting the Lutheran Church of Hungary to participate in the 1952 assembly. He was anxious to clarify the consequences of such an action, including the possibility

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<sup>67</sup> Igor Bella was a former President of the Slovak Lutheran Church Zion Synod in the USA. He had served from 1947 as a resident LWF field representative in Czechoslovakia, a position from which he was expelled in 1949 by the communist authorities. He was succeeded by Mogens Zeuthen from Denmark (1955–1957), Paul Hansen from Denmark (1959–1980), Sam Dahlgren from Sweden (1980–1987), and Tibor Görög from Hungary (1988–1997). In 1970 this position was given the title Europe Secretary of the LWF.

<sup>68</sup> Carl Lund-Quist, born 1908 in the USA, was ordained in 1936 by the Augustana Lutheran Church. Before joining the LWF as assistant to the executive secretary in 1951, he had served as pastor of the Concordia Lutheran Church in Chicago, as campus pastor at the University of Minnesota and assistant executive director of the National Lutheran Council of the USA. He held several leadership positions related to mission and Christian unity, including in the YMCA and WSCF. He served as the executive secretary of the LWF from 1951 till 1960. He died in 1965.



of the end of the membership of the Lutheran Church of Hungary in the LWF. He consulted widely both with church leaders and with in-house advisers regarding the situation. When the responses to his soundings indicated that these actions were not in line with the nature and the constitution of the LWF, he readily concurred. The LWF had to treat the church in Hungary as well as in other socialist countries according to the same rules that applied to all member churches.

After this decision, some of Michelfelder's closest Hungarian advisers suggested that he and the officers of the LWF were free to invite to the assembly "consultants without vote" on the basis of their expertise on specific topics. Michelfelder was open to the idea if it would make possible the presence of some members of the Hungarian church who were close to Ordass. He even asked Vilmos Vajta to prepare a list of potential consultants from Hungary who would ensure some political balance to the representation of the Hungarian church at the assembly. This plan was apparently not implemented.

The end result was that the delegation of the Lutheran Church in Hungary consisted of the delegates appointed by the new leaders of the church. The leading figures were Bishops Lajos Vetö and László Dezséry. No consultants from Hungary were present. The assembly was almost totally quiet in its proceedings about Hungary and its bitter church/state conflict – in striking contrast to the wide publicity given to the conflict by the LWF Executive Committee and by church and secular media in 1948–1951. The most direct reference to Bishop Lajos Ordass was made at the Hannover Assembly by Bishop Hanns Lilje, who began his sermon at the opening service of the assembly with the following words:

*First of all, our thoughts turn to those of our brethren who cannot be present in our midst, whom we would love to welcome here and who would be glad to be here. It would not be right if we did not first of all remember them in this moment, without a trace of hate and without fear of the powers of this world, but simply as members of a fellowship which no power on earth can disrupt.<sup>69</sup>*

The impressive assembly in Hannover, with much public attention and, yet, with harshly restricted attendance from Eastern Europe, left the Lutheran Church in Hungary in isolation from the worldwide community of Lutheran churches and largely from the Ecumenical Movement until 1955–1956.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Hannover Report, p. 168.

<sup>70</sup> Delegations from Eastern Europe came only from the Soviet occupied zones of Germany and from Hungary and one delegate from one of the four listed member churches in Yugoslavia. Czechoslovakia and Poland appeared on the list void of delegates. Under Estonia and Latvia delegates represented their Exile Churches based in Sweden, Germany, and the USA. List of Delegates, Hannover Report, pp.179–183.

## CHAPTER FIVE

# THE 1956 UPRISING IN HUNGARY – THE LUTHERAN CHURCH IN POLITICAL CROSSCURRENTS

### 5.1. DEVELOPMENTS IN EUROPE AFTER STALIN'S DEATH

In the years of the initial occupation of Hungary and the imposition of Soviet control on the whole country, numerous unrelated signs of opposition to the introduction of Soviet patterns of society appeared. Many of the assumed opposition leaders became targets of enforced silencing. The most visible, although still uncoordinated, efforts to silence any opposition were aimed at leaders of the indigenous Hungarian socialists many of whom had had their initial training in the Soviet Union.

A major shift in the political climate in much of Eastern Europe came after the death of Joseph Stalin on March 5, 1953. A short period of thawing took place in Hungary. The Kremlin introduced the so called "New Course" featuring, for example, a lessening of repressive measures against the people and an easing of pressure on industrial and farming production. This reform was first introduced in Hungary under the leadership of Imre Nagy, who in 1953 was selected by Moscow as the country's new prime minister.

The Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union (CPSU) in February 1956 was the starting point for many fundamental changes, even for de-Stalinization, which took different forms in each country of Eastern Europe. In this congress Nikita Krushchev delivered his famous "Secret Speech" in which he denounced Joseph Stalin for the latter's purges during the 1930s and for his development of a cult of personality.

From 1953 to 1956 unrest and demonstrations occurred in several countries belonging to the Soviet sphere of interest. The most notable of them were first in East Germany (GDR), then in Poland and then the uprising in Hungary, which most dramatically drew the attention of the LWF.

The main thrust of the protests was a demand to get rid of the ideological and military control by the Soviet Union and a desire to develop native patterns of socialist society. Each of these countries expressed the desire to remain socialist while rejecting authoritarian Soviet control and strict military alliances with the Soviet Union. Several of the protest leaders had had substantive political training within the USSR, and, subsequently, were closely linked to the Kremlin.

In Poznan, Poland, an armed uprising of industrial workers on June 28, 1956 was followed by mass demonstrations initially centering on demands regarding the economy and then turning into anti-communist uprisings. People called more openly for reform and change. The election of Władysław Gomułka as first secretary, not negotiated with Moscow, was a victory for the reformists in the Polish party. The ferment of the reformists' movement was a serious threat to the Soviet leadership who feared that the whole communist system would collapse with its spread. A peaceful solution was, however, found and Poles expressed their support of Gomułka in mass rallies and demonstrations.

The obligatory visa system, which had almost totally closed the East European

countries from each other, was partially abolished in the summer of 1956 and tourism between the countries was promoted. Freer contacts and direct communication played important roles in the revolutionary events of the following fall.

## 5.2. THE UPRISING IN HUNGARY

The ups and downs in the leadership of Hungary after WW II were dictated by Moscow. The Stalinist Matyas Rákosi was favored from 1944 to 1953. Between 1953 and 1955 the anti-Stalinist Imre Nagy was preferred as head of the state while Rákosi was allowed to remain head of the Communist Party. In 1955 Rákosi returned as prime minister but was ousted in mid-July of 1956. At that point Ernő Gerő, the Communist Party's second in authority, was raised to power.

In the fall of 1953 Prime Minister Imre Nagy announced a reform program aimed at raising living conditions, a program in line with the Kremlin's New Course. But after Nagy was ousted in April 1955 and Rákosi was back in power, a re-freeze started. While Rákosi could not ignore all the reforms started by Nagy, he was responsible for increasing the repression and intimidation of the Hungarian people which in turn increased the support of Nagy among Hungarians. The situation in the country remained tense even after Rákosi was replaced by Gerő, as the party leaders were not willing to make concessions.

A silent demonstration took place in early October 1956 during the re-burial of László Rajk, the former leader of the Communist Party and foreign minister. Rajk had been executed after a show trial in 1949 as a "Titoist," as were a number of other prominent politicians in the Soviet satellites during the years 1949 to 1955. The demonstration was followed by a mass rally of university students which first took place in Szeged on October 16 and then in Budapest on October 22. The students in Budapest formulated sixteen points of demands, which included demands for national independence, withdrawal of Russian troops from Hungary, free elections, and the return of Imre Nagy to power. On October 23, 1956 the students in Budapest started a peaceful demonstration to show support to Polish reformers who a few days earlier had protested against the Soviet presence. Thousands of workers dissatisfied, among other things, with food shortages joined the student demonstrators during their march through Budapest. The number of demonstrators was estimated at 300,000.

As the situation escalated, the president of the Communist Party, Ernő Gerő, and the president of the Ministers' Council, András Hegedüs, decided to call on the Soviet army, then present in Hungary, for aid. Two divisions arrived in Budapest on the morning of October 24. As shots were directed into the crowd, the demonstrators answered by attacking the Soviet tanks with Molotov cocktails. Many Hungarian soldiers and sometimes entire units of the army joined the demonstrators. For five days battles raged in Budapest and provincial towns.

The Party's only choice was to call back Imre Nagy who accepted and formed a new cabinet on the morning of October 24, the same day the Russian tanks rolled into Budapest. On October 28, Nagy declared a unilateral cease-fire and promised among other things to abandon the one-party policy and to abolish the secret police, the AVH. The fighting stopped immediately. On November 1, Nagy in a proclamation of neutrality announced that Hungary would withdraw from the Warsaw Pact. The insurgents, however, demanded guarantees of the promised improvements.

Two members of the Soviet Communist Party Presidium, Mikhail Suslov and An-

astas Mikoyan, visited Budapest between October 27 and 30 and placed the decisions of the Hungarians under sanction. The illusion of being free was experienced by the Hungarians from October 28 to November 4.

Differing views, even confusion, prevailed in the Kremlin: the key question was to negotiate or not. The Soviets initially promised to withdraw their troops from Hungary, but the visit of a Chinese delegation to Moscow contributed to the confusion. Finally, fear of Hungary's withdrawal from the communist camp led to the final massive military intervention on November 4 by the Soviets. The Hungarian resistance to the intervention continued for several weeks, with periods of intense street fighting.

The Western powers did not respond to the appeals from Hungary for military intervention, obviously for fear of a new war. This was a signal to the Soviet Union that the Western powers accepted the status quo between Eastern and Western Europe. The LWF also appealed for Western aid: on November 5, the President of the LWF, Bishop Hanns Lilje of Hannover, Germany, telegraphed Dwight Eisenhower, the President of the United States, begging him to "help restore peace."

After the uprising, Soviet support was switched to János Kádár who had been a member of the Communist Party Presidium, established in late October 1956 during the Nagy regime. On November 2 Kádár was invited with other party members to Moscow, where he soon accepted the Kremlin's planned intervention in Hungary.

Kádár remained in power until 1988. The first seven years of his regime were a time of repression. It is estimated that more than 300 executions and 16,000 convictions took place, among them the trial and execution of Imre Nagy in 1958. Many associations were dissolved and their leaders arrested. The period of repression was closed by a general amnesty in 1963.

One of the main achievements of Kádár's regime was the development of the "new economic mechanism" which came into force in 1968 and continued until 1972 when the left-wing opposition of the party slowed down the process. The aim of the new economic mechanism was to develop a profitable and competitive economy. It included elements typical of the so-called free economy. Despite many obstacles, its implementation led to an increase in food and consumer goods production as well as free enterprise. Thereby the living standard in Hungary rose higher than in most East European countries.

János Kádár proved a skillful leader who was able to win the support both of ordinary people and the Kremlin. Opinions of him, nevertheless, were varied. Some of the supporters of the uprising considered him as a traitor to revolution, e.g. in respect with his role in the deposition and ultimately the execution of Imre Nagy.

### **5.3. THE IMPACT OF THE UPRISING ON THE LUTHERAN CHURCH IN HUNGARY**

The new constitution, which had been proclaimed in 1949 marking the start of the "people's republic" in Hungary, also involved new requirements for the churches. In 1951, a governmental church administration, the State Office for Religious Affairs, was instituted to control the life and activities of the churches.

The synod of the Lutheran Church was summoned in 1952, with one of its main tasks to issue new church laws which would be better in line with the new political orientation of the Hungarian government. The synod also decided to restructure the church's four dioceses into two: a northern and a southern district. As a consequence,

two bishops, Zoltán Túróczy and József Szabó, had to resign, and László Dezséry and Lajos Vető assumed their responsibilities. It was also decided to reduce the age limit of pastors to sixty, which meant that a majority of the leadership in the church was changed. The changes aimed at strengthening the loyalty of the church towards the state and brought in a new generation of pastors.

The same year, there was an incident between the Lutheran Church in Hungary and the Lutheran World Federation. The LWF's second assembly was to be in Hannover, Germany, and Lajos Ordass had been invited to the assembly as the vice-president of the LWF and as a candidate for a second term. However, the two bishops, Vető and Dezséry, requested him to refuse the candidacy, indicating that it would be unfortunate for both Hungary and Ordass himself since he was seen as a person linking the life of the Lutheran Church to the service of Western political interests. They also blamed Ordass for causing the halt in the aid of the Western churches to Hungarian churches. Ordass refused to follow the advice of Vető and Dezséry. He was, however, denied an exit permit and could not participate in the assembly, which nevertheless elected him for a second term as vice-president.

In the early fifties, the diaconic work and teaching of religion at schools also became targets for governmental control and restrictions. Diaconic institutions, e.g. homes for the elderly and handicapped, were either closed or taken over by the government for other purposes. The agreement of 1948 between the government and the church required that the compulsory teaching of religion was to continue in all schools. In less than a year, however, a new law was passed making the study of religion elective. As a consequence, the number of students enrolled for religious instruction dropped to fifty in Budapest where the number of Lutherans was approximately 60,000.

The year 1956 once again saw a short period of thaw for the Hungarian churches. In July, the Roman Catholic Archbishop Grösz and the Lutheran Bishop Ordass were released from prison and Cardinal Mindszenty was transferred from prison to house arrest. On October 5 the Supreme Court of Hungary annulled the verdict on Ordass, after which the regular Disciplinary Court of the Lutheran Church followed suit, acquitting Ordass on all counts. On October 30 László Dezséry, who had been appointed bishop of the southern district in 1950 after the arrest of Ordass, submitted his resignation and Lajos Ordass, who had originally been legitimately elected for this position, resumed his office.

The Central Committee of the World Council of Churches met in Hungary in August 1956. In connection with this meeting, Willem Visser't Hooft, the general secretary of the WCC, Franklin C. Fry, president of the United Lutheran Church in America, Bishop Hanns Lilje, president of the LWF, and Carl Lund-Quist, the general secretary of LWF and representatives of the Hungarian State Office for Church Affairs met in order to discuss the status of Lajos Ordass.

On October 14, 1956 Ordass preached his first public sermon in eight years. Two weeks later, on October 31, he preached in the large Deák-tér church in Budapest, the "cathedral" of the Lutheran Church in Hungary. The church was filled to capacity even though public transportation was shut down due to a strike. For those who expected a political message for the people in the midst of national turmoil, the sermon was a disappointment. His topic was "Forgiveness Gives Life – Hatred Kills," based on Matthew 18, the text of the day; it was Reformation Day, one of the great festivals of the Protestant churches in Hungary. Ordass concluded his sermon with the words: "Now we need the gospel. God is the God of forgiveness."

Two days later, on November 2, Ordass addressed a wider audience in four languages, Hungarian, German, English and Swedish, with a "greeting" broadcast by

Hungarian radio. In Sweden, his address was broadcast several times during the day. Among other things, Ordass appealed for international solidarity:

*We have many who are wounded and need care and medicine. There is much damage to buildings and personal belongings. In the name of Jesus Christ, come and help us! We want to do our best through our church institutions to help all those in need. May God bless you all.*

This message was noted by international church organizations and partner churches of the Hungarian Lutheran Church in several countries. Within a few days, material aid was sent to Hungary by the Lutheran World Federation and other aid agencies.

Ordass quickly seized the opportunity for starting a series of reforms in the Lutheran Church in Hungary. On November 3, he convened a meeting of pastors and professors of theology to discuss the necessary actions to rebuild the spiritual life of the church and to renew her administration in order better to fulfill her primary task.

Several proposals were made during the meeting, many of which concerned a temporary division of responsibilities within the church. Bishop Türoczy, whom the synod had forced to resign in 1952, was asked to administer the northern diocese. A new editor was chosen for the church paper, *Evangélikus Elét*, and another person was asked to take the position of general secretary for church administration. Further, all senior pastors of congregations who had been elected according to the requirements of "the people's democracy" were requested to resign but were allowed to run for these positions with other candidates in a free election.

To become operative, these decisions needed formal approval by the legal organs of both the church and the State Office for Church Affairs. This was not self-evident since Soviet tanks rolled into Hungary on November 4, the day following the meeting of the leaders of the Lutheran Church. It appeared likely that their decisions would not be implemented; it seemed that hopes for a new era for the church were just illusions. However, to the surprise of many, the State Office for Church Affairs approved the new situation, including the resignations of Dezséry and Vetö. Further, the opening of a new dialogue between Ordass and János Horváth, the director of the State Office for Church Affairs, was another sign of hope for the church.

In practice, the new situation meant independence for the church in choosing its bishops and pastors, reduced control of religious education at schools, freedom for clergy conventions without government control, and the return of the two high schools which Bishop Dezséry had handed over to the government without authorization by the church. Work among the youth started again, and participation in religious instruction rapidly grew from 30% of the students to 80%, in some instances even as high as 100%. Such administrative reforms opened doors for work aimed at spiritual revival in the Lutheran Church.

In the beginning of 1957, a delegation from the Lutheran World Federation visited Hungary, receiving confirmation that the Lutheran Church would be permitted by the government to send delegates to the assembly of the LWF that was to be held in Minneapolis, U.S., in the summer of 1957. Lajos Ordass was to head the delegation. There was some suspicion that there was a hidden agenda behind the Hungarian government's permission, to "help the Communist cause"<sup>71</sup> Some members of the State

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<sup>71</sup>Jean Olson Leshner's archives: clipping of an article of February 16, 1957, in a newspaper remaining unknown.

Office for Church Affairs had mentioned that Bishop Ordass' wide international contacts could be useful for strengthening the international credibility of the Hungarian government. On the other hand, there seems to have been fears in the United States that the presence of delegates from behind the Iron Curtain might cause an "internal security problem".<sup>72</sup>

In spite of several signs of hope and even of a thaw in church-state relationships, a new wave of tension emerged in the first months of 1957. The State Office for Church Affairs again started to restrict independent decision-making by the Hungarian churches.

At the end of March, a legal ordinance was issued by the Presidential Council which called for all nominations for higher offices in the churches to be confirmed by the authorities. This ordinance was declared to be retroactively valid as of October 1, 1956. The director of the State Office for Church Affairs, János Horváth, however, informed Bishop Ordass that this ordinance did not concern the Lutheran Church "since everything was in order there." Despite this, within the next sixteen months, the entire leadership of the church was removed. After that, until the year 1988, all candidacies for the positions of bishops and professors of theology had to be approved by the government. For each position, there could be only one approved candidate, who then was "elected."

In July 1957 the delegation of the Lutheran Church in Hungary, led by Bishop Ordass, travelled to Minneapolis to participate in the LWF Assembly. Two of the original members of the delegation had not been approved by the Hungarian government and substitutions had to be arranged. In Minneapolis, Ordass was elected the first vice-president of the LWF executive committee. He was not, however, permitted to travel to any of the committee's meetings during his 6-year term.

After his return from Minneapolis in September, Ordass discovered that the Lutheran church was facing a number of new problems. He tried to contact the government authorities to discuss the situation, but as this did not succeed, he expressed his concerns in a letter addressed to János Horváth. One of his main points was that the filling of some vacant positions in the Lutheran Church had been made difficult by the government's prohibition of church assemblies.

Another concern of Ordass was the freedom of the church press, from which the government demanded "a higher degree of progress," i.e., a more consistent adherence to the ideology of the communist government. This was the issue in which "there is the deepest opposition between our points of view," Ordass wrote, remarking that politicalization of the church press would raise suspicion in the wider public concerning the freedom of the church.

Further, Ordass raised in his letter the matter of the church's international relations, in which, according to him, there had been some "disturbances," such as a denial of permits for church personnel to travel abroad, or the government's failure to inform the church in advance of a visit by church authorities from East Germany. Last but not least, he mentioned the arrests of church personnel, an extremely delicate topic. When sending his letter in late October 1957, he was aware of the risk of yet another trial.

At the same time as Ordass was writing his letter to Horváth, Carl Lund-Quist, the

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<sup>72</sup>Undated carbon copy of news release regarding a hearing of the U.S. Senate Internal Security Subcommittee, sent to Lund-Quist on July 27, 1957, by Lloyd Svendsbye. This citation was supplied by Jean Olson Leshner who was at the time a member of the LWF staff.

general secretary of the LWF, and the Hungarian Vilmos Vajta, director of the LWF Department of Theology, paid a few days' visit to Hungary. Ordass showed his letter to Vajta, who later translated it into English. In his report on the visit, Vajta commented:

*In this letter Ordass has really put his neck on the guillotine. It is a fearless and open talk where the complete church situation is seen in the context of the tragic situation of the Hungarian nation. Bishop Túróczy is in complete agreement with this letter.*<sup>73</sup>

Within a few weeks Ordass' letter led to discussions with the government officials. To his astonishment the government's delegation included five members belonging to the Lutheran Church. Among them were two former bishops, József Szabó and Lajos Vető, and the former general secretary of the church, Károly Grünwalszky. Ordass was told that the church should accept the reality that it existed in a socialist state and should place its resources at the disposal of the state. The church and its press were accused of having been too passive in this regard.

In a later discussion, Horváth accused Ordass of not mentioning, when interviewed by journalists in the U.S., the positive results achieved by the construction of socialism nor the optimism of the Hungarian people with regard to the future. The church was also ordered to stop connections abroad immediately, since the influence of such contacts, especially with the LWF, was regarded unfavorably by the government.

While the discussions between Ordass and Horváth went on, Bishop Vető and the General Inspector of the Lutheran Church, Ernő Mihályfi were reappointed and the lawfully elected Dezséry had to resign. Horváth told Ordass that even the appointment of pastors in the smallest congregations was of importance for the government. The government's interests are not to be damaged, and "reactionary" pastors are not to be preferred over those who are "progressive." Horváth promised that the government would no longer interfere in the personnel issues of the church as soon as all pastors were "progressive."

The news of the rearrangements in the Lutheran Church of Hungary were received with a shock in the LWF, expressed in a telegram of December 17, 1957, addressed to János Horváth and signed by the LWF president Franklin Clark Fry and general secretary Lund-Quist, stating that

*These congregations must always have the prevailing voice, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, in the choice of their own leadership, or the church, instead of being God's, is on the way of becoming an instrument in the hands of somebody else, in this case the Hungarian state. The Lutheran World Federation strongly protests the recent action of the Government of Hungary as a violation of this basic principle and urgently calls for its reversal.*<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Copy of a confidential report ("diary") by Vilmos Vajta on the visit of Dr. Vajta, Dr. Lund-Quist and Mrs. Vajta to Hungary, November 16–22, 1957 (dated December 2, 1957, p. 6).

<sup>74</sup> Copy of telegram of December 17, 1957, to President János Horváth, signed by Franklin Clark Fry and Carl E. Lund-Quist.



Nevertheless, further attacks against the Lutheran church followed, focusing more and more on the person of Bishop Lajos Ordass. For some reason, however, the authorities were not willing to put him on trial but used more sophisticated methods to have him deposed.

The government attempted to raise distrust against him inside the church, but with little success. It used articles published in the church press, written by Bishop Vetö and Professor of Old Testament, Miklos Pálffy, to influence church opinion. The writers also attacked Ordass and those loyal to him of conspiracy both within Hungary and abroad. They claimed, e.g., that the uprising in 1956 was not spontaneous but prepared by foreigners. Both the LWF and the WCC were accused of interfering with the relationship between the Lutheran Church of Hungary and the Hungarian state. For Ordass, the main question was the safeguarding of the integrity and identity of the church, for which it had always had to fight.

The situation of the Lutheran Church in Hungary was closely followed especially in Scandinavia, and the church leaders of Finland, Denmark, Sweden and Norway sent a joint letter to János Horváth, expressing their concern about the situation:

*It is our hope that the news about such heavy attacks against the spiritual freedom of the church is exaggerated, and we would be very grateful in this case to be informed about it. But if this is not the case we want to express our most serious misgivings.*

Although the letter did not change anything, it was an encouragement for Ordass and a sign of solidarity with sister churches.

Ordass was finally deposed in June 1958, when János Horváth announced that, in fact, the resignation of László Dezséry in October 1956 had not been legal. Dezséry was reinstated – and resigned in two hours. Using the retroactive ordinance of March 1957, the authorities were able to seek a new candidate for the now open position. Only one candidate was approved and nominated as the bishop of the southern district, the senior pastor of Pécs, Zoltán Káldy, who took office on November 4, 1958.

After being deposed, Lajos Ordass lived in retreat for twenty years, but was well remembered by his foreign contacts. In the Lutheran Church of Hungary attitudes towards him were controversial. Some international visitors showed their solidarity towards Ordass by meeting with him – and even tried to keep contacts with the Lutheran Church through him, ignoring Káldy, which the latter found offensive.

For ten years, the state paid no attention to him, until a Finnish student of theology Antti Kukkonen cited Ordass' diary in a book on the Lutheran Church in Hungary. Ordass was called to a conversation with state officials who accused him of damaging the image of Hungary abroad. At a later church convention, he was accused of illicitly giving his notes to a foreigner. In so doing, he had betrayed his country and abused the generosity which the church had showed towards him in providing him a pension.

In his speech at the same meeting Bishop Káldy stated that he was now forced to reject his earlier high esteem of Ordass. He accused Ordass of "insulting and slandering us." After Káldy's speech, pastors were asked "to show their colors," which they did, one by one stating that they could not identify themselves with Ordass and his conduct. In a resolution written after the meeting, Ordass was condemned specifically of releasing his diary abroad.

In spite of being distanced by his own church, Ordass kept his position as vice-president of the LWF until the end of his term. He enjoyed the confidence of the LWF leadership but was not able to carry out the duties of his office. The support by the

LWF was made clear to Káldy as well, which may have further deepened the enmity between the two.

Ordass died in August 1978. After the late 1980s his name was mentioned with reverence on certain solemn occasions, but despite many initiatives he was not rehabilitated by his church until October 1995. One of those who had most actively pursued his rehabilitation was his wife Irén, who died in June 1995, only four months before the decision of the church court.

#### **5.4. THIRTY YEARS AS A CHURCH LEADER – BISHOP KÁLDY ON THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH IN A SOCIALIST SOCIETY**

Zoltan Káldy kept his position as bishop nearly thirty years, until his sudden death on May 17, 1987. In 1967 he became Presiding Bishop of the Lutheran Church in Hungary with his office in Budapest. Káldy held several ecumenical and international positions, the most notable of these being the presidency of the Lutheran World Federation from 1984 until his death, and membership on the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches for two terms beginning in 1963. Like leading bishops of other churches in Hungary, he also had a seat in the Hungarian Parliament.

Káldy's background was in evangelical revivalism, and he did not feel comfortable with high church institutional formalism. He was highly appreciated as an evangelical preacher and had a strong support in the area where he had worked as pastor.

In his installation speech on November 4, 1958, Káldy underlined the significance of the Concordat of 1948 between the Hungarian state and the Lutheran Church and stated the main principles of cooperation between the state and the church in socialist Hungary, principles to which he was personally committed. He interpreted the Concordat to be a safeguard for the church allowing it to act freely on the basis on its own confession, without being forced to submission to another ideology. Káldy emphasized that he and the church were not bound to any social system of the past and that he acknowledged the new Hungarian state authority. He was not prepared to support any efforts to return to the previous social and political order of Hungary. This was the basis for his commitment to develop good relations between the church and the state. He also expressed the view that the events of the uprising in 1956 had been an effort to reestablish the old Habsburgian Hungary.

At the same time, Káldy pointed to the boundaries of the authority of the state. If the state interferes with the proclamation of the church, the church must obey God, not the authorities. He also stated that it is self-evident that the church cannot accept the materialistic ideology of the state, but she can and has to cooperate with the state in matters of public life for the best of the people.

Káldy's theological thinking underwent a decisive change during his early years as bishop. Reconsidering his pietistic background, he came to regard evangelical preaching as sterile, out of date, and reactionary. As an alternative, he started in the sixties to develop a "theology of diakonia" which was to be his hallmark. The main focus in this theology was to promote the gospel through service without exercising power. In time, the theology of diakonia gained wide acceptance among students and professors of theology as well as among pastors throughout the world. The emphasis on diakonia also was given a certain prominence within the international ecumenical movement in which it continues even now to represent a major emphasis.

Governmental control over all the Hungarian churches grew extensively after the uprising. Many restrictions were put in place and authorization by government officials was needed for practically everything, ranging from approval of candidates for positions as pastors to such details as bishops' circular letters to congregations. One of Káldy's first responsibilities was to carry out the dismissal of pastors whom the government had judged unacceptable. This proved most controversial within the church, and evoked the harshest criticisms against Káldy. He was also later blamed both in Hungary and abroad for arbitrarily misusing his authority as the leading bishop.

As bishop, one of Káldy's main emphases was to ensure for his church a proper place in the socialist state – not to conform, but not to be in opposition either. In its essence, the church is a servant of the gospel and as such she is not against the affirmation of socialism. Instead, her calling means to struggle for socialism “with a human face,” i.e., for the exploration of the relationship of the social values of the gospel with those of socialism as a political ideology.

Káldy's policy was successful in contributing to an inner stability within the church, which in comparison with other churches in socialist states, was striking. The freedom of the church also increased during Káldy's period as the leading bishop. It became possible to publish religious books, including a new translation of the Bible and a hymnal as well as biblical commentaries. Another of Káldy's aims was to strengthen the congregations in their spiritual life and their engagement in mission. He aimed at bringing the Lutheran Church in Hungary back to the world map and at strengthening contacts with Lutheran sister churches and the ecumenical movement.

A shift towards greater openness towards its member churches in Eastern Europe took place within the LWF from the late 1950s to the late 1960s. Accordingly, confidence was shown toward Káldy who from 1963 on was elected to a number of important positions in LWF governing bodies, finally becoming president of the Federation at its assembly in Budapest in 1984.

The author of this book met Káldy for the first time in the early 1960s, when working with the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF). Later, as a staff member of the LWF Department of Church Cooperation, the author met Káldy several times, especially in connection with the preparations for the LWF Assembly which was held in Budapest in 1984, and later during Káldy's period as the president of the LWF. In these discussions Káldy made it clear that he did not want to conform to socialism, neither did he want the church to be in total opposition to the government. His concern was how the church could stand on its own ground within a socialist society.

In pre-assembly discussions in which Sam Dahlgren, the LWF secretary for Europe, was also present, the situation of the Lutheran Church in Hungary was discussed. Káldy told the two representatives of the LWF that he had arranged a meeting with Lajos Ordass who, according to Káldy, had indicated that he understood Káldy's situation and position. In Káldy's opinion, problems were caused by the strong ideologies and conflicting opinions of both himself and Ordass, and especially because the group behind Ordass had turned against Káldy.

Another interesting discussion took place in the mid-eighties between the author and Imre Miklós who was then the leader of the State Office for Church Affairs in Hungary, responsible for control over the Hungarian churches. They met in a meeting, arranged by the LWF and the Lutheran Church in Slovakia, aimed at estimating what effects socialism had on churches. Miklós, who had been invited to this meeting, assured the participants that there was no need for church and society to be in opposition. According to Miklós his mission was to legalize the decisions of churches

in a constructive way. He felt that the actions of the Office for Church Affairs needed more careful examination to be properly understood.

There was criticism of Káldy also within the worldwide church. He was accused of compromising – or even of collaborating – with the socialist government and of being too soft with it. In actuality, his intentions were probably to find a way to cope with the government. As a person, Káldy was often misunderstood because of his easily heated temperament which was especially evident in his dealings with those who criticized or opposed him.

In his book *Politik och Kyrka: Lutherska kyrkor i Östeuropa*,<sup>75</sup> Sam Dahlgren has expressed the view that Bishop Káldy was probably the most deeply criticized leader of a Lutheran Church. According to him, Káldy had to live all thirty years of his bishopric in the shadow of Lajos Ordass, who for many was the one and only legal bishop of the Lutheran Church in Hungary. Káldy, however, led the church through the difficult late fifties and sixties, and was able, because of his good relations with the state, to find ways to serve the Hungarian people more freely and broadly than was possible in any other socialist country.

## **5.5. A COUNTRY IN NEED OF HELP – FOREIGN AID AFTER THE UPRISING, LWF’S ROLE**

The conflict in 1956 left Hungary with a plethora of acute needs. It is estimated that at least some 3,000 to 4,000 Hungarians were killed, while some 200,000 people fled the country, mostly to or through Austria. In the aftermath of the uprising approximately 13,000 Hungarians were detained and more than 20,000, or according to some estimates 35,000, were imprisoned. 230 persons were executed – one of them was the one-time prime minister Imre Nagy in June 1958. What the uprising left behind was massive material and economic destruction and large-scale human suffering.

The Lutheran World Federation was quick in its response to the Hungarian crisis. Under the neutral Austrian flag, the first relief convoy from the LWF reached Hungary on November 2, 1956, the same day Bishop Ordass’ appeal to European countries was broadcast. But, in fact, he had made a request to the LWF earlier, in his first report to the Federation after resuming his position as bishop. This report reached the LWF on October 20. On November 2 the LWF reached Ordass by telephone, and the bishop repeated his request which had also been conveyed to the LWF the previous day by the Dean of the Theological Seminary of the Hungarian Reformed Church, Professor László Páp. At that point Ordass remarked that there was not yet a solution as how to meet the material needs of the Hungarian population. Many personal problems were still unsettled at that point, but financial aid was needed, especially to begin again work among youth and women, and to replace the loss of previous governmental support for pastors’ salaries.

After the quick start, however, LWF’s aid operation came to a halt, since only the Red Cross was allowed to get through to Hungary. But the LWF staff was busy in preparing future convoys and appealing for funding from member churches, so that they “should not be unprepared when this opportunity opens,” as the Director of

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<sup>75</sup> Dahlgren, Sam, *Politik och Kyrka: Lutherska kyrkor i Östeuropa* [Politics and Church: Lutheran Churches in East Europe] (Stockholm: Verbum, 1989).

the LWF Department of World Service, Bengt Hoffman, remarked in a statement of November 22 concerning the needs in Hungary. Inside Hungary the assistance was mainly targeted to pastors of the Lutheran Church and their families, and especially to those families who had lost their breadwinners during the uprising. Also, the state had stopped paying salaries to church workers after the revolution. Funds were collected in congregations to support their pastors, but no one wanted to support the former church leaders. Bishop Ordass, however, felt that even if the church leaders were punished for their crimes, their families should not be left without help.

Aid consisted mainly of food, clothes, medicine, and vitamins for children. DDT was also mentioned in the list of needs. LWF assistance was coordinated with the World Council of Churches, while the Lutheran Church in Hungary was responsible for organizing the distribution of the relief items inside Hungary.

The opportunity for churches and church-related organizations to continue their aid operations opened again after a few weeks' pause. Carl Lund-Quist, the general secretary of the LWF, and Mogens Zeuthen, LWF secretary for Minority Churches, paid a visit to Hungary at the end of January 1957, to acquaint themselves with the needs as well as to show their solidarity with the Lutheran Church which at that time was still full of hope for the future. It had been planned that the general secretary of the World Council of Churches, Willem Visser't Hooft, would join them but the Hungarian officials had refused to grant him an entry visa.

The director of the State Office for Church Affairs, János Horváth, told the LWF representatives that he believed that the WCC together with Professor Pap had contributed to planning the revolution of the fall of 1956. Thus, he had no desire to meet Dr. Visser't Hooft. The delegates concluded that no WCC label should be shown in anything sent by churches to Hungary. The delegates were also told that there were no needs in the country and that the Red Cross was able to handle all necessary distribution. Unofficial sources proved the contrary.<sup>76</sup>

The LWF had sent the American journalist Jean Olson (later Jean Olson Leshner), who at that time was an editor for the LWF Department of World Service, to report on the Hungarian aid operation and future needs. She travelled to Vienna on October 30 and from there joined the first LWF relief convoy to Hungary as far as Győr, where it was decided in consultation with the local pastors that it would be safest to let only the "neutral Austrians" follow the convoy to Budapest. The convoy reached Budapest successfully and returned back to Vienna only a few hours before the Russians started their final intervention in the early hours of Sunday, November 4. Jean Olson joined the convoy again in Győr. In a press release of November 7, quoting Bishop Ordass she wrote, "the food and medicines were not as important to the Hungarian Churches as the knowledge of brotherly love coming from so many lands."<sup>77</sup>

In addition to its work inside Hungary, LWF aid operations reached Hungarian refugees in several other countries, including Austria, the U.S., Great Britain, and the Nordic countries. The most pressure was on Austria where thousands of Hungarians had fled already by November 4. By November 21 the number of new Hungarian refugees in Austria had reached 45,000. Although Austria had anticipated the influx

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<sup>76</sup> Notes by Jean Olson from an interview with Dr. Lund-Quist, January 30, 1957 (Jean Olson Leshner's private archives).

<sup>77</sup> Olson, Jean, News Release of November 1956 and radio speech on November 12, 1956 (Jean Olson Leshner's private archives).

of refugees, there was not enough time for proper preparations. The newcomers were settled first in temporary reception camps, from where it was soon decided to accommodate them in other institutions, including those owned by churches, and private dwellings. General care of the refugees was taken by the Red Cross, the Austrian government, the American government, and voluntary organizations. The main needs at that point were for all kinds of foodstuff, disinfectants, paper diapers for babies, and warm clothing.

After the relief shipment of early November, Jean Olson returned to Vienna where for a month she wrote daily reports for the LWF, processed photos, and helped out where she could. "Our LWF staff ate and slept while working," she recalled afterwards. The following glimpses from Olson's accounts give an impression of the major problems facing the relief action:

*The first few days of the flood of Hungarian refugees into Austria was just plain chaos as far as organized help was concerned. When the revolt first broke out, the Austrians immediately prepared to house several thousand refugees. However, when 6–7,000 came over on November 4, the day the Russian counter-offensive began, and 2,000 per day began coming from then on, the situation went from bad to worse. There was just no time to prepare places for so many even if there had been weeks of warning.*

*Refugees were forced to sleep in crowded halls on straw, eat cold meals and forego the privileges of heat, lights and running water until emergency facilities could be prepared. Red Cross and relief organization officials began looking like refugees themselves after days and nights of strenuous work with little time to sleep or shave. Everywhere was disorganized and confusion – everywhere, that is, except for Graz.*

In the Austrian city of Graz, refugees were well taken care of by university students who had taken the initiative to establish a refugee center and to collect funding for it, despite being told by city authorities that they were too idealistic. Despite this discouraging judgment, an organized group of 1,500 students started a collection on October 28, and by the first evening they had collected 118,000 Austrian shillings, which was more than the Red Cross collected in its annual one-week campaign in the city. The students did most of the work and also collected most of the supplies.

Besides organizing the refugee camp in Graz, they also bought a half-ton of high-quality medicine, loaded it on a rented truck and headed for Hungary. According to Jean Olson this was officially recognized as the first relief truck to enter Hungary after the revolt. Soon the students also chartered an aircraft to fly medical supplies to Budapest. Jean Olson tells that the Red Cross soon had to admit that the best organized Hungarian refugee camp in Austria was the University of Graz student recreation center. This fact was also noted by Ted Hartig, a representative of the LWF and a pastor on a visit to Graz. On his recommendation, the Austrian Hilfswerk sent foodstuff and clothing to the Graz refugee center.

Austria was also the hub for emigration to the U.S. In early December 1956, Bengt Hoffman reported from Austria that "1,000 refugees from Hungary were supposed to be registered daily for emigration to the U.S." The registration took place in Camp Roeder, established by the LWF as a "processing center" for those Hungarian refugees who wanted to migrate to United States.

Hilfswerk, the relief agency of the Austrian Lutheran Church, also had an important role as a partner of the LWF in the aid operation in Austria.

Funds, material aid, and personnel for the operation were provided by several countries, including the USA, Canada, Germany, Sweden, Denmark and Finland. The diversity of the church-related aid consisted e.g. of a number of deaconesses from Scandinavia and Germany coming to assist in the day-to-day work.

After the initial critical phase, the LWF continued to support the Lutheran Church in Hungary especially by education and scholarship programs and the reconstruction of churches and vicarages. Support was also provided for congregational activities. This post-uprising support was mainly administered by the LWF Department of Church Cooperation. This support reached its height in the 1960s and 1970s and continued on a lesser scale until the early twenty-first century.

# CHAPTER SIX

## THE CHURCH IN SOCIALISM – THE LWF ASSEMBLY IN BUDAPEST, 1984

### 6.1. THE PROFILE OF THE LWF IN BUDAPEST, 1984

*Composition of the LWF Assembly.* Having viewed the LWF profile from the perspective of the founding assembly in 1947, let us now jump ahead 37 years and look at it from the perspective of the years 1980–1985 and especially from the 7th Assembly in Budapest, July 22 – August 5, 1984. The comparative statistics of the two assemblies show how the decision-making structure and overall appearance and profile of the LWF changed during nearly four decades of the Cold War.

*Comparative statistics.*

Assembly attendance in Budapest, with figures for Lund 1947, was

Voting delegates / member churches / countries represented:

Budapest 315 / 97 / 49

Lund 174 / 55 / 22

Other participants:

Budapest: 1500 international visitors, advisers, observers, and official guests; 300 youth participants; 270 press and media representatives; 50 members of the LWF staff in Geneva; and some 10,000 short-time visitors from the host church

Lund: 335 registered visitors and some hundreds of short-time local visitors.

The distribution of delegates by regions:

Region	Delegates	
	Budapest 1984	Lund 1947
Africa	43	2
Asia-Pacific	54	11
Europe	159	116
Latin America	18	1
North America	41	44

Sub-regional distribution of delegates from Europe:

Sub-Region	Delegates	
	Budapest 1984	Lund 1947
Eastern Europe	45	24
Western Europe	58	50
Nordic countries	56	42



For purposes of this study it is worth underscoring that at Budapest nearly a third of the voting delegates from European member churches were from Lutheran churches in the socialist countries in Eastern Europe and the USSR.

Other comparisons:

Women's participation:	Budapest 33%	Lund 3.5%
"South" participation:	Budapest 36.5%	Lund 8.75%

## 6.2. THE LWF IN THE CONTEXT OF COLD WAR POLITICS

During the years between Lund and Budapest the context changed gradually, but seen in historical perspective, dramatically. The early nineteen-seventies was a period of détente that affected not only inter-state relations but also the conditions of church life in Eastern Europe. This stage in the development of relations was marked by the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) in which 35 countries participated and which culminated in the signing of the Final Act of the Conference in Helsinki on August 1, 1975. But as happened characteristically throughout the Cold War, after the hopeful conclusion of two landmark strategic arms limitation treaties signed by the U.S. and the USSR in the 1970s and the success of the Helsinki Final Act, the fragile international détente collapsed and the Cold War climate began again to deteriorate.

After the humiliating withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam, the U.S. began to reassert its role as the world's premiere military power, announcing plans to deploy a new generation of short and medium range cruise missiles armed with nuclear warheads. Soon the Reagan Administration unveiled with a grand flourish its design for a space-based anti-missile defense system, the so-called Star Wars program.

The Soviet Union responded in kind, building up further its conventional forces, already far superior to the ground defense forces of the West, and escalated its own development of a new generation of nuclear arms and delivery systems. To prove its strength and strategic position in the global competition for control of oil resources it invaded Afghanistan in 1979 provoking an almost total cessation of talks of any kind between the superpowers.

The Soviet Union, experiencing serious economic difficulties and losing ground in the global competition for political influence in Africa and Latin America launched a new, more aggressive international peace propaganda campaign, taking advantage of the burgeoning anti-nuclear peace movements in the West. What had been a consistent drift toward a nuclear confrontation accelerated, setting off alarm signals among political and military analysts on both sides. There was talk of an imminent, perhaps unavoidable nuclear confrontation. The Soviet Union revitalized its old efforts to mobilize peace campaigns favoring its policies, while the Reagan administration refined its strategy to win the Cold War with a combination of military threats and conciliatory gestures.

The increasingly shared concern about these threats to peace found an echo in the LWF and the global ecumenical movement. Major peace initiatives were programmed, and attempts were made to join church efforts in East and West in a common effort to turn the tide before it was too late. Church leaders began more insistently to speak of peace as both a gift of God and a divine obligation for the church. The Moscow Patriarchate convened a large conference of religious forces to defend the "Sacred

Gift of Life.” Archbishop Olof Sundby of the Church of Sweden took the initiative to convene a “Life and Peace Conference” in 1983. The noted German nuclear physicist Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker, a Protestant layman, issued an appeal for convening a Universal Council of the Churches for Peace.<sup>78</sup> All these touched the LWF and stimulated it to make the pursuit of peace a more visible priority.<sup>79</sup>

Modest steps towards the improvement of the place of churches in socialist Eastern Europe in the context of the Helsinki negotiations on peace and security in Europe continued despite heightened tensions between East and West.

The LWF managed to establish contact for the first time with scattered Lutheran congregations in Russia and the Asian Soviet republics, and from 1977 even to provide them aid. In the German Democratic Republic, a notable meeting was held in 1978 between state authorities and Protestant church leaders that opened the way for a more public role for the churches in that socialist state. The regional churches in the GDR all organized public celebrations in 1983 to mark the 500th anniversary of the birth of Martin Luther. An international Luther Year celebration was held at the Wartburg castle near Eisenach in May 1983 with many thousands of participants, including political leaders from East and West Germany. The LWF received permission to organize a conference of European Lutheran churches in Tallinn, Estonia in September 1980, the first ever in the Soviet Union.

All these things foreshadowed a new space for church life in those parts of Europe where the churches had suffered since the beginnings of the Cold War (and earlier still in the Soviet Union) from severe restrictions and periodically from violent persecution. These signs of change increased the confidence of the LWF and its member churches to speak of their task in socialist Europe as partnership in mission, lifting the embargo on the use of that term upon which delegates from Eastern Europe and the former colonial countries of Africa had insisted on at the 5<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the LWF in Evian 1970.

### **6.3. THE LWF BEGINS PREPARATIONS FOR THE ASSEMBLY**

Early preparations for the 7<sup>th</sup> LWF Assembly in 1984 were influenced by the reescalation of the Cold War even though the Hungarian host church and state authorities showed no particular signs of concern about the world political climate. The Cold War mood surfaced, however, during the initial discussions on the choice of the site of the assembly. Later on, it pervaded in-house planning of the assembly agenda, technical preparations, negotiations with the host church and Hungarian government representatives, and the involvement of member churches in the planning process.

In the beginning of 1980 the LWF had an embarrassing problem. No member church

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<sup>78</sup>The Russian Orthodox Church played an active role in a number of international peace conferences organized by the Soviet Peace Committee, and also convened several interreligious peace conferences to which churches participating in the ecumenical movement were invited. These took place in Moscow. The LWF sent official observers to them from 1973 onwards and assumed a more active role at the inter-religious conference convened by the Patriarchate in May 1982.

<sup>79</sup>The Executive Committee of the LWF issued at its meeting in 1981 a Peace Statement, which preceded a more active role in the international activities for peace. In addition to its participation in the 1982 Moscow conference, the LWF gave a positive response to the initiative of Archbishop Sundby to convene an ecumenical Life and Peace Conference in 1983 in Uppsala and it also participated in consultations regarding the initiative of Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker of Germany to form an international Council of Peace.

had offered to host the assembly. This was highly unusual. Normally, assembly sites were chosen from among several invitations from different continents. Now the LWF headquarters staff had to conduct a discreet in-house screening of viable options.<sup>80</sup>

Special attention was given to Asia and Eastern Europe, neither of which had hosted an assembly. Latin America was not considered since the planned 1970 Assembly in Porto Alegre, Brazil had to be cancelled due to the military coup in that country; the assembly was moved *in extremis* to Evian, France. The time was not yet ripe to try again. The officers of the LWF concurred with the conclusion of the Geneva staff that preference should be given to a socialist country of Eastern Europe. First, however, church leaders in the region needed to be sounded out since the initiative had to be taken from that side.

Further informal talks narrowed the field. The doors were closed to the three Baltic countries whose churches were under the tight control of Soviet authorities who were believed certainly to disapprove. The Slovak Church, an active member of the LWF with a sizable membership, was also unlikely to venture an invitation; the memory of the Prague Spring and the subsequent Soviet intervention in August 1968 was still too fresh.

The Lutheran Church in Poland with its 100,000 members formed a tiny minority in an overwhelmingly Roman Catholic society and did not have sufficient recognition to host a large international Protestant gathering. Additionally, an increasingly active though still largely underground challenge to the status quo was taking shape there. Shipyard workers under the leadership of Lech Wałęsa, intellectuals and leaders of the Roman Catholic Church – especially after the election of Polish Cardinal Karol Józef Wojtyła as Pope in 1978 – all contributed to the popular unrest. Poland had become the least stable member of the Warsaw Pact.

That left only two viable options: the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and Hungary. The informal response from the church offices in Berlin was clear: no invitation from the GDR member churches would be forthcoming. The churches there were already involved in preparations for the Luther Year and it was unthinkable to consider yet another large international gathering only a year later. Actually, Weimar in the GDR had been considered as the site for the 5th Assembly, but due to political tensions between the GDR and West Germany the East German authorities had cancelled the invitation, and the assembly – after the cancellation of Brazil as the site – was finally held in Evian, France in 1970. Only one serious option was left: Hungary.

Time was running out near the end of January because a decision was to be made by the Executive Committee in July 1980 and there was still no invitation in sight. Then what was to become the colorful drama surrounding the LWF in the “Budapest era” began to unfold. The first act was how to interpret the silence of Budapest. Carl Mau, the LWF General Secretary, had to consider the unwritten rule that the LWF President for the term following an assembly was elected from the host church.<sup>81</sup> In this case the obvious person would be Zoltán Káldy, the presiding bishop of the Lutheran Church in Hungary.

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<sup>80</sup> The staff of the Department of Church Cooperation prepared the summary that was considered by the cabinet of the General Secretary and shared informally with the members of the Executive Committee at its meeting in Augsburg in July 1980. LWF Archives, GS file.

<sup>81</sup> Presidents elected: Lund 1947, Anders Nygrén from Sweden; Hannover 1952, Hanns Lilje from Germany; Minneapolis 1957, Franklin Clark Fry from the U.S.; Helsinki 1963, Fredrik A. Schiotz from the U.S.; Evian 1970, Mikko Juva from Finland; Dar es Salaam 1977, Josiah Kibira from Tanzania.

Mau's dilemma was that Káldy had become a controversial figure for a segment of his own church as well as for a substantial number of church leaders in Europe and North America. They held him responsible for collaborating with state authorities in the removal of Bishop Lajos Ordass from the office in June 1958, following which he had been elevated to the post. Mau could hardly take an initiative that would be interpreted as supportive of Káldy without creating further divisions within the church and the LWF. In private, he indicated that he favored Hungary as the site for the 7th Assembly, but only on the condition that Káldy not be considered a candidate for the presidency.

The LWF Europe Secretary, Paul Hansen of Denmark and I, director of the Department of Church Cooperation, jointly came to the conclusion that one of us should place a casual phone call to Bishop Káldy. I urged Hansen to do it as he was constantly in touch with the Hungarian church office on matters of interchurch aid. He, however, passed the ball back to me. We agreed not to consult Mau before placing the call to free him from any responsibility should difficulties arise.

Reluctantly, I finally placed the call. I asked Káldy whether he had given any thought to inviting the LWF to hold the assembly in Hungary, emphasizing that no decision about the site had yet been made. In November 2009 I received a copy of the record of the call with date, time and my name on it, found in the archives of the Hungarian Secret Service.

Two days after that call Káldy called Mau expressing his delight that the LWF was proposing Budapest as the site and informing that an official invitation would come within a few days. The Hungarian authorities had apparently given a green light with great speed.

Mau's first reaction was to be furious with me for exceeding my mandate, but preparations began to flow smoothly. Káldy presented an official invitation on behalf of his church to the LWF Executive Committee meeting in Augsburg in July 1980, together with a detailed plan for local arrangements and a report on the assurances of support given by the Hungarian government.

The Executive Committee took the decision on the venue without major debate. The rationale for choosing a Marxist country for the site of the 7th Assembly was to manifest to the church and people of the host country that the LWF was committed to mission on every continent and region. The specific purpose – not specifically advertised – was that an assembly with the clear marks of a church community, with Bible study and the celebration of the eucharist at its center, would present an important public witness to the gospel and the Church Universal that might help to open greater public space for the host church in a society whose official state ideology was opposed to religion, and in this case especially to Christianity.<sup>82</sup>

The decision in favor of Budapest did not sit well with many Christians in Hungary or abroad. It provoked a wave of protests mainly from among native Hungarian church persons close to the LWF now living abroad and from older church leaders at home who were close to Bishop Lajos Ordass. Among the most severe critics Vilmos Vajta, former LWF staff official, was included.

The LWF was accused of having accommodated itself to communist influences; of seeking to prevent the assembly from any criticism either of the Hungarian government or the Soviet system; of silencing the critics of Bishop Káldy who regarded him

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<sup>82</sup> An affirmation of the expressed intention was given once more in the opening address of the outgoing President of the LWF, Bishop Josiah Kibira of Tanzania. Budapest Report, pp.13–22.

as a puppet of the communist authorities; and, worst of all, of effectively assuring his election as the next president of the LWF, an open offense to the memory of Ordass.

In fact, the decision to go to Budapest reopened older wounds. When in the mid-1950s the first wave of liberalization under communist rule took place, the popular uprising of late October 1956 began calling for Hungary to leave the Warsaw Pact and become a neutral nation between East and West. When the response of the Soviet Union came it was massive and brutal. Its military intervention restored and reinforced the undisputed Marxist order in Hungary, assured its loyalty as an ally firmly within the socialist bloc, and placed János Kádár, the General Secretary of the Hungarian Communist Party (1956 to 1988) firmly in place as leader of the government.

It was in this heady and volatile time that Lajos Ordass in November 1956 was reinstated as Presiding Bishop of the Lutheran Church in Hungary. It was not to last, however. Eighteen months later he was deposed for a second time. Thus, the naming of Káldy, apparently under pressure from the state, as Ordass' successor created a rift in the Hungarian church that ran through local congregations, the church as a whole and well beyond, deeply affecting relations between the Hungarian church and the LWF. For many around the world this rift epitomized the impact of the Cold War on the churches. The LWF was influenced by it at the time around the Budapest Assembly. Even today the divisive effects of this rift remain imbedded in the memory and life of the Hungarian church.

Technical preparations for the 7th Assembly went smoothly from the beginning to the end. No problems of substance emerged with the state or municipal authorities. LWF leaders had easy access to the State Office for Religious Affairs. Embassies around the world were well informed and few difficulties arose with the entry visas of delegates to the assembly.

The event was well advertised on the main streets of Budapest. The brand-new sports hall of Budapest provided superb facilities for all assembly meetings and activities. Numerous volunteers were available for various support functions. All participants were invited to a lavish reception given by the government in the House of Parliament. No restrictions were imposed on the program or on office or communication functions by government authorities. Political security measures were unobtrusive and virtually invisible. From the organizational point of view, it was one of the easiest assemblies the LWF ever held.

#### **6.4. INTEREST OF THE HUNGARIAN AND GDR GOVERNMENTS IN THE ASSEMBLY**

The conclusion to be drawn from the efficient cooperation of local and state authorities in the preparation and in the practical running of the assembly was that the event was important not only to the Lutheran Church in Hungary, but also to the Hungarian government.

Long before the assembly itself, I had a bizarre confirmation that this conclusion would prove to be correct. During the LWF Europe conference, September 5–9, 1983, when a Mr. Gabor Solti, presenting himself as Second Secretary of the Hungarian Embassy in Rome, came to see me discreetly at Vico Equense where we were meeting near Naples, Italy. He wished to convey to the LWF, he said, why the Hungarian government had a positive interest in the success of the assembly in Budapest. He gave three main reasons:

(1) Hungary, though now part of the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact, belongs historically, culturally and spiritually to the Western world. It is not a Slavic country, and a successful world assembly of Lutheran churches would strengthen the national identity of the Hungarian people in the eyes of the world.

(2) Hungary's economic success, exceeding that of most of the socialist countries, was a result of its economic cooperation with the industrialized countries of the West. It was important that nothing happen at the assembly to disturb this.

(3) The Hungarian government and Communist Party had taken a different approach to religion from that of its "big brother," the Soviet Union. "We are prepared for five hundred years of constructive cooperation with the church while our Soviet neighbor counts on your disappearance within twenty years." For these reasons, he said, "we do not want anything to happen that would cause trouble." And, he added, a mark of a successful assembly would be "that you elect a Hungarian president for the LWF, the obvious person being Zoltán Káldy."<sup>83</sup>

Before he departed, Mr. Solti made another, exceptionally blunt remark: "We know that Bishop Káldy is not an easy person to work with. In case the LWF has difficulties with him, you should know that you can always approach us and we will help you."<sup>84</sup>

Another glimpse of the Hungarian government's attitude to the LWF came in relation to Carl Mau's general secretary's report at the plenary session of the assembly on July 23. He had prepared it with great care and had asked some of his Geneva colleagues to help in formulating politically sensitive parts. He wanted to deal with problem areas in a down-to-earth manner and to avoid any provocation of either anti-communist or anti-capitalist nature. A courtesy copy of the report was given to Bishop Káldy the day before its delivery. We assumed it would go immediately to the State Office for Religious Affairs.

The conclusion of the report dealt with the significance of meeting in Budapest. Mau referred to the escalated international tension between East and West. He underscored that the church is not subservient to any political ideology and that it expected to have its place in all countries, including those whose official ideology is Marxist socialism. He summed up, saying:

*"We hope that we can take a significant step forward [here] in being freed as a Federation from the shadows and burdens of past political and church-political conflicts and thus to become better equipped to witness and serve together as one community in every society and in the midst of conflicting forces. I am thinking especially of this country after the Second World War and the turmoil through which the church has*

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<sup>83</sup> My personal notes of the conversation with Gabor Solti were conveyed in writing to the LWF General Secretary, Carl Mau.

<sup>84</sup> I met Mr. Solti two more times, in Rome, January 1984, when he asked questions about preparations for the PreAssembly Youth Conference, and in Geneva, February 1987, when he was curious about the then pending election of the general secretary for the LWF. I tried to find him during my visit to Budapest in March 2007. I was informed by Dr. Géza Jeszenszky, the former Foreign Minister of Hungary in 1990–1993, that Mr. Solti did not belong to the regular diplomatic corps, but was an agent of the secret service stationed in the Hungarian Embassy in Rome. His real name was probably also not Solti. The Secret Service used for him only his code name "Daniel" in its reports and for me the code name "Cassar." Copies and English translations of Secret Service reports of 1980–1955 received by courtesy of the Rev. László Terray, Norway.

*come to this day. I think of Bishop Lajos Ordass, a Vice-President of the LWF.... I also think of Raoul Wallenberg, who was the second secretary of the Swedish embassy here in Budapest in the closing days of the Second World War. ... He courageously and with great determination was instrumental in saving 100,000 of the Jewish community, which was threatened by extinction by action of the Nazi regime."*

The fate of Wallenberg, who had been taken into captivity after the entry of Soviet troops in 1945, and who subsequently disappeared, was at the time of the assembly intensely debated in the Western media. Appeals had been sent by political authorities and by some NGOs to the Soviet government asking for an accurate account of the events. Only minutes before the delivery of his report, Mau added to his report by hand some words about the brutality of the Red Army in whose custody Wallenberg had apparently been killed. These words were not reproduced in the official assembly report.<sup>85</sup>

The following day at the lavish reception the Hungarian government gave for assembly participants, Mr. Imre Miklós, the Minister for Religious Affairs, asked me: "Why did the general secretary change the text of his report?" Someone from the Soviet embassy in Budapest had called his office twenty minutes after the general secretary had finished delivering his report, he said, asking the question. "You can be sure now," he added, "that whatever possibilities I may have had to assist the LWF in sending an international youth delegation from the assembly to visit churches in the Soviet Union have been dashed."<sup>86</sup>

The East German Ministry of State Security (Stasi) also seems to have followed keenly the assembly and its preparations. Besides the fear that there would be pseudo-pacifists among those who were allowed to visit Hungary, along with the official participants in the assembly and the Youth Congress preceding it, a perhaps graver concern was that the so-called "reactionary" forces within churches would use the assembly to pursue their goals, infiltrating into the LWF leadership and further into the life of East European churches. It was recommended that churches in socialist countries discuss in advance in a coordinated way the critical issues which were to be on the agenda of the assembly, thus being prepared to prevent "reactionary" decisions and statements.<sup>87</sup>

To the public eye, however, the assembly was free from any political interference from the socialist authorities of Hungary or of any other East European country.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup>The official text of the report of the general secretary is included in the Budapest Report 1984, pp. 157–173. A taped voice copy is stored in the LWF archives. The writer saw the handwritten words which the general secretary added orally to the last paragraph (p.173) of the official text. The words could be possibly found also in the governmental archives in Budapest.

<sup>86</sup>The LWF Youth Desk had prepared to send several groups of youth participants in the assembly to church visits to Eastern European countries. All other groups except the one chosen to travel to the USSR were able to complete the planned visits. The heads of the Baltic Lutheran churches had issued an invitation and prepared a program for the LWF youth delegation. The visas for the group to enter the USSR were not granted. A further set-back was probably a result of the words added by the general secretary to his report and which the Soviet embassy had apparently considered inflammatory. Carl Mau's visa application was turned down when he planned to visit Lutheran congregations in the Soviet Union later in the autumn of 1984. The plans which did not materialize for the youth group visit to the USSR and related correspondence are available in LWF archives in Geneva and in the archive of the Estonian Lutheran Church in Tallinn.

<sup>87</sup>Copies of the secret Stasi reports in LWF archives.

<sup>88</sup>Rumors circulated that both the Soviet and the GDR authorities had expressed dissatisfaction to the Hungarian government about inviting the assembly to Budapest. Answers may be found in further archival work in Budapest, Berlin and Moscow.

## 6.5. THE APPEARANCE AND THE COURSE OF THE ASSEMBLY

The main public events of the assembly were the festive eucharist at the opening of the assembly in which some 10,000 members of local congregations took part, and the closing rally again with the participation of thousands of Hungarian Christians. The local attendance was extensive also at the open plenary sessions in the Budapest Sport Hall.

Outside the meeting rooms, the most important points of contact between the international assembly and the Hungarian Lutheran Church were on the Sunday when in small groups the international participants visited some three hundred local congregations all around the country, participating in services of worship and enjoying hospitality in parsonages and homes of parishioners. These visits were later reported to have been by far the most significant part of the assembly for the members of local churches. For those coming from outside Hungary these visits provided first-hand experience of the life of a church in socialist Hungary.

The outgoing president of the LWF, Bishop Josiah Kibira of Tanzania, in his opening remarks addressed the significance of the Cold War for the LWF candidly and in existential terms from the perspective of an African Christian. He emphasized that the rapidly growing churches of the decolonized regions had assumed full membership in the worldwide community of Lutheran churches, so African voices on the concerns of the LWF were authentic Lutheran voices. He emphasized with passion and intensity the centrality of the pursuit of the unity and the mission of the church, and the significance of Christian faith for the current world problems and of those of his continent.

Kibira urged participants to listen carefully to the Hungarian Church's experience of life and witness within a socialist society. He criticized Christians from the North, for whom "socialist ideologies and Christianity are totally incompatible." He pleaded for "a fruitful encounter" between the delegates who came from different social systems. He confirmed unequivocally the missionary intention of the LWF decision to meet in Budapest. He warned about conforming to the worldly structures of society, which "temptation is certainly as great in the USA, Sweden, Tanzania, and South Africa as here in Hungary." He emphasized that "the East-West conflict is deeply intertwined with the North-South problem." He welcomed "the possibility to meet and talk across the political and economic barriers that divide the world and threaten our future." Kibira said,

*"The preoccupation with peace has been understood by many Christians to lie at the very heart of the gospel. Since the last assembly, it has got a totally new priority in many of our member churches as well as in the Federation. We have prayed and longed for the wisdom and imagination of being able to erect new signs of understanding and peace here in Budapest. We want to take up the limited but still significant responsibility we have as the LWF to contribute to an easing of tensions that threaten peace. We will try to do it with Christian integrity and courage, without giving way to propaganda from any side." Peace is inseparable from justice, he concluded.*

Different facets of the Cold War relevant to the task of the LWF were brought into focus in the main addresses related to the assembly theme, "In Christ – Hope for the World"



and the discussions on them.<sup>89</sup> They addressed the challenges and the impact of the Cold War on the worldwide Lutheran community. Other presentations dealt with the impact of the Cold War on the mission and ecumenicity of the church. Several of the thirteen working groups dealt in depth with the influence of the Cold War.

The proceedings, according to the Assembly Report, carefully avoided polemics. Nevertheless, a number of painful experiences, suspicions and problems surfaced in the public report and even more explicitly in the official minutes.<sup>90</sup> In retrospect, the guarded tone of the public report raises questions about the extent to which delegates coming for the first time to meet in a Marxist-socialist country engaged in self-censorship on issues assumed to be sensitive for the host church and society, and to what extent those responsible for the preparatory work and reporting feared an open discussion of the existential questions facing Christians and churches under the influence of the Cold War.

## 6.6. TWO CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

Two issues on the assembly agenda received far more attention than the main theme and its subtopics and were seen to represent current main concerns of the LWF and its member churches.

The first of these was the suspension of the membership of two white member churches in Southern Africa, an issue that was passionately debated and given extraordinary weight among the resolutions. At stake was the ecclesial self-understanding of the LWF. The Budapest Assembly had already approved an amendment to the constitution that referred to “altar and pulpit fellowship” of the member churches “with each other” and that pointed to the self-understanding of the LWF as an ecclesial communion. The proposal to suspend was ruled to be in line with the communion character of the Federation.<sup>91</sup> The Budapest Assembly eventually added to the third article of the constitution of the LWF: “The member churches [of the LWF] understand themselves to be in altar and pulpit fellowship with each other.”

But the principles and repercussions of a disciplinary action by the LWF Assembly were discussed and voted on first. The discussion of the report of the working group on “Racism in Church and Society” followed. The cause for the specific proposal for suspension was that two white member churches, one in South Africa and the other in Namibia, refused to dissociate themselves from the apartheid system, instead con-

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<sup>89</sup> Professor Klaus-Peter Hertzsch of the GDR spoke on the main theme, “In Christ – Hope for the World”. Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker of the FRG spoke on “In Christ – Hope for Humankind: Presentation on Peace”, and Walter Altmann of Brazil, Simon Farisani of South Africa, Mihály Simai of Hungary and Margareta Grape-Lantz of Sweden responded to him.

<sup>90</sup> The most extensive floor battles took place concerning rulings by the chair and the business committee of the assembly regarding information to be made available to the delegates concerning protest voices and also the constitutionality of the suspension of membership in the LWF.

<sup>91</sup> The original Constitution of 1947, Article III stipulated that the LWF is “a free association of Lutheran churches.” and that “it shall have no power to legislate for the churches belonging to it or to interfere with their complete autonomy.” The condition for membership was the acceptance of the Constitution. The “Doctrinal Basis” in Article II refers to the Holy Scriptures as the source of all church doctrine and practice and recognizes the Confessions of the Lutheran Church as a pure exposition of the Word of God. Lund Report, 1948, p.100. The Constitution amended by Budapest Assembly is found in the Budapest Report, 1984, pp. 264–269.

forming as churches to the apartheid legislation of the South African government and thereby were in compliance with racist practices. This was viewed as noncompliance with the basic character of the LWF within which racial discrimination can have no place.

The 6th Assembly in 1977 at Dar es Salaam had confirmed that toleration of the apartheid system was incompatible with the confessional basis of the LWF constitution.<sup>92</sup> The ruling of the chair was that a decision to suspend a member church requires a two-thirds majority vote, which according to the LWF constitution is required for the acceptance of a church into LWF membership. The decision for the suspension of the two churches passed with an 81% margin.

The second, as predicted, was the election of the President of the LWF. As mentioned, the possibility, or even the likelihood, of electing Bishop Zoltan Káldy had been highly controversial both in Hungary and abroad. Critical comments had been communicated in church media in Western Europe and the USA and in letters addressed to the LWF.<sup>93</sup>

An open letter from the Hungarian Pastor Zoltán Dóka to the LWF Executive Committee and "to all in the LWF who feel responsible for the Hungarian Lutheran Church" received the widest international attention.<sup>94</sup> Dóka's accusations against Káldy centered on his political role as a Member of Parliament and his attitude towards the government; on his advocacy of the Hungarian "Theology of Diakonia," viewed as an accommodation to the objectives of the communist government; and on Káldy's tyrannical behavior towards the pastors and lay leaders of the church. A staff member of the German Diakonisches Werk brought hundreds of copies of the Dóka letter from Stuttgart to Budapest for distribution in samizdat style at the assembly site. They were read by many participants and journalists present. The letter became a heated issue among delegates as the election date approached. Voices critical of Káldy added to the uneasiness of delegates about his candidacy. Káldy decided to respond to the criticism by Dóka at a press conference on July 27.<sup>95</sup>

The vote on the presidency took place on July 31. Four candidates were on the final ballot. None received a simple majority in the first round of voting. The second round gave Bishop Káldy 173 votes and Ms Bodil Sølling of the Church of Denmark 124.

Although the voting had been by secret ballot, the question of who voted for whom was discussed well beyond the end of the assembly. It did come to light that the delegates from the African churches had decided already at the regional pre-assembly conference in Harare, Zimbabwe in November 1983 to give their unanimous vote to Káldy and reconfirmed their consensus in Budapest.

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<sup>92</sup> The 6th Assembly resolution had stated: "The situation in Southern Africa constitutes a status confessionis. This means that, on the basis of faith and in order to manifest the unity of the church, churches would publicly and unequivocally reject the existing apartheid system." Dar es Salaam, 1976, 180.

<sup>93</sup> Such comments originated from individual pastors and church members of the Hungarian Church, and were communicated further by several of them resident outside Hungary and by older church leaders in the West who had been close to Lajos Ordass. LWF Archives.

<sup>94</sup> Dóka to Kibira, Mau, LWF Executive Committee, and "to all those, who feel responsible for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary", dated July 10, 1984 in Kuchen, Germany.

<sup>95</sup> The Business Committee of the Assembly, consisting of the outgoing executive committee members, decided to distribute Káldy's press statement to the delegates, but refused to place the letter of Dóka on the agenda of the assembly and to distribute copies of it to the delegates. Copies of the Dóka letter and of the press statement of Káldy, are in LWF Archives; reproductions appeared in news releases of press agencies, e.g. LWI, EPD, Glaube in der 2. Welt.

## 6.7. CAUSES OF CONTINUED CONTROVERSY AND MISGIVINGS ABOUT BISHOP KÁLDY

In retrospect, the prolonged misgivings about Káldy as the head of his church and as the president of the LWF seem to have risen from at least two unrelated sets of assumptions and experiences.

The first was related to his political role and reliability. After Káldy's installation as bishop, many church leaders and other friends of the Hungarian Church in the West frequently expressed the fear of an increased influence of communist governments on Lutheran churches in Eastern Europe and on the LWF. Western critics also saw Káldy's membership in the parliament as a further sign of his inclusion in the ruling elite of communist Hungary. Questions concerning his political convictions and his trustworthiness in the face of the state's official Marxist ideology clearly divided opinions both within his own church and among several other member churches in Europe and North America.

Secondly, the experiences of pastors whom Káldy had disciplined for suspected disloyalty to him and for criticizing his "Theology of Diakonia" strengthened the image of Káldy as a politically unreliable, tyrannical leader allergic to any questions suggesting disagreement with the official ideology. Káldy's critics suggested that he was as faithful to the "Theology of Diakonia" as to the Augsburg Confession. They claimed that Káldy's theology, especially his interpretation of "diakonia," watered down the Christian faith in order to be politically acceptable in a socialist society.

Káldy's political role in Hungary during the Cold War remains an open question. Some of the accusations against him have been found to be baseless. Unlike several other bishops and lay church leaders in Hungary after 1950, Káldy had never been a member of the communist party. A study of his speeches and public statements suggests that he had consistently expressed his nonacceptance of Marxist socialism; the same was the case whenever he gave support to specific resolutions and programs of the ruling party. The membership of church leaders in the Hungarian parliament was generally viewed by politicians and people in Hungary as no different from the ex officio membership of some of the Anglican bishops in the British House of Lords.

The type of questions to which research on recent history has not yet given answers include the following: How did Káldy actually act in the political arenas, both public and secret? Did he open doors for the witness of the church? Or did he damage the church by his associations with authorities and with other persons in public life? Did he have one face for his own church, another for the international church communities and yet another for political forums and public life?

Did Káldy defend the freedom of the church? Or was he disloyal to pastors and church workers, and did he let them down? Did his disciplinary actions originate from the state or from himself? How far were his actions, which from the church point of view were controversial, initiated, tolerated or unnoticed by his government contacts? In which way was the position of the Hungarian Lutheran Church in its own country and in the ecumenical context different in 1984 from its position in 1948 or 1958?

The statistics of the frequency of Káldy's contacts with government persons and the number of reports signed by him are of little or no help in the search for answers. New light might be shed on Káldy's political role when considered simultaneously from the perspectives of his opponents and supporters within the church and from the angle of the State Office for Religious Affairs.

Substantive answers to pertinent questions may, however, have to wait. One rea-

son for the difficulty of dealing with them may be that questions about Bishop Káldy apply equally to most church leaders who have found themselves in the midst of an acute political or church conflict.

Another type of misgiving was related to Káldy's personality as a church leader and shepherd of pastors. Its causes were displayed by his arbitrary disciplinary rulings in cases of relatively insignificant disagreements and in the extraordinarily rude language which he used in criticizing publicly those in his church whom he did not trust. These experiences had eroded confidence in him among many pastors and church workers, including some of his closest colleagues. Word about his misbehavior at Hungarian pastors' conferences had reached churches outside Hungary including some of their delegates to Budapest.<sup>96</sup>

Even officials of the Hungarian State Office for Religious Affairs had, according to unconfirmed reports, expressed their dissatisfaction with his leadership. Káldy's tendency towards short-tempered dictatorial behavior had, however, little to do with the political context as such. His temperament would have been a burden for the office of any leading bishop under any political system. It was nevertheless bolstered by the practice of communist regimes to isolate church leaders from their flocks by granting them special privileges and by sowing mistrust between them and ordinary pastors and churchgoers. There seems to have been a general consensus among pastors that Bishop Káldy was not an easy church leader to work with.<sup>97</sup>

## 6.8. THE HISTORY AND THE EFFECTS OF THE RIFT IN THE LUTHERAN CHURCH OF HUNGARY

The history of the rift which was caused by the dismissal of Ordass and the installation of Káldy under government pressure, may help in understanding its persistent influence on the Hungarian church, on the relationships between the church and the LWF, and ultimately on the actions of the State Office for Religious Affairs from the period of the popular uprising to the end of the Cold War. The initial effort to understand the rift from both governmental and church perspectives has opened up questions which still call for a further scrutiny.

At the Budapest Assembly, the parting of the ways of Ordass and Káldy was remote history to the delegates. Yet it had continued to fuel a long-lasting church-political conflict. What actually happened between the two men and subsequently in the church and in its relation with the government was and is still unclear.

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<sup>96</sup> Robert Patkai, Chairman of the Lutheran Council of Great Britain, sent a letter to Carl Mau, dated June 8, 1984, to which he attached an excerpt of the notes taken by an unnamed participant in a pastors' conference of some 50 participants presided over by Bishop Káldy in the spring of 1984. In the excerpt the writer of the notes gives examples of Káldy's threats and allegations addressed to the pastors present, e.g. "...those involved in irresponsible chatter with foreign participants, are risking their cassocks [defrocking]. We shall get even with them after the assembly. Their surveillance has been organized.... Vajta, Terray or Patkai don't measure even up to the dirt under the fingernail of Ordass..." LWF Archives, Geneva.

<sup>97</sup> Much of the personality of Káldy remains in the shadow of the controversies. His preaching, his concern for evangelism, his passion for strengthening the position of the Lutheran Church in the public life of Hungary, for lifting its visibility as a partner in the worldwide community of churches, and his readiness to admit to his trusted friends his errors, even in relation to Lajos Ordass, remained outside the limelight of Hungarian and international church media until the end of his life. *Requiescat in pace.*

For the government of Hungary, Káldy had apparently been the best possible choice to succeed Ordass. He came to Budapest from a provincial center in the south of the country. He did not have the same level of theological or academic education as the Budapest-based learned elite of the church. Accordingly, he was less likely to embarrass the government. Furthermore, he was an outsider to the top level of church politics of the preceding years. He had had no visible share in causing the deadlock between Ordass and the government. He was a seasoned pastor and a recognized evangelist. He had the confidence of the ordinary, mostly economically hard-pressed people in his district. He had personal interest in the peace movement. He had had no major problems with local authorities.

The government apparently wanted to bring the quarrels with him and within the Lutheran Church to an end, as they threatened to become an embarrassment to the government, especially on the international scene. For a dictatorial regime the change of a leader of a small church community, which the Lutheran Church was in relation to both the Reformed Church and the Roman Catholic Church, ought to have had a simple solution. Also, for the church, Káldy was clearly the most acceptable choice out of those whom the government was likely to tolerate.

In the period of the changing of the guard, Ordass and Káldy had met privately. At that moment the initial prospects of understanding between the two men had looked positive. A viable course for the church, mutually acceptable for both of them, seemed to be in sight.<sup>98</sup>

What happened did not follow the script approved by the government and considered tolerable to the church at large and even to the two bishops. Almost immediately the ways of Ordass and Káldy began to part. Ordass did not accept Káldy's suggestion that he become head pastor in the Deák-tér Church in Budapest, nor did he welcome a possible invitation to join the teaching faculty of the Theological Academy of the Lutheran Church.

Then, the government and the church began to realize the depth of the LWF's commitment to Ordass. He had been the trusted representative of the Hungarian church since 1947. He had been re-elected vice-president of the LWF at Minneapolis in 1957. He had not resigned from the LWF Executive Committee in 1950 or in 1958 when the government deposed him for the second time from the bishop's office. Consequently, foreign church leaders and LWF officers, when coming to Hungary, always went first to see Ordass, the vice-president of the LWF, before proceeding to meetings with other leaders of the Hungarian Lutheran Church, of which Káldy was the presiding bishop. Káldy, with his hot temper, was deeply offended that he as the presiding bishop was repeatedly bypassed by LWF representatives as their chief contact in Hungary. Finally, the personal difficulties between Ordass and Káldy rapidly grew into a church-political problem between the Hungarian church and the LWF, and soon into a matter of East-West and Cold War tension within the LWF.

By the time of the Budapest Assembly some of the roots of these problems had been cleared away. Káldy had become a member of the LWF Commission of Church Cooperation in 1970 and of the LWF Executive Committee in 1977, and finally he was a candidate for the presidency. The Hungarian government had accepted a new course for its international policies and its relations with the Hungarian churches. The whole

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<sup>98</sup> Káldy's personal report to two LWF visitors to Budapest, Sam Dahlgren and Risto Lehtonen, on February 2, 1984. Personal notes of Lehtonen, private archives, Helsinki; and LWF archives, Geneva.

Eastern bloc under Soviet leadership had begun to crack. Former Soviet satellites began quietly to seek more political space within the alliance and more independence in relation to the Soviet Union. Hungary became a pioneer of this course during the later years of Kádár.

The irony for the churches and largely for the LWF itself was that they, after all the changes in Cold War politics, still considered Hungary as a part of a monolithic Soviet *imperium*. To have an assembly in Budapest meant for the LWF, in the best case, that new doors might open for its relations with the churches within Soviet Union, and, in the worst case, that the LWF might find itself increasingly under the control of or subject to the constant interference of Soviet agencies, especially in its work in East Europe. Opinions on what would happen differed both among members of the Executive Committee and among LWF staff.

In retrospect, neither alternative was valid. What was not clear within the LWF was that the LWF Assembly had become useful if not important for the Hungarian government in its quiet pursuit of greater mobility and independence in relation to the Soviet Union. Therefore, as far as the Hungarian authorities were concerned it was not what the assembly or its individual participants would say about the Hungarian society and state that mattered, but rather whether something in the assembly would draw negative attention from Soviet authorities. The LWF and its leadership did not realize how much the actual place of the assembly and of the whole LWF in the Cold War politics of the Eastern bloc had changed, and what were the possibilities its recognition might have opened for the witness of the church. Instead, the assembly and the Federation itself came to drift along in a stream of contradictory fears and suspicions.

## **6.9. THE HUNGARIAN PROBLEMS AS A CONSEQUENCE OF THE COLD WAR**

The internal rift in the Hungarian Lutheran Church and its effects on its relations to churches outside, that erupted when Ordass was deposed and Káldy was installed in his place, was in effect a corollary of the early conflict between “the free world” of Truman’s USA and the new order of socialism of Stalin’s Kremlin.

In the West Ordass had represented a church at ease with Christians in the USA. He was hailed by many in the LWF, in line with the Western behavior during the early Cold War, as an exemplary church leader standing firm under pressures to accommodate to communist rule. In the East, the Hungarian government of the Stalin era viewed the moral and financial support from the LWF to the Hungarian Lutheran Church under Ordass’s leadership as subversive political action.

Political authorities in both West and East failed to notice or to take seriously Ordass’s consistent refusal to advocate for any political ideology or program. They did not understand the nature and the source of his persistence, in defending the church against such governmental restrictions as touched the spiritual lifeline of the church. Outsiders forced on him the image of defender of the West and enemy of the East, whereas he himself wanted to rely on no other foundation than the Biblical witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. And so, by holding to his faith, he became a threat to the rulers of his country whose foundation was their socialist ideology.

# A Case Study on Ethiopia

## CHAPTER SEVEN A CHALLENGE FROM AFRICA

African Lutheran churches, which affiliated themselves with the international Lutheran community between 1947 and 1984, brought the LWF in 1947–1984 face to face with the postwar social transformation of the continent.<sup>99</sup> Decolonization and national independence movements set the tone for African public life and for its international image. The departure of the colonial masters left most of the newly independent African countries in a state of flux, if not outright political turmoil.

Two outside responses emerged: a drive for social and economic development supported by the United Nations, by voluntary agencies and by churches, and a parallel race between the Cold War adversaries to safeguard their economic and military interests on the continent. Local tribal and ethnic rivalries, aggravated by the colonial legacy, slowed down the desired improvements in the quality of life and the achievement of stable national self-determination.

These rivalries also opened doors for interference by competing foreign powers. The political and military engagement on the part of the North turned the continent into a new theater of the Cold War, transforming local conflicts and campaigns for national liberation into devastating “proxy” wars.<sup>100</sup>

The uprising against imperial rule in February 1974 burgeoned into a full-fledged revolution, making Ethiopia a priority for the LWF in Africa. Hitherto the worldwide Lutheran community had worked on two fronts in Africa, (1) supporting churches and missions as they sought their place in countries moving towards national independence from their colonial past, and (2) joining ecumenical efforts to combat organized racism in Southern Africa, most clearly manifested by the apartheid system in South Africa.

In playing these roles, the LWF placed emphasis on direct communication with its member churches on the spot and in consultation with them cooperated selectively and discreetly with liberation movements. The national revolution in Ethiopia called for an approach of its own.

Several intrinsic factors were instrumental for the shaping up of the profile of the LWF in the new situation.

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<sup>99</sup> At the founding assembly of the LWF in 1947 only two African churches were recognized as members of the LWF. In 1984 the number of African member churches had risen to seventeen representing more than 3.7 million persons.

<sup>100</sup> Odd Arne Westad offers a thorough analysis of the effects of the Cold War on the prolongation of the impoverishment of the developing countries of the South. He shows, how the interventions of the superpowers undermined the efforts of the leaders of newly independent African countries to establish the kind of cooperation between African states that would ensure their territorial integrity, protect them from external interference, safeguard respect for human rights, and create conditions for economic and social development. He presents a documented account of the devastation caused by the superpowers as they pursued their global interests, with particular remarks on Ethiopia. Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 396–407.

The first was the history of the Ethiopian Evangelical Mekane Yesus Church (EECMY), markedly different from those of most other Protestant churches on the continent. The EECMY was not a typical daughter of the global missionary movement. This church traces its first origins to casual seventeenth century encounters between the ancient Coptic Orthodox tradition and European Protestantism. The history of Coptic Christianity in Ethiopia in turn goes back to the third and the fourth centuries AD.

When the first Protestant mission organizations entered Ethiopia in the 19th century, they were firmly committed to working within the ancient Orthodox Church of Ethiopia and supporting the revitalization of her life and work. The Ethiopian pioneers of the EECMY shared the heritage of the ancient Amharic imperial culture permeated by Coptic Christianity. She was from her beginning an African church, and as such more independent in relation to overseas churches and mission agencies than most of the other Protestant churches in Africa. Her membership in the LWF was marked by an assertive independence which was manifested visibly in her contribution to mission theology and strategies within the LWF and the worldwide church.

Secondly, the revolution of 1974 reduced contact between the worldwide ecumenical movement and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church for several years. For a time, all of Ethiopian Christianity was sidelined from expanding international ecumenical cooperation as manifested by the World Council of Churches and the All Africa Conference of Churches.

In 1974, the Mekane Yesus Church was, in the eyes of the rising ecumenical movement, a small and isolated community in the shadow of the historic Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Moreover, her relationship with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church had deteriorated into a curious mix of congenial cooperation on the one hand, and hostile antagonism on the other. This development took place in spite of the respect shown by the early mission agencies towards the indigenous Orthodox Church. Furthermore, the distance of the Mekane Yesus Church from the mainstream Protestant missionary movement and her open but guarded posture towards the revolutionary government, were difficult for the international church organizations to interpret.

Thirdly, the influence of the East-West conflict of the Cold War upon the revolution in Ethiopia was unique on the continent in its visibility. Before 1974 there had been many signs of the race between the two superpowers to secure their respective political and economic interests in the context of decolonization. This rivalry was evident all over the continent from Algeria, Angola, Congo, Madagascar, Mozambique, Namibia, and Somalia, to South Africa. It had already generated or helped to escalate destructive wars in which the Cold War powers were directly involved. The competition between the superpowers was also a factor behind numerous humanitarian efforts in the name of development and in support of liberation struggles. The Ethiopian revolution was a major factor in the sudden change of the ideological map of the Horn of Africa and in the patterns of superpower influence in the region.

By the time of the outbreak of the revolution in Ethiopia, the LWF and other international church organizations already had ample experience of the influence of the Cold War on Europe and North America and on the churches of these areas.<sup>101</sup> Yet, the presence of the Cold War in Africa, as it emerged abruptly in its most explicit form in Ethiopia, took the LWF by surprise. The international community and the worldwide

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<sup>101</sup> Cf. Maser, Peter and Jens Holger Schjørring, eds., *Zwischen den Mühlsteinen. Protestantische Kirchen in der Phase der Errichtung der kommunistischen Herrschaft im östlichen Europa* (Erlangen, 2002) and Mojzes, Paul, ed., *North American Churches and the Cold War*.



church were also unprepared to deal with the new complications that the East-West confrontation caused in Africa. Within a few short months, the ideological and military interests of the superpowers simply overran the aspirations and expectations of the majority of the population.

The Christian churches in Ethiopia, among them the Mekane Yesus Church, which by then was already an influential African member of the LWF, were suddenly faced with life and death choices.

The events in Ethiopia opened for the LWF a new chapter in its search for a relevant role for both the worldwide Lutheran community and the worldwide church in the context of the global conflict.

Concerning the functions of the LWF the key question to be asked is whether the LWF was able to offer more than mere words as it sought to support the life and witness of a member church in the midst of political and social upheaval. To answer that question, we must study the hard-core joint experiences of the EECMY and the functions of the LWF during their encounter with the political and military powers at play in revolutionary Ethiopia. The LWF was prompted to re-examine the nature of the mission of the church in the context of the social and political turmoil in Africa. Indeed, this re-appraisal extended even beyond Africa. Past assumptions, strategies for mission and development, and even the specific action plans of church organizations came under new scrutiny in the context of this urgent national crisis.

# CHAPTER EIGHT

## THE RISE OF THE ETHIOPIAN EVANGELICAL CHURCH MEKANE YESUS

The earliest roots of the Mekane Yesus Church are found within the life of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the middle of 17th century. They stem from the first recognized Lutheran encounter with the ancient Ethiopian Orthodox tradition produced by the entry of a young German layman, Peter Heyling, upon the scene.

The overarching theme of the story of his role was a vision of the “rejuvenation of ancient churches of the Orient” which had captured university students in Lübeck, Germany. The heart of the vision was making the Bible available in local tongues to the geopolitically isolated churches of the Oriental tradition in the Near East and East Africa. One of the persons from Lübeck was Peter Heyling, a brilliant young student of medicine, law and foreign languages. After completing his studies in Germany and France he made an exploratory tour of the Mediterranean region, followed up by further language study and excursions to observe monastic life among the Orthodox in the Middle East. His pilgrimage brought him finally to Ethiopia where he settled down for nearly two decades. His main work in those years was the translation of the Holy Scriptures into Amharic and other local languages. A byproduct of his work with the Orthodox Church was a profound Orthodox-Lutheran theological dialogue, the first of its kind in Ethiopia, traces of which were found by later scholars. He met his death in 1652 by the hand of a Moslem Turk. He was gratefully remembered by the Orthodox in Ethiopia for at least a century after his death.<sup>102</sup>

His translation of the Scriptures led to a widening recognition of local languages in Ethiopia. The Oromo translation of the Scriptures strengthened the self-respect of the Oromo people and the gradual acceptance of Oromo culture and traditions as part of the common Ethiopian heritage. This proved instrumental for the spread of evangelical Christianity among the people living at the periphery of Ethiopia. The commitment to make the Holy Scriptures available in local tongues within ancient churches, while respecting local ecclesial tradition, was the lead motive for Heyling’s work. A similar aim was pursued by foreign Protestant mission agencies entering Ethiopia in the nineteenth century.

Continued tension and battles between the nomadic peoples of East Africa and the Amharic population of ancient Ethiopia presented a challenge to the national identity of Ethiopia. The Amharas, carrying the tradition of the Solomonid rule and of Orthodox Christianity, formed the core of the old Ethiopia. The largely Islamic Oromos, who

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<sup>102</sup>The extraordinary story of Heyling is recorded by Gustav Arén, *Evangelical Pioneers in Ethiopia. Origins of the Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus* (Stockholm and Addis Ababa, 1978) 34–38. Arén bases his story of Heyling on the works of the German Orientalist Job Ludolph/Ludolphus, published in *A New History of Ethiopia* (English tr. London 1684) and on H. Michaelis *Sonderbarer Lebens-Lauff Herrn Peter Heyling’s, aus Lübeck* (Halle, 1724). Heyling was apparently thoroughly at ease among Oriental Christians, befriending the Coptic church leaders. The Egyptian Coptic Patriarch recommended him to the newly appointed head of the Ethiopian Church, who in turn welcomed him to Ethiopia. Arén’s account covers the student group in Lübeck in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, the travels of Heyling in the Holy Land and in Egypt, his stay in a Coptic monastery, and theological and ecclesiological discussions generated by his presence in Ethiopia. It also describes his good standing with the Patriarch and with the Emperor.

had migrated from the coastal regions of East Africa into the present-day South and Central Ethiopia and ultimately inhabited also a large part of today's West Ethiopia, posed a threat to the stability of the Amharic imperial rule. Tensions and conflicts continued between the center and the periphery until the enthronement of Emperor Teodoros in 1855. He was determined to bring the country into order by deliberately integrating the non-Amharic peoples of the territory into Ethiopia.

A politically significant change took place during the second half of the 19th century when large and populous neighboring areas were annexed by imperial Ethiopia. The new borders were finalized by the ill-famed conference in Berlin 1884–1885 when the major colonial powers of the North carved up most of Africa into their respective colonies, redrawing the political map of the continent.

As a result of this action, the surface area of Ethiopia more than doubled. The Amharas lost their position as an ethnic, cultural and religious majority as non-Amharic and non-Orthodox peoples, including Oromos, Tigreans, Somalis, Sidamos, Shankellas and some smaller ethnic groups, were included in the expanded country. This broke the unified society of Amharic Ethiopia, which had been ruled by the privileged aristocracy, the large landowners and the government elite loyal to the emperor. The seeds of disintegration of the imperial tradition had been sown. The Orthodox Church, which had been the official religion of the Amharic Empire, could not go unaffected.

The expansion turned Ethiopia into a pluralistic society, in which adherents of Islam and traditional African religions, and later also of evangelical Christianity, formed a substantial part. The center of the country around Gondar and Addis Ababa maintained the Amharic tradition and represented the old stable Ethiopia. The Amharic proletariat and disadvantaged non-Amharic peoples were consigned to the periphery. Amharic was maintained as the official language of the country. The Orthodox faith remained, however, an official state religion, even though Orthodox Christians no longer represented a religious majority.

The first wave of organized evangelical foreign missions entered Ethiopia at the beginning of the 19th century.<sup>103</sup> A second wave of foreign mission activity arrived in the mid-eighteen-fifties from Sweden and Northern Germany. These two missions planned to concentrate their efforts among Oromos, who originally extended from the coastal regions to the center of Ethiopia. The Swedish Evangelical Mission played a decisive role in the rise of the evangelical communities which were later to form the nucleus of the EECMY.<sup>104</sup>

Much later, especially after World War II, several other mission agencies from Northern Europe and the USA established partnerships with the emerging evangelical

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<sup>103</sup>The first of the Protestant foreign missions was the British and Foreign Bible Society followed soon by the Church Missionary Society from Britain and the Evangelical Mission Society of Basel, Switzerland. Their shared aim was to make the Holy Scriptures available in local tongues and help the Ethiopian Orthodox Church to overcome her isolation from Europe, which had resulted from the spread of Islam in North and East Africa. An extensive account of the activities of these mission agencies in Ethiopia during the first half of the 19th century is given by Arén, pp. 40–84. A short summary is found in Theodore Bachmann and Mercia Brenne Bachmann, *Lutheran Churches in the World*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis 1989, pp. 56–57.

<sup>104</sup>The Swedish Evangelical Mission, and the newly founded Hermannsburg Mission, which was related to the Church of Hannover in Germany, had in the mid-1850s developed plans for a joint mission to Oromo and Islamic peoples in Central and Western Ethiopia, areas which the British agencies had not succeeded in entering. The first Swedish missionaries arrived in 1866. The Hermannsburg Mission was at that time denied access to the country. It joined the other missions in Ethiopia only in 1927.

church communities in Ethiopia.<sup>105</sup> The missions represented different backgrounds and types of piety and also differing attitudes towards the Orthodox tradition, state authority, and the emerging Cold War politics. The policy decisions of the Swedish Evangelical Mission and the Hermannsburg Mission not to bypass but to pursue cooperation with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, to refrain from drawing converts from amongst the Orthodox, and rapidly to entrust the responsibility for mission to local Christians proved itself to be prudent in view of the later revolutionary period.

The annexing of new areas to Ethiopia with the blessing of the Berlin conference brought into the country several newly emerged local church communities with different theological backgrounds, ethnic identities and ideological orientations. All of them were not ready to respect the Orthodox traditions of Ethiopia and to refrain from proselytism. Nevertheless, several of them expressed interest in entering a partnership with the emerging Mekane Yesus community. The occupation of Ethiopia by Italy in 1935–1941 brought a halt to most foreign missionary activity, causing the suspension of all plans for organized cooperation between Protestant communities.

After the Italian withdrawal from Ethiopia in 1941, the country as well as its churches went through many changes. Eritrea, a colony of Italy since 1860, was annexed to Ethiopia. Catholic influence in the region increased. A new self-respect among evangelical Christians began to grow. The Addis Ababa congregation, founded by the Swedish Evangelical Mission already in 1921, decided in 1941 to become independent from foreign missions, developing into a center of evangelical Christians consisting mainly of Amharas, Oromos and Eritreans.

The effort to draw the Protestants in Ethiopia together into one church organization was renewed in 1944, when a Conference of Ethiopian Evangelical Churches (CEEC) was convened. Participants consisted of representatives of congregations of the various Protestant traditions, while foreign mission agencies were excluded from decision-making.

The attempt to form a united evangelical church was unsuccessful because the participants did not have the same understanding of what constituted a church. Similar disagreements divided the supporting mission organizations. As a consequence, the congregations related to the Presbyterian mission and to the Sudan Interior Mission, later named the Society of International Missionaries (SIM), decided to build up, without Lutherans, their own programs for missionary ministry and pastoral training. In turn, the Addis Ababa congregation, which assumed the name Mekane Yesus in the 1950s, was determined to unite congregations related to Lutheran missions working in several provinces into a joint Ethiopian church.

Meanwhile, the Orthodox had become increasingly concerned about the growth of Protestant mission activity, which they accused of proselytization among Orthodox Christians. Attitudes on both sides hardened and the differences between the traditions drove the churches apart from each other, although the Addis Ababa based

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<sup>105</sup> Several Lutheran mission agencies entered Ethiopia in the post-World War II years as partners of the newly constituted EECMY, e.g. the Norwegian Lutheran Mission, the Icelandic Mission and the Danish Ethiopian mission. Other non-Orthodox missions worked with some of the other Protestant churches and communities, although several of them were in practice indigenous and self-reliant. The most visible were the Kale Hiwet Church related to the Society of International Missionaries (SIM), known in other regions as the Sudan Interior Mission; the Meserete Kristos Church, an independent charismatic church; the Seventh Day Adventist Church; the Mulu Wongel Church; the Emmanuel Baptist Church; the Southern Baptist Church; and the Philadelphia Pentecostal Church. The period of persecution drew Protestant churches and communities closer to each other.

Mekane Yesus congregation tried seriously to avoid conflicts with the Orthodox.

However, the sustained attacks by the Ethiopian Orthodox hierarchy against the Protestants strengthened the determination of the leaders and members of the Mekane Yesus congregation to form an autonomous Ethiopian Church of the Lutheran confession. The participation of Mekane Yesus representatives in the All-Africa Lutheran Conference brought together by the LWF in Marangu, Tanzania in 1955, added momentum to the drive to form a country-wide Ethiopian Lutheran Church. Finally, the Lutheran missions from Sweden and Germany, which had a long-standing commitment to working within the Orthodox Church, also lent their support to the local initiative.<sup>106</sup>

The Addis Ababa congregation applied in 1957 for membership in the LWF on behalf of the emerging church, which had not yet been able to adopt its own constitution. The LWF Assembly in Minneapolis 1957 accepted the application, granting the Ethiopian Evangelical Mekane Yesus Church full membership.<sup>107</sup>

The founding of the country-wide EECMY was welcomed by Emperor Haile Selassie. The imperial government recognized the new church, ignoring the protests of the Orthodox Patriarch. Without the explicit support of the Emperor, who himself was Orthodox, the founding of the EECMY would hardly have been possible at that time. Relations between the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and EECMY remained frosty until the mid-eighties. Nevertheless, the EECMY councils and its general secretary, Gudina Tumsa, consistently expressed the commitment of EECMY to the ecumenical goals of visible unity and practical cooperation. The President of EECMY, Emmanuel Abraham, at that time a minister of the Emperor's cabinet, remained suspicious of the Orthodox for decades to come.

The entry of the EECMY into the LWF as a member church brought the most rapidly growing Lutheran church in the world into the international community. As a result, both Ethiopia and the churches within it began to receive increased foreign attention. The growth of the church gave weight to the testimony of the EECMY in both church-related and secular international forums.

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<sup>106</sup> The "strong man" of the Swedish Evangelical Mission in Ethiopia, Manfred Lundgren, who had been a convinced supporter of the role of the SEM to concentrate on evangelical revitalization of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, came in 1954 to the conclusion that the doors were closed for evangelical work within the framework of the Orthodox Church and that the only alternative was to gather the congregations related to Lutheran missions into a Church of the Lutheran confession. His influence was significant for securing mission organizations' support of the founding of the EECMY and of its linking to the LWF as a step towards its continued ecumenical commitment.

<sup>107</sup> The constituting convention of the church took place in January 1959. In retrospect it can be seen that the forming of the EECMY on the basis of the Lutheran confessions opened a way of strengthening the ecumenical ties between the EECMY and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The clear ecumenical commitment of the LWF in its own constitution confirmed the direction even during the long time when the Orthodox Patriarch and the President of the EECMY, Emmanuel Abraham, were not on speaking terms.

Statistics on the Ethiopian population and the membership of the EECMY: <sup>108</sup>

YEAR	MEMBERSHIP OF EECMY	POPULATION OF ETHIOPIA	EECMY PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION
1959	35 000	20 400 000	0,17
1974	209 000	26 787 000	0,75
1977	330 000	28 921 000	1,14
1984	546 740	39 481 000	1,38
1991	900 000	49 831 000	1,81
1998	2 274 209	61 266 000	3,71
2005	4 033 413	78 368 000	5,15
2010	5 000 000	91 592 000	5,45

At the beginning of 1974 the EECMY consisted of four synods, all of them historically related to Lutheran mission organizations. Three more synods were formed in the course of the same year.

Two of them were originally synods of the Evangelical Church of Bethel related to the Presbyterian Church (USA) and were accepted in 1974 as full members of the EECMY. Although all synods had accepted the constitution of EECMY including its confessional basis, and their bilateral ties with their earlier mission partners had been disbanded, some synods still mirrored the theological emphases of their earlier mission partners.

As the statistics on membership show, the church rapidly rose from its position as a tiny marginal group into an influential Ethiopian minority church. Its multiethnic constituency, with strong Oromo participation from the border areas of the country, presented a particular challenge to the Amharic-dominated political and religious center of the country. The government could not afford to ignore this development.

The growth of the EECMY resulted from a combination of several factors: her own local mission and evangelistic activity, theological education and ministry within the EECMY, the merger of other evangelical church groups, including those related to the SIM and to the Presbyterian Church (USA), and from the rise of charismatic movements.<sup>109</sup> In addition, foreign mission agencies gave solid support to theological education and to the training of a wide range of other church workers, further contributing to the growth.

<sup>108</sup> The EECMY membership figures are published in *Lutheran World Information* usually in the last issue of the year concerned or in the first issue of the following year.

<sup>109</sup> The Evangelical Church of Bethel, related to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) became a member of the EECMY in 1974, adding two synods to the EECMY, the Western Wallaga Bethel Synod and the Ilubabor-Kafa-Shoa Synod. A SIM mission station and the related local church group in Asosa, close to the Sudan border, joined the Western Synod of the EECMY in 1980–81. Eide, Øyvind, *Revolution and Religion in Ethiopia: Growth and Persecution of the Mekane Yesus Church* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000), 42.

In the initial years of the EECMY's membership in the LWF, more important than the numerical growth was the church's changing stance towards the state and towards the worldwide church.<sup>110</sup>

The EECMY strengthened the voice of African churches not only in the LWF but also within the ecumenical movement and the wider international community. The EECMY was the first LWF member church of the South concretely to question the paternalism of the churches of the affluent North. Henceforth the African member churches were no longer "younger churches" of the underdeveloped South, but equal and legitimate partner churches with a voice regarding all common concerns of the LWF on the international stage, be they theological or political.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup>The constitutional recognition of the equality of LWF member churches was strengthened by the 1969–1970 revision of the governing structures, management and policies of the LWF approved by the LWF 1970 Assembly in Evian. Its intention was to free the LWF from expressions of paternalism, of concepts of "younger churches" and of dependence on mission agencies. The restructuring corresponded to the trends among churches in Africa and Asia.

<sup>111</sup> Cf. Chapter 10 below, "The Proclamation and Development Debate."

## CHAPTER NINE

# THE PRESENCE OF THE LWF IN ETHIOPIA IN 1947–1973

### 9.1. THE ENTRY OF THE LWF INTO ETHIOPIA

During its first years the LWF maintained contact with Africa mainly through Lutheran mission organizations. The primary concern in the postwar years was to ensure organized support to “orphaned missions” and “younger churches,” from which missionaries had been expelled or interned during the war. The LWF pursued a policy of bringing the mission agencies of its member churches into cooperation with one another and also with other Lutheran churches.

In the case of Ethiopia, where the early mission partners had been the Swedish Evangelical Mission, since 1865 and the Herrmannsburg mission from Germany, since 1927, the LWF as a new actor encouraged other European and North American churches to expand Lutheran mission involvement with the emerging Mekane Yesus Church. Coordinated support for the still small local church communities speeded up the formation of the nation-wide Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY). The mission partners provided an effective network between Ethiopia and the worldwide LWF community for the decades ahead.<sup>112</sup>

Prior to the affiliation of the EECMY with the LWF an avenue opened up for the partnership of Ethiopian Christians with the LWF through Emmanuel Abraham, an influential lay leader of the Mekane Yesus congregation in Addis Ababa. By profession he was a civil servant of Haile Selassie’s imperial government. He had accepted the invitation to preside at the first LWF conference of African church leaders at Marangu, Tanzania in 1955. His grasp of the challenges confronting African churches in the context of decolonization and his wise and firm chairmanship of the conference heralded his coming role as one of the best-known African church leaders within the LWF and a leading spokesperson for African Lutheranism both within the worldwide ecumenical community and among the international humanitarian organizations active in Africa. During his presidency of the EECMY (1969–1985) the church became an influential East African member church of the LWF and expressed the rise of African

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<sup>112</sup>Mission organizations were formally part of the LWF through the LWF Commission on World Mission until its restructuring in 1970 by the 5th Assembly of the LWF in Evian, France. Their role in the LWF since then was understood as instruments of their home churches and of their partner churches in mission rather than as independent societies or agencies which had a place of their own in the LWF apart from its member churches. Nevertheless, the mission agencies continued to have a significant operational role in the new structure of the LWF, specifically involved in critical conflict situations. Evian Report 1970, pp. 153.



self-consciousness in Lutheran and ecumenical forums.<sup>113</sup>

## 9.2. THE LWF AND THE RADIO VOICE OF THE GOSPEL

The establishment in 1963 of its international broadcasting station “Radio Voice of the Gospel” (RVOG), based in Addis Ababa, gave the LWF another strong foothold in Ethiopia. This high-risk and high-cost enterprise reflected a recognition of the role of the political liberation movements that were seeking to free African nations from colonial rule. As the local churches shrugged off the tutelage of mission organizations and the mentality of Northern Christendom, their message to churches in the North and the South was clear.

A new era had dawned for the worldwide mission of the church. Political upheavals had suddenly made a huge number of people in Africa, Asia and in the Middle East totally unreachable to traditional missions carried out from the North.<sup>114</sup> Mission leaders saw the use of the airwaves as a means of communicating the gospel to people otherwise cut off from missionary contact. These thoughts inspired American and Nordic mission leaders who, coming together at LWF gatherings in the mid-fifties, drew up concrete plans.

Four persons, Bishop Fridtjov Birkeli and Dr. Sigurd Aske of Norway, Dr. Fred Schiotz of the USA, and the Rev. Manfred Lundgren of Sweden played decisive roles in launching the international broadcasting station. Influential church leaders such as Dr. Franklin Clark Fry of the U.S., Bishop Hanns Lilje of Germany and Ato Emmanuel Abraham of Ethiopia soon joined them. The group understood the communication possibilities opened up by the spread of inexpensive transistor radios and electronic communication technology.<sup>115</sup> They wanted to harness broadcasting to serve the mission of the church beyond confessional boundaries. Together they were able to convince the LWF governing bodies of the urgent need to act. They also managed to convince those who thought that the costs of such a plan would exceed the means of

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<sup>113</sup> Emmanuel Abraham, born in 1913, left Ethiopia for England in 1935 and thereby escaped the Italian occupation. He was employed as the Secretary of the Ethiopian Legation in London and subsequently made an aide to the Emperor Haile Selassie, who among some other Ethiopians spent a couple of years in exile in London. Abraham had also planned to acquire further education in England but did not find time for that amidst his demanding duties of the tumultuous time. In his memoirs he states that “I have come to the realization that I could not have acquired from any college or university the knowledge and experience I obtained in the office of the Ethiopian Legation in London during that period of distress and stress, working eight years in a highly responsible position.” He returned to Ethiopia in 1943 to serve the Foreign Ministry of the imperial government as a civil servant and as Ethiopian Ambassador to New Delhi, Rome and London, and later as Minister of Posts, Telegraph and Telephones, of Communications, and of Mines until the end of Haile Selassie’s rule. He was detained by the Derg in April 1974 and released in January 1975. He was the President of the EECMY from 1969 to 1985 and a member of the LWF Executive Committee 1957–1984. His personal authority proved significant for the status of the EECMY in its relations with the Ethiopian government. Emmanuel Abraham, *Reminiscences of My Life*, Oslo 1995.

<sup>114</sup> The change in the understanding of the “worldwide mission” of the church and of the role of mission organizations was reflected in the last meeting of the International Missionary Council (IMC) held in Accra, Ghana in 1958, prior to the merger in 1961 of the IMC with the World Council of Churches, and the later conferences of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the WCC.

<sup>115</sup> Cf. Lundgren, Manfred, *Proclaiming Christ to His World: The Experience of Radio Voice of the Gospel, 1957–1977* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, Department of Communication, 1983) also Uppsala, *Studia Missionalia Upsaliensia* XXXVIII.

the LWF.<sup>116</sup>

In his report, Bishop Birkeli also raised questions about Africa's place in the current East-West battle. He expressed the wish that "Africa with its special gifts might become a sort of mediator." He envisaged the Christian church in Africa as having strong influence on the political and social level, and even becoming among religions "the strongest and most decisive factor."

Concrete exploratory work on the site, scope and program, and on the concept for the Lutheran radio station began immediately after the LWF 1957 Assembly in Minneapolis. The necessary support for the plan, both spiritual and material, was soon made available. The purpose of the broadcasting was to convey the basic Christian message and to demonstrate and cultivate church engagement in social and economic development.

The station was not to be used for any commercial or political propaganda purposes whatsoever. The broadcasts would be based on local production and rooted in the life of local congregations. The station would not become an independent center of evangelism run by internationally known evangelists, but an instrument of the local churches and congregations of the target regions in Africa, the Middle East and Asia.

Two African countries, Ethiopia and Liberia, were shortlisted as possible hosts of the broadcasting station. Most governments in Africa, Asia and the Middle East were unwilling to allow independent radio stations to operate from within their borders. Ethiopia was known as a nonaligned country with a long history of church life. The high altitude of Addis Ababa was an advantage for short-wave broadcasting. Liberia for its part was known for its early independence, for its stable democracy, and for its U.S. dollar-based monetary system.<sup>117</sup> When the planners of the LWF project had already decided to concentrate their efforts in Ethiopia, they learned that the Near East Council of Churches (NECC) had also approached the Ethiopian government for permission to establish its Arab language broadcasting station there.<sup>118</sup> After some delay, the Emperor made a clear-cut final decision in favor of the LWF.<sup>119</sup>

The Mekane Yesus Congregation in Addis Ababa, and later the EECMY as a whole, worked with the RVOG from the beginning. The Near East Council of Churches was

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<sup>116</sup>The 1957 Minneapolis Assembly of the LWF received a vague and hesitant proposal from the Africa group of the Commission on World Mission for "further efforts" on radio evangelism in Africa. However, only after the Norwegian Fridtjov Birkeli, himself then Director of the LWF Department of World Mission, had added to the proposal by a powerful personal plea for "tripling our missionary efforts through the air," did the assembly respond by placing the responsibility of LWF "Christian radio and audio-visual evangelism ... in Asia and Africa" firmly on the assembly record.

<sup>117</sup>The image of the stability of the democracy of Liberia was publicly shattered by a violent military coup led by Master Sergeant Samuel K. Doe in April 1980 in Monrovia. The coup had a particular impact on the LWF and its African member churches, because it coincided with the 1980 Conference of Lutheran Churches in Africa in Monrovia.

<sup>118</sup>The two organizations, LWF and NECC, decided in this situation to develop their plans in cooperation without regard to which of them would receive the governmental permission. This decision led them to long-term cooperation.

<sup>119</sup>Key persons on behalf of the LWF involved in negotiations with the Ethiopian government were Dr. Sigurd Aske, the Director of the radio project and station 1959–1974, Dr. Arne Sovik, Director of the LWF Department of World Mission 1958–1967, and Dr. Herbert Schaeffer, a missionary of the American Lutheran Church in Ethiopia 1957–1961. Emmanuel Abraham, who at that time was the Minister of Telecommunications of the imperial government, excluded himself from preparing the proposal to be submitted to the Emperor in favor of his predecessor in the government, H.E. Ato Berhanu Dinke, who was an active member of the Orthodox Church. With this decision Ato Emmanuel wanted to minimize tensions with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church over the permit for the LWF. For the full story of the negotiations, see Lundgren, pp. 52–55.

another early partner. The LWF also invited the Ethiopian Orthodox Church to participate in the programming.

The ideas behind the approved broadcasting were rooted in the postwar Lutheran understanding of mission. The programming was to follow a “30/70” pattern, which meant that 30% of the broadcast time was to be devoted to evangelism and Christian education, and 70% to general education, development concerns, and international news.

The planners offered assurances, albeit over-optimistically, that the approved program pattern would be free from any particular ideological bias and from any allegiance to specific governmental interests. The aim was to fulfil a bridge-building and reconciling role between the Cold War forces in the target areas. The programs aimed at particular audiences were to be prepared in regional production studios in cooperation with local personnel from those areas. The recruitment and training of staff for the Addis Ababa station and for the local studios were high priority tasks. The programs were to be audible in most of Africa, the Middle East and parts of Asia. Cooperation with the EECMY and with other Ethiopian churches within the Ethiopian ecumenical community was vital for the station.

The Radio Voice of the Gospel station and studio were formally inaugurated with appropriate festivities on February 26, 1963 in Addis Ababa, after six years of preparatory and construction work.<sup>120</sup> During its eleven years in operation it was to be the broadest and most visible channel of communication between the LWF and Ethiopia.

The planners and builders of the station were fully aware of the high risks, including the possibility that the broadcasting permit might be withdrawn in the event of a political crisis. The post-colonial storm clouds sweeping across the continent overshadowed all the work. The unsuccessful bid to depose the Emperor in 1970 was a fresh reminder of the unstable political situation. The LWF leaders estimated that a ten-year period of successful broadcasting would justify the investments of money and personnel.<sup>121</sup>

### **9.3. THROUGH THE MISSION AND SERVICE PROGRAMS OF THE LWF**

The affiliation of the EECMY in the LWF opened up a wider role for the LWF in Ethiopia.<sup>122</sup> A network of cooperation emerged between the Ethiopian church, its mission

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<sup>120</sup> The ceremony was opened by Emmanuel Abraham, Minister of Posts, Telegraphs and Telephones of the government of Ethiopia. Emperor Haile Selassie delivered the inauguration address, in which he expressed his and the government’s concurrence with the ecumenical concept and programming plans. Franklin Clark Fry, a former president of the LWF presented the theological, missiological and ecumenical principles that were to guide the operation of the station. Cf. Lundgren, *op.cit.*, 92–93.

<sup>121</sup> The total operational costs from 1960 to the end of 1977 were US\$ 12,258,000 and the total initial investment in the station had been \$4,237,000. The number of station personnel had grown from 100 in 1963 to 212 in 1976. The Ethiopian share of the staff consisted of both “skilled” and “unskilled” persons. Their number at the end of 1976 was 190. Of the expatriate staff in 1976, 15 came from Europe/USA and 7 from Africa/Asia.

<sup>122</sup> The first step had been taken when the Mekane Yesus congregation in Addis Ababa, registered as a church, was received as a member of the LWF at the 1957 Minneapolis Assembly. It consisted of one congregation and an elementary school. Its acceptance was apparently influenced by the desire to elect Emmanuel Abraham, a member of that congregation, to the LWF Executive Committee, membership of a member church being a prerequisite for the position. The nationwide Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus was constituted only in 1959 and was received by the LWF 1963 Assembly in Helsinki as the Ethiopian member Church. It consisted at that time of four synods. with 43,000 members in total. Minneapolis Proceedings, 163, Helsinki Proceedings, 58, 98, 100.

partners and the LWF. Following appeals by the Mekane Yesus Church and with the active encouragement of the LWF, new Lutheran mission partners entered Ethiopia. For several decades the mission organizations had a formally recognized role in the LWF through its Commission on World Mission. It was to serve as a clearing house for mission theology and strategy. That commission largely followed in its approach the mission tradition characteristic of the International Missionary Council with its emphases on self-expanding, self-governing and self-supporting churches.

The formal umbrella role of the LWF regarding the mission organizations came to an end with the restructuring of the LWF in 1970. However, mission agencies continued to play an indirect role within the LWF. This role proved critically important in Ethiopia. With the strong backing of the cluster of mission partners and the LWF, the EECMY pursued her mission with its focus on evangelism, on the building up of congregations, on Christian education and on the training of local leadership in all aspects of church work. In the face of the enormous and pressing needs on the ground, a steadily widening range of social development concerns emerged as an integral part of the mission, including participation in health care provision, in literacy campaigns and in the improvement of general education.

A strategic center for cooperation in missionary work was theological education. The Mekane Yesus Theological Seminary was opened in 1960 in Mekanissa, then on the outskirts of Addis Ababa. The initial steps to establish the seminary were taken by the Swedish Evangelical Mission. Mission agencies in cooperation with the LWF played a central role in providing it with competent faculty. Coordinated international support for scholarships made possible also an expanding training of national staff for the seminary and for other training programs of the EECMY.

Around the same time, in 1961, a new interdepartmental service unit of the LWF, the Community Development Service (CDS), was founded to respond to rapidly growing social development needs. The churches of developing countries were committed to participating in this work as part of their mission.<sup>123</sup>

The new unit received an astoundingly positive response among churches and governmental development agencies in Europe. Especially the German and Scandinavian contributions to the LWF skyrocketed when the governmental development agencies began to support development projects administered by churches. The amount of funds available for development projects rapidly matched and even surpassed the funds received from the constituencies of churches in Europe and North America for mission and interchurch aid.

The EECMY responded to the new possibilities by forming its own development unit, Christian Relief and Development Fund. It became for the LWF the main channel for supporting EECMY-related development projects. It was to free the increasingly overloaded church administration from the rapidly expanding management of church-related relief and development projects. The functions of the LWF-CDS were limited to external financing and advisory support, while the whole initiation, planning, implementation and financial administration of the LWF-CDS funded projects was the responsibility of the receiving church.

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<sup>123</sup> The CDS, founded in 1961, was originally an interdepartmental tool liaising with the LWF Departments of World Service (DWS) and World Mission and with other LWF units that participated in the social development projects of member churches. Following the LWF restructuring of 1970 the CDS was made into a sub-unit of the DWS with an interdepartmental staff advisory group, so as to ensure that all aspects of social development would be covered in the work of the development arm of the LWF.

The EECMY understood its commitment to development goals as an integral part of its involvement in mission, the target of which was the “whole human person and the whole society.” The projects supported by the LWF-CDS included agricultural and resettlement projects, road and bridge building, the establishment of agricultural and commercial schools, equipping women for development activities, and water conservation and drilling projects. Much of this work, initiated during imperial rule, bore fruit long after the revolution. The EECMY role in community development implied close cooperation with local, provincial and national governmental authorities.

Mission agencies also continued to provide bilateral development aid which was, with the consent of the EECMY, mostly directed to the synods with which they had a history of cooperation. The leaders of the central office of the EECMY emphasized to her mission partners that such mission agency activity was to be coordinated by them. The bilateral partnerships with specific synods or centers were ended by a joint agreement between EECMY and her mission partners, when the Committee of Mutual Christian Relief (CMCR) was formed in 1978.

A further avenue for the LWF presence in Ethiopia in cooperation with the EECMY, yet semi-independent of it, opened up in 1973–1974 through the operational service arm of its Department of World Service (DWS). Repeated droughts in Africa had led the relief unit of the LWF to expand its role beyond immediate refugee relief work to the alleviation of suffering caused by natural disasters.

The LWF-DWS had since its founding gained extensive experience of refugee, resettlement and welfare services, first in Europe, and soon after among the Palestinians in the Middle East, among refugees from mainland China in Hong Kong and subsequently in Africa.<sup>124</sup> The massive flow of refugees from Portuguese-ruled Mozambique, from Rwanda and also from the apartheid South Africa to Tanzania in the 1960s and 1970s led the LWF-DWS to expand the capacity of its Dar es Salaam based agency, the Tanganyika Christian Refugee Service (TCRS). The WCC and the Christian Council of Tanzania became co-sponsors. The TCRS in 1974 signed a tripartite agreement between the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Tanzanian Government.

The TCRS rapidly became the largest refugee and resettlement operation of the LWF-DWS in Africa. Most of the Department of World Service activity was carried out in politically and ideologically high-tension areas. By the beginning of the seventies the department had extensive experience of acute conflict situations and of managing church-state relationships in areas where the governments had to face movements of political change from inside and acute political pressures from outside. Its status as a recognized non-governmental humanitarian organization and the linkage with U.N. agencies provided an important shield for the LWF-DWS programs in politically sensitive areas.

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<sup>124</sup> *Reports 1963–1969* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1970), 195–213, prepared for the LWF Assembly in Evian, gives an overview of the policies that the LWF Commission on World Service developed and followed during the rapid expansion of the scope of the LWF-DWS operational functions. The author of the report, Bruno Muetzelfeldt of Australia, the director of the department, spelled out the main emphases of the LWF-DWS, which defined the place of its services within the mission of the church, its relations with the local churches, its role in relation to prevailing and emerging political structures, its commitment to total openness to peoples in need “without regard to race, religion or political conviction”, its ecumenical intention and practices, its multilateral approach to crisis areas, and its relationships with recognized intergovernmental and non-governmental humanitarian organizations. These emphases and criteria became characteristic for the LWF-DWS for the remaining years of the Cold War.

In 1973 Ethiopia once again faced a large-scale famine. The near bankruptcy of the imperial government caused by the international oil crisis aggravated the impact of the drought. Alarming news about the imminent death of hundreds of thousands of people reached the LWF-DWS through the Mekane Yesus Church and through its relief and development network in East Africa even before the crisis was acknowledged by the Ethiopian government.

The LWF-DWS, upon the invitation of the EECMY and in cooperation with her, promptly initiated an emergency relief program. The imperial government speedily gave the necessary clearances for the entry of an expatriate team, for the establishment of an LWF service office, and for the importation of food and the necessary equipment for relief centers. Already in early 1974 an internationally staffed field office was up and running in Addis Ababa. The relief action became fully operational at the very moment when the revolutionary military group began taking over the governmental functions. The LWF relief actions continued in the early years of the military regime without any interference or break and in close cooperation with the EECMY. However, the launching of an international relief program, obtaining work permits for expatriate staff, and the importation of equipment required governmental authorization and a pledge to keep the authorities informed about progress.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> The agreements between the LWF-DWS and the Ethiopian revolutionary military have been hard to trace. The fate of the masses of starving people may have been an issue which the new regime did not want to touch as it struggled to consolidate its power.

# CHAPTER TEN

## THE PROCLAMATION AND DEVELOPMENT DEBATE, 1972–1974

From the very beginning of its membership in the LWF the Mekane Yesus Church proved to be an unexpectedly active partner within the worldwide Lutheran community. This became particularly evident in the widely publicized EECMY correspondence on the issue of the balance between international support for evangelism and for social and economic development.<sup>126</sup>

The letter from Emmanuel Abraham, the President of EECMY, to André Appel, the General Secretary of the LWF, of March 9, 1971, was a manifestation of the new relationship of African member churches with the LWF. The exchange of letters was followed by a public statement of the officers of the EECMY, May 9, 1972, entitled “On the Interrelation between Proclamation of the Gospel and Human Development.”

The statement was an open challenge to churches in the North to reflect on their identity and their understanding of the mission of the church, and to inform themselves better about the situation of the church in Ethiopia. The statement pointed out the glaring contradictions in the policies of mission and development agencies of European and North American churches, which in the eyes of the Ethiopian member church seemed to follow the development priorities of European and North American governments and to ignore the intention of the Ethiopian church to communicate the gospel in its fullness to the whole human person and the whole society.

The statement reflected impatience regarding the imposition of the values and priorities of the governments of affluent countries and of their secularized churches on the Ethiopian churches and people. It called for increased support for Christian education and for the theological training of future pastors and other church workers, so as to meet the needs of the rapidly growing but exceedingly poor church. The statement voiced the suspicion that the LWF and its affluent member churches in effect tended to serve the political interests of Europe and North America. It concluded as follows:

*Our hope is that our sister Churches [of the North] do not judge our needs solely on their own criteria and on the condition that they have stipulated. We want to proclaim Christ because we believe it is our responsibility. We want to proclaim Christ because our people are hungering for Him.*

*We trust that in this document we have made the reasons for our concerns clear and that the current theological and missiological trends in the West will not be the sole determining factors for aid but that African views will be taken more seriously and considered against the background of the present situation.*<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Resolution of the EECMY Assembly, January 1971, the letter from Emmanuel Abraham to the general secretary of the LWF of March 9, 1971, and the Statement of Church Officers of the EECMY, May 9, 1972, “The Interrelation Between Proclamation of the Gospel and Human Development.”

<sup>127</sup> *Witness and Discipleship – Leadership of the Church in Multi-Ethnic Ethiopia in a Time of Revolution*, (Addis Ababa: Gudina Tumsa Foundation, 2003). Also: Eide, op. cit., 263–268.

The statement triggered an intensive discussion at LWF headquarters and among member churches about the role of affluent churches of the North in the mission and development among peoples of the South.

In response to the EECMY statement, the LWF convened a representative international consultation on Proclamation and Development, October 21–25, 1974 in Nairobi, Kenya.<sup>128</sup> It took place at the time when the Ethiopian revolution was turning violent. The leading theme was “Serving the Whole Human Being.” The consultation highlighted the oneness of unconditional service to the needy, without regard to religion, ideology or social status, and the explicit communication of the gospel of Jesus Christ as the main concern of the church. The domineering influence of Northern partner churches and of “donor agencies” on their partners in the developing countries of the South emerged as a point of contestation. Voices protesting against the servile role of churches of the South towards mission and development agencies of the North and their governmental sponsors increased the heat of the Nairobi discussions.

The African voices at this consultation signaled a departure from the concepts of mission and development prevalent among theologians and church leaders of the North. During the following years the debate on a “wholistic understanding of mission” spread across LWF member churches and agencies and within the ecumenical movement.

The participants in the consultation faced a further challenge, which had been voiced by Burgess Carr, the general secretary of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC). He had called for a jointly agreed “moratorium,” a temporary halt to all foreign support in the form of money or expatriate personnel to churches in Africa and Asia. He maintained that only such a moratorium would provide an adequate measure for churches of the South to escape their unhealthy dependence on European and North American churches, and also to escape the Cold War polarities. He was convinced that that dependence distorts the mission of African churches on their own soil.

This call was made at a conference of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the WCC, December 1972 – January 1973 in Pattaya, Thailand, and again at the assembly of the AACC at Lusaka, Zambia in May 1974. Carr questioned whether any mission, development or relief program, even when declared by churches to be non-political, could avoid having political dimensions. The Nairobi consultation concurred that the life and witness of each church had political influence, even though the church was fundamentally and by definition unaligned with governments and political parties.

The Nairobi consultation of 1974 and the whole Proclamation and Development debate produced a real stir within the LWF. The impact of the personal role of Gudina Tumsa, the secretary general of the EECMY, cannot be overestimated. He was forceful in presenting his views as they arose out of the Ethiopian context.

The consultation raised urgent questions about the relationship between diaconia and development on one hand and evangelism and teaching on the other. Both were recognized as essential elements of the mission of the church. Questions were also raised about the influence of wealth and of political allegiances on the self-understanding of the church. Participants pointed to the differing priorities of local Christians and of church institutions and also of national churches and their international

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<sup>128</sup> *Proclamation and Human Development*, Documentation from the Lutheran World Federation Consultation, Nairobi, Kenya, October 21–25, 1974 (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1975).



organizations. The debate left its marks on later mission statements of churches and gave a renewed impetus to the pursuit of the oneness of the church expressed in her worship, teaching and also her social ministries.

The concern for the wholeness of the witness of the church as expressed by the officers of the EECMY and especially by the general secretary of the church, Gudina Tumsa, drew the attention of the LWF Study Department and its director, Ulrich Duchrow, to the Ethiopian experience. The struggle of EECMY for its identity and witness emerged as a significant case study within the Ecclesiology Study of the LWF in 1972–1976.<sup>129</sup>

Although the Nairobi consultation failed to find common answers to the thorny questions raised, it called both rich and poor churches to examine their own ecclesial, missional and political integrity as members of the Church Universal. The costly struggle of the Mekane Yesus Church during the years of revolution added weight to the Ethiopian plea to reaffirm the divine foundation of the church. The consultation grew into an existential challenge to the LWF leaders and personnel in the subsequent restless years as they grappled with divisive forces on all continents.

By the beginning of 1974 the LWF had already become a deep part of the life of the EECMY. Whoever governed the country had to work with this growing church community, which by then consisted of more than 200,000 members. Although small in the Ethiopian perspective, its voice already carried far beyond its immediate confines to international audiences. No other church or country had engaged with the whole of the LWF as profoundly.

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<sup>129</sup> A considerable number of publications appeared in connection with the LWF Ecclesiology Study. Two helpful ones appeared under the same title: Lutheran World Federation Department of Studies, *The Identity of the Church and Its Service to the Whole Human Being: Final Volume I and Final Volume II, Summary, Analysis, Interpretation* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1977). The Introductions to these volumes were prepared by Ulrich Duchrow and Karl H. Hertz.

# CHAPTER ELEVEN

## FROM IMPERIAL RULE TO REVOLUTION

### 11.1. THE EMPEROR'S RULE

The entry of a group of army officers on February 18, 1974 to the premises of the imperial government proved to be the first sign of the changes to come. The intention of the group was to present a set of demands to the Emperor and his cabinet. It was the quiet, almost inconspicuous beginning to a series of events that evolved into a military take-over and then plunged Ethiopia into the turmoil of revolution, eventually ending the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie I and thereby also the centuries-old imperial era.

Haile Selassie I (1892–1975) had enjoyed high international esteem as Emperor from 1930 on. During the Italian occupation in 1936–1941 he lived in exile in Britain. He rose already in his émigré years to become a leader figure for postwar Africa, recognized as such by the allied powers. Upon his return to Ethiopia he provided an impetus to the independence movements in Africa. He voiced from early on his total opposition to racism. He embodied in his person African statesmanship, religious tolerance, and openness to social reform. He emerged as an acknowledged leader of the movement for African unity. Addis Ababa became a symbolic capital of Africa and the site of the headquarters of the Organization of African Unity (OAU).<sup>130</sup>

The longstanding alliance between the Emperor and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church had reflected the cultural and religious continuity in Ethiopia. It had contributed to a wide recognition of Ethiopia's place in the history of civilizations as an ancient Christian nation and as a symbol of stability in the sea of peoples of Africa. The alliance had ensured also the cultural and political dominance of the Amharic elite in the public life of the country.

In global politics Haile Selassie I had consistently supported the non-alignment movement that drew adherents from many newly independent countries seeking an alternative to the bi-polar division of the world. His government was represented at

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<sup>130</sup>The address of acceptance by Haile Selassie I as the newly elected President of the OAU, at its founding assembly in Addis Ababa in 1963, summarizes his position on the role and significance of Africa on the world stage. The following excerpts from his address illustrate his emphases:

"We reaffirm today, in the name of principle and right, our opposition to prejudice, wherever and in whatever form it may be found, and particularly do we rededicate ourselves to the eradication of racial discrimination from this continent. We can never rest content with our achievements so long as men, in any part of Africa, assert on racial grounds their superiority over the least of our brothers. Racial discrimination constitutes a negation of the spiritual and psychological equality which we have fought to achieve and a denial of the personality and dignity which we have struggled to establish for ourselves as Africans. Our political and economic liberty will be devoid of meaning for so long as the degrading spectacle of South Africa's apartheid continues to haunt our waking hours and to trouble our sleep. We must redouble our efforts to banish this evil from our land. If we persevere, discrimination will one day vanish from the earth. If we use the means available to us, South Africa's apartheid, just like colonialism, will shortly remain only as a memory. If we pool our resources and use them well, this spectre will be banished forever."

"Africa shares with Asia a common background of colonialism, of exploitation, of discrimination, of oppression. At Bandung, African and Asian States dedicated themselves to the liberation of their two continents from foreign domination and affirmed the right of all nations to develop in their own way, free of any external interference. The Bandung Declaration and the principles enunciated at that conference remain today valid for us all."

the Bandung conference in 1955. He had demonstrated significant independence in his foreign policy, maintaining close ties with the British government while openly supporting anti-colonial struggles in Africa. Despite the tensions between the U.S. and China, he had also cultivated early contacts with the China of Mao Zedong while simultaneously pursuing military cooperation with the U.S.

Haile Selassie's political positions were communicated inside and outside Ethiopia by means of illustrative actions. One of them was the occasion to celebrate the inauguration of a direct airline connection, the first from Africa, between Beijing and Addis Ababa in January 1973 by Ethiopian Airlines and China Airways. An exclusive Chinese circus-ballet group had been specially flown over to perform to an Ethiopian and international audience at an Addis Ababa theater. The Emperor attended this amusing and flamboyant festive occasion in person.<sup>131</sup>

Soon after the end of World War II, worsening domestic conditions in Ethiopia began to damage the international reputation of the Emperor and his government, reducing their influence. The Italian occupation had left its scars. The annexation of Eritrea, a former Italian colony, added to the difficulties of the already impoverished country. Internal grievances began to multiply. The unjust privileges of landowners, which condemned the vast majority of the rural population to lives of serfdom, was both symptom and cause of a deepening rift between the governing elite and the impoverished majority. The inequality between the ruling Amharic elite and the marginalized people, most conspicuously the Oromos, Tigreans and Eritreans, was a cause of growing dissatisfaction. Repeated droughts and subsequent mass starvations exposed the government's impotence.

Finally, in 1973 the international oil crisis shook the foundations of the Ethiopian economy to the extent that the government lost its grip on power. Corruption spread and undermined the social order. Mutinies occurred in military units because of poor pay and intolerable conditions. The Emperor could no longer count on the loyalty of the army. A transfer of power was emerging as the only way out of social deadlock – Ethiopian society was becoming a huge powder keg. The coming together of radicalized intellectuals and disgruntled military officers, several of them trained in the U.S., provided the detonator.

The Emperor's relations with international church organizations towards the very last years of his eroding rule are illustrated by two major events in the early seventies.

The Ethiopian government endorsed the invitation issued by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church to the World Council of Churches to hold its Central Committee meeting in Addis Ababa, December 28, 1970 – January 7, 1971. At that time criticism of the Emperor's rule was widespread inside the country whose problems were well known within the ecumenical movement and extensively documented by advocates of social and economic justice in different parts of the world.

To the disappointment of the more radicalized members of the churches of Europe and North America, the internal social and political problems of Ethiopia did not surface in the proceedings of the WCC Central Committee, whereas Haile Selassie demonstrated his identification with the worldwide church specifically by inviting all five hundred participants of the WCC gathering to participate in a "prayer breakfast" at his palace.

The Emperor's government also welcomed the General Assembly of the World

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<sup>131</sup> The author was an eyewitness to this enjoyable celebration of non-alignment policies.

Student Christian Federation (WSCF) to Addis Ababa in 1972–73 in spite of the open concern of the Ethiopian authorities regarding the influence of left-wing radicalism among university students and among Christian student organizations of the day. The Ethiopian host organization was the Ethiopian Haimanote Orthodox Student Movement. The site provided for the assembly was the Africa Hall of the UN Economic Commission for Africa instead of the university campus. Two cabinet ministers were involved in the host committee. The internal security agency of the government went to great lengths to prevent contacts between the politically restless students at the University of Addis Ababa and the participants of the international assembly. The Emperor showed his generosity towards the worldwide Christian student movement by inviting all the participants to a reception at his palace.<sup>132</sup>

The Emperor may have counted too much on the international prestige of Ethiopia as providing a unique case among the family of African nations. Its uniqueness was based on its long-documented history, on the continuity of its culture and religion during close to two thousand years, and on the stability of its governance through periods of natural disasters, internal tribal conflicts and foreign interventions. Neither the attempted *coup d'état* in 1960 nor several peasant rebellions inside Ethiopia, which all failed, could shake the esteem in which Haile Selassie was held abroad. The impressive historical record of the Empire was, however, not enough to bolster his dwindling authority at home. The main causes for the fall of the Emperor's rule in 1974 were the continued deterioration of the living conditions of the majority of the population, the collapse of the Ethiopian economy, and the total failure of the government to manage the famine situation.

Unlike the liberation leaders of several other African countries, none of the original leaders of the Ethiopian revolution had been trained in the Soviet Union. Instead, many young Ethiopians, including Colonel Haile Mariam Mengistu, had received military training and higher education in the U.S. The political radicalism that was sweeping through American and European campuses in the sixties was the source of Marxist ideas adopted by the future leaders of Ethiopia. Nevertheless, the visions of revolution and the anarchic-Marxist leanings of the American "New Left" evoked no sympathy among Soviet ideologists. Instead, their appearance around Mengistu became an additional cause for the Soviet leaders' mistrust of his declared "Marxism-Leninism."

It is also noteworthy that in the early seventies there were no signs of agitation or infiltration from within the Soviet camp in Ethiopia. The interests of the socialist

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<sup>132</sup> The global political tension was keenly felt at this Addis Ababa Assembly of the WSCF in December 1972 and January 1973. The Ethiopian government took a close interest in the preparations and the Minister of Justice gave a welcoming address at the opening session. He personally supervised the establishment of security measures for the assembly. A main task of the security police was to prevent communication between the assembly delegates and teachers and students at the University of Addis Ababa. This included controlling the mimeographing services for the assembly. Local students had been enrolled as stewards to assist the WSCF office staff from Geneva. When the mimeographing of documents for the assembly was about to begin, the Geneva staff found that the machines did not work. A member of the local staff explained that a repair team would be available. Meanwhile, the writer, as the general secretary of the WSCF was requested to give written authorization to the Geneva colleague in charge of the office services by signing a separate permit for each document for duplication. After these formalities were completed, the technicians suddenly appeared and got the machines working. *Report of the WSCF Assembly at Addis Ababa December 28, 1972–January 9, 1973*; Lehtonen, Risto, *Story of a Storm: The Ecumenical Student Movement in the Turmoil of Revolution* (Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, UK: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998) and (Helsinki: Finnish Society of Church History, 1998), 289–314.

bloc were, at this point, still clearly directed elsewhere in Africa – as an example of this, Ethiopia’s hostile neighbor, Somalia, was at this time an ally of the Soviet Union.

## 11.2. THE BREAK WITH THE PAST

The takeover of the government began with the demands of young army officers for changes in both the imperial cabinet and its policies. The Emperor’s government had no other choice but to give in. Ten days later the Prime Minister Akilou Habte-Wold resigned.

The officers’ group smoothly took over the running of the government, while the now powerless cabinet of the Emperor was kept on as a facade. The declared goal of the officers was to mold Ethiopia into a truly democratic African country, in which socialism with an African flavor would define the course of social and economic development. The Tanzanian experiment, Julius Nyerere’s model of African socialism, was regarded a forerunner. Illiteracy was to be eliminated. The perennial hunger was to be overcome. Proper health care was to be made available to all. Inherited social and tribal conflicts and grievances would be solved. The peoples of the periphery were to be given a voice. The autocracy of the centralized, elite-based imperial regime of Amharas was to be replaced by a representative government.

In response to these promises, the revolutionary leaders initially received wide support among rural politicians, among the young academic elite, within the army and also among Protestant Christians and churches. The leaders of the Mekane Yesus Church publicly welcomed the revolution at its earliest stage. Their attitude arose from their identification with the impoverished people, who comprised the bulk of the constituency of the church. Through their constituencies, church leaders were well informed about the plight of the people.

At the end of April 1974, the military group detained all the cabinet ministers of the Emperor’s government and placed the Emperor Haile Selassie under house arrest. Barely seven months after the beginning of the change, on September 12, the newly formed Provisional Military Administrative Council – the “Derg” – announced the transfer of governmental authority to itself.<sup>133</sup> The military had formally deposed the Emperor, dissolved the parliament and suspended the Ethiopian constitution. This marked the definitive end of imperial rule. Lt.-General Aman Mikael Andom took on the chairmanship of the Derg and Colonel Haile Mariam Mengistu was elected deputy chairman.

On 12 November 1974, fifty-nine of the detained members of the deposed imperial government and Aman Mikael Andom, the first Chairman of the Derg, were summarily executed upon the orders of the hard-core military group. This wiped out any chance of an open-ended and more peaceful “creeping” revolution steered by a political coalition. Power moved into the hands of the openly Marxist wing, which increasingly ignored the interests of the marginalized people and the regions. The new leaders were determined to eliminate all opposition.

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<sup>133</sup> Already on June 28, 1974 the revolutionary group, calling itself the Co-ordinating Committee of the Armed Forces, the Police, and the Territorial Army Forces, popularly called “Derg” (an Amharic word for ‘Committee’), purged of dissenters, became a 106-member Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC), replacing the imperial governing structure, but still under the name “Derg.”

News of these events quickly reached the provincial leaders and the churches. The new regime lost its credibility overnight. The ruthless violence of the radical wing of the regime shocked many of the popular leaders and activists of the revolution as well as the leaders of the EECMY. Positive expectations shifted to a mixture of fear and critical caution about the outcome of the revolution.<sup>134</sup>

In the ensuing months the killings continued. The regime moved rapidly to liquidate those persons of influence, non-Marxist and Marxist alike, whom the Derg considered unreliable. Major Haile Mariam Mengistu emerged as the strong man in charge. He showed no mercy to any comrade of the original revolutionary team who showed the slightest sign of dissent.

On 3 February 1977, Haile Mariam Mengistu staged a *coup d'état*, and made himself head of state, completing the switch from democratic aspirations to dictatorship. He declared "Marxism-Leninism" and "scientific socialism" the official ideology of Ethiopia. He launched a massive campaign to purge all levels of the national government as well as the provincial and city administrations from all resistance to his rule. Summary executions were the method of choice.

Dissenters, who had supported the initial goals of the revolution, rejected totalitarian autocracy and the centralization of the political system and affirmed the rights of the peoples of the periphery. The purge was specifically aimed at intellectually articulate Marxist political groupings, driving many of Mengistu's former supporters into such Marxist oriented underground movements as the Oromo, Tigrean and Eritrean liberation fronts.<sup>135</sup> The Putsch turned the Derg into a pliant tool in the hands of Mengistu. The period from mid-1977 to the end of 1978 came to be called "the Era of Red Terror."

No segment of society was safe from the hard hand of the ruler. Direct persecution also extended to churches and Islamic communities, despite the governmental declaration of complete religious freedom.

The Red Terror coincided with the war between Ethiopia and Somalia that erupted in July 1977 and brought the Ethiopian army close to defeat. Moreover, the rising political and military activity of the Eritrean, Tigrean and Oromo liberation movements posed an internal threat to the government. These pressures prompted Mengistu to seek all possible support from the Soviet Union. He did his best to represent the Ethiopian revolution as an authentic expression of Marxist-Leninist ideology. The Red Terror was presented as an African version of the great November Revolution of Russia and of its violent follow-up by Joseph Stalin. Mengistu needed Soviet military aid in order to throw the intruding Somali troops out of Ogaden in the southeast of

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<sup>134</sup> The shift is most obvious in the statements of Gudina Tumsa, general secretary of the EECMY, who counseled the members of the church to prepare for persecution and suffering because of the political orientation of the government.

<sup>135</sup> A conspicuous target were seven pan-Ethiopian organizations out of which six represented Marxist views and two had been close allies of Mengistu. The most influential of these were the right-wing Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU), the Marxist Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) and the All-Ethiopian Socialist Movement (MEISON). Of the smaller ones, worth mentioning is the Ethiopian Oppressed People's Revolutionary Struggle (ECHAAT). Among Oromos, there were two organizations with different goals: the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Oromia (IFLO) wanted to form an Islamic state in Eastern Oromia, while the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) promoted a non-religious Oromo organization. A further challenge for the Mengistu regime came from The Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF).

the country and to prevent the collapse of his regime.

In response to Mengistu's desperate pleas, two foreign governments came to the rescue of the revolutionary government of Ethiopia. The first was Cuba, which had already been heavily involved in the liberation struggles of Angola and Namibia and was eager to participate in the defense of Ethiopia against the intrusion of Somalia, which the Cubans assumed was already in America's pocket. Their own experience of the intrusions of the U.S. in Latin America since 1959 had convinced them of the justification of the Ethiopian revolution.

The second government to respond was that of the Soviet Union, which only a few days after Cuba decided to come to the rescue of Mengistu's regime, withdrawing its support for Somalia, its former ally. A joint, Soviet-led and financed operation was launched to push the Somali army out of Ogaden and to back up Mengistu. The Kremlin had made its decision only after intense internal debate and considerable hesitation.

Indeed, the Soviet Union's lack of enthusiasm for the Ethiopian revolution was conspicuous throughout the Mengistu era. The Kremlin leaders questioned his understanding of Marxist thought, some of them claiming that Mengistu had no real grasp of it at all. Yet their pragmatic conclusion was that the success of the revolution in Ethiopia was in the interest of the USSR, because it would weaken the control of the U.S. and Western Europe over Africa. While the Soviet leaders did not count Ethiopia as a reliable ally, they feared that refusing to support Mengistu would diminish Soviet prestige in developing countries and make the socialist option less attractive to African eyes. This was particularly important in the context of the events in Somalia where the experiment with socialism had run aground.

A massive supply of Soviet arms and military "advisers" and a large contingency of Cuban soldiers were rapidly flown to Mengistu's aid in mid-1977. The Somali army was defeated early in 1978 and Mengistu was able to claim a great victory for the Ethiopian army – and for the revolution.

Unease about the Ethiopian operation, however, soon grew in the Kremlin. Not only was it costly – it had also provoked an unexpected anti-Soviet reaction in the U.S.

Political support from the USSR, the GDR and other socialist countries of Europe and from Cuba continued well after the Ogaden war and long beyond the years of the Red Terror. However, the Soviet government with its new perestroika policies began to withdraw from Ethiopia after Mikhail Gorbachev's access to power in 1985. The Kremlin was not ready to jeopardize the ongoing SALT II negotiations on the mutual reduction of arms, or to endanger the détente between the U.S. and the USSR, which had culminated in the 1975 Helsinki agreement of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. Moreover, the deterioration of the Soviet economy forced the country to withdraw from areas that were of limited political and military interest. Finally, the confidence of the Soviet leaders in Mengistu's leadership declined further when he failed to manage the Ethiopian economy and to cope with evermore dramatic hunger disasters. Meanwhile, Marxist-oriented liberation movements emerged among the Eritrean, Tigrean and Oromo communities that seemed more deserving of support.

By the beginning of Gorbachev's rule, the Soviet Union was ready to start its total disengagement from Africa. The Soviet-Ethiopian agreement on Soviet military support to Ethiopia expired in 1991. The formation of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia in September 1984, modeled on the Communist Party of the USSR, came too late to impress the communist allies. The massive suffering of people under political purg-

es, the religious persecutions and the failure of Mengistu's regime to improve living conditions were for the perestroika-Kremlin ultimate signs of failure.

The withdrawal of the Soviet Union from Ethiopia went largely unnoticed in the West, particularly the U.S., even when Mengistu complained bitterly about the Soviet betrayal of the Ethiopian people. A period of internal uncertainty under the isolated Marxist dictator continued until May 1991, when the Tigrean forces took over Addis Ababa and the President of Ethiopia, Haile Mariam Mengistu, fled to Zimbabwe where he received permanent asylum.<sup>136</sup>

The revolution as a whole and the coup by Mengistu in 1977 in particular, defined Ethiopia's position in the Cold War until the last years of the regime. The case of Ethiopia also added a new dimension to the understanding of Africa. It demonstrated that the contradiction between the oppressed poor and the privileged rich in Africa transcended both the imposed extensions of the Cold War to the continent and the struggles for liberation from colonialism and white racism. The intellectual history of Europe including that of Marxism is an insufficient tool for African people and states to deal with the open questions of their society.

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<sup>136</sup> Cuba's role in supporting Mengistu in the war against Somalia is discussed in detail by Piero Gleijeses in *Cuba and the Cold War, 1959–1980, The Cambridge History of the Cold War, Volume II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 327–348. The Soviet Involvement in the Horn of Africa is analyzed by Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 261–272.



## CHAPTER TWELVE

# THE REVOLUTION RAZES CHURCHES

The churches in Ethiopia reacted in very different ways to the news of the deposal of Haile Selassie I. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC), by far the largest church in the country, embodied the long tradition of Ethiopia in which the Orthodox Church and the Amharic imperial state were inseparable.

The revolution challenged this church-state alliance by promising to create a modern Ethiopia in which church and state would be separated, the non-Amharic ethnic groups would be integrated and the imperial rule would be replaced by democracy. Unsurprisingly, such a project received little support from the Orthodox leaders of the day. The Derg thus saw only one option possible: to crush the existing Orthodox hierarchy and to make the Orthodox Church subservient to the revolutionary government.

What then followed was that Archbishop Samuel, to whom the EOC had delegated its contact with the Derg, suddenly died in his monastery in 1975 under obscure circumstances, presumably murdered. The Patriarch of the EOC, Tewoflos, was detained in 1976 and executed in 1979. Archbishop Paulus, who was a member of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, was held in detention from 1976 until 1981. The head of the state, Haile Mariam Mengistu, managed to replace most of the Orthodox bishops with new faces and thereby to ensure the cooperation of the EOC with the Marxist-Leninist government.

Subsequently the revolutionary government granted the EOC a privileged position in relation to other churches and religious communities. Meanwhile the participation of the Orthodox of Ethiopia in the worldwide ecumenical movement was sharply reduced. The tension and occasional collisions between the leaders of the EOC and the EECMY continued through these troubled years.

The EECMY, by contrast, saw the revolution as offering a new opportunity for the church to practice her vocation concerning the rights of the poor, the ending of ethnic discrimination, the elimination of illiteracy and the pursuit of social justice within the framework of the declared goals of the new regime. Most members of EECMY belonged to the non-Amharic part of the population that had long suffered discrimination at the hands of the Amharic elite. The sense of optimism was widely shared among the older as well as the younger generation of the EECMY.<sup>137</sup>

Church leaders hoped that the new rulers would in due course recognize the constructive value of the church for society as a whole, acknowledge the EECMY as a legitimate institution in Ethiopia, and permit its congregations and training institutes to continue their work.

The Mekane Yesus Church grew significantly during the early years of the revolution, especially among the poor and the non-Amharic population. Meanwhile, popular discontent with the imperial government increased. The identification with the poor gave to the public image of the EECMY an embryonic political dimension,

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<sup>137</sup> The bluntest statements by senior church leaders and their young colleagues, declaring that the objectives for the mission of the church in Ethiopia coincided with the stated objectives of the revolution were made at the seminar organized by the LWF together with the Mekane Yesus Theological Seminary in Addis Ababa in 1975.

even though she had no intention of developing an explicit political program.

For the leaders of the EECMY, the non-negotiable task of the church continued to be to convey the message of salvation offered by Christ and addressed to all peoples, particularly to the poor and oppressed. This message was to be conveyed by word and deed. The activist pioneers of the revolution seemed in the eyes of EECMY leaders to be aspiring to similar social ideals.

The strengthening of Mengistu's position and the flow of military support from the Soviet Union encouraged the Derg in its initial years to pursue a policy of centralized rule and to declare Marxism-Leninism as the ideological foundation of the state. The response of the EECMY was twofold. She was willing to cooperate with the revolutionaries in areas such as land reform and the transfer of institutions of education, health care and social and economic development to the government.<sup>138</sup> However, the EECMY repeatedly made it clear that she would not compromise on matters of faith and ideology. In her first official statement after the revolution, the church declared that "ideologies cannot be considered absolute" and that "complete allegiance is due to God and God alone." For the EECMY the Christian faith and Marxist ideology were irreconcilable.<sup>139</sup> In a memorandum entitled "Some Issues Requiring Discussions and Decisions" for which Gudina Tumsa received the endorsement of the EECMY Special Executive Committee Meeting held August 19–24, 1975, he wrote:

*The Gospel of Jesus Christ is God's power to save everyone who believes it. It is the power that saves from eternal damnation, from economic exploitation, from political oppression, etc. Because of its eternal dimension the Gospel could never be replaced by any of the ideologies invented by men throughout the centuries. It is the only voice telling about a loving Father who gives his Son as a ransom for many. It is the good news to sinful man, the only power to save mankind from its sinfulness. It is too powerful to be compromised by any social system...*<sup>140</sup>

Two weeks later, on September 9, 1975 in Boji, Gudina stated in his address to a pastors' course: "I see it as my duty to prepare the church for the persecution that will surely come. I'm afraid it will prove fatal to me one day."

By this time, Gudina Tumsa had already become an outstanding church leader. He combined in his work remarkable theological learning and a strong sense of its meaning in the turbulent Ethiopian society. He had been deeply disturbed by the execution of the Chairman of the Derg, General Aman Andom, in November 1974. Gudina also had a profound understanding of Ethiopian culture and society. He called for the development of an African political theology relevant to the social and political situation on the continent. At critical moments, his intuitive skills helped him to turn his learning and his experience into immediate decisions.

Gudina did not want a wall of silence and hostility between Christians and Marxists. Together with Emmanuel Abraham, the President of the EECMY, he was anxious to maintain open channels of communication between the EECMY and the intellectual

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<sup>138</sup> Pastoral Letter: the EECMY and the Ethiopian Revolution, presented to the EECMY Executive Committee in March 1975, cf. Eide, op. cit., 115–117, and the full text of the document, Ibid., 269–270.

<sup>139</sup> Statement of the EECMY Executive Committee, Minutes of the EECMY Special Executive Committee Meeting of August 19–24, 1975, FELM archives, Ethiopia reports.

<sup>140</sup> "Witness and Discipleship: Leadership of the Church in Multi-Ethnic Ethiopia in a Time of Revolution," *The Essential Writings of Gudina Tumsa* (Addis Ababa, Gudina Tumsa Foundation, 2003), 76.

leaders of the revolution. He wanted the foundation of Christian faith and the identity of the church to be known and understood by political leaders. His passion for justice and for the rights of the marginalized arose from his Christian faith and were at its center. He wanted to keep the EECMY independent of political ideologies and while himself being Oromo, also independent of the radicalized political movements among the Oromo people.

Courageously, Gudina invited his brother, the Derg member Baroo Tumsa, to address the May 1976 General Assembly of the EECMY. The topic was “The New Political Ideologies and the Church.” Baroo had already been a left-wing activist before the revolution and through this family link Gudina could follow the thinking among the Marxist groups. Baroo led one of the smaller, intellectually advanced Oromo groups, the Ethiopian Oppressed People’s Revolutionary Struggle (ECHAAT), which mainly drew its support from the cities. During the first phase of the revolution he had been made a member of the Politbureau, the ideological advisory group of the Derg. By the time of the 1976 EECMY General Assembly, Baroo Tumsa was a full member of the Derg.

Baroo Tumsa gave in his lecture to the EECMY Assembly an outline of the Marxist interpretation of religion. He pointed to areas in which the objectives of the church and the Marxist regime overlapped, although the church in his view represented “idealism” while the government policies were built on “the materialist theory of Marxism-Leninism.” He ended his presentation as follows:

*I see no contradiction of this [ideological] program with that of the goals of the church. Maybe in certain areas the church might have to re-orient its methods of work to the changing situations. And the capability to adapt to new situations becomes imperative for survival.*<sup>141</sup>

Gudina Tumsa’s response to his brother focused on the church’s encounter with unbelief and on Western philosophical thought in which scientific Marxism had a special place. His leading concern was that Christians should have an understanding of Marxist-socialist thought and should be able to articulate their faith in the context of a revolutionary society that advocated atheism.

The public dialogue between the brothers at the assembly was civil despite their fundamental disagreements and it left its marks on the EECMY. The EECMY leaders had obviously wanted to challenge the ideological leaders of the country both intellectually and spiritually. Such dialogue would cease to be possible after Mengistu’s coup in 1977 and the outbreak of the ‘Red Terror.’

Baroo Tumsa met his end in 1978, supposedly at the hands of the leaders of the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Oromia, because he stood for a non-religious society, while his killers advocated an Islamic state, and possibly also because ECHAAT had, in the eyes of Mengistu, become a politically suspect organization.<sup>142</sup>

At this time, Gudina Tumsa took the initiative of launching an ecumenical forum for all Ethiopian churches. The idea had emerged during a seminar on “Christianity

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<sup>141</sup> Baroo Tumsa, “The Church and Ideologies,” 1976, in *Witness and Discipleship: Leadership of the Church in Multi-Ethnic Ethiopia in a Time of Revolution* (Addis Ababa, Gudina Tumsa Foundation, 2003), 35–44.

<sup>142</sup> The case of Baroo Tumsa is discussed in depth by Øyvind Eide, op. cit. The full text of his paper is included in the official report of the EECMY Assembly at Nedjo, January 1976.

and Socialism" in 1975, a joint venture of EECMY and the LWF. The EECMY General Assembly endorsed the proposal in January 1976.

The Council for the Cooperation of Churches in Ethiopia (CCCE) was formally established in 1977. In the preparatory work, strong emphasis was placed on the need for unity between churches allowing them to speak with a common voice in response to the pressures of the revolution. Gudina contacted all the main churches and successfully obtained the backing of the Protestants, the Roman Catholics and also of some Orthodox communities. The EECMY headquarters provided office space for the new CCCE. Gudina was elected its first chairperson. It soon became evident that the new organization and his role in it would provoke political repercussions.

The founding of the CCCE had alerted the government to the growing influence of the non-Orthodox churches. As a counter move, the government and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church jointly convened an interreligious seminar at the Africa Hall on March 28 – 30, 1978 to which all significant religious communities were invited. The plan was fully endorsed by the Orthodox Church and broadly welcomed by the Muslim community.

The Roman Catholic Church and the EECMY representatives expressed hesitations because they suspected that the real intention would not be dialogue, but to force religious communities to submit to the government's ideology. They decided, nevertheless, to participate, because they felt that it offered an opportunity – perhaps the last one – to present their differing views on the role of the church in relation to the state which itself was moving in an authoritarian and nationalistic direction.

As soon became apparent, the purpose of the seminar was, indeed, to pressure all religious groups into supporting the Marxist-socialist policies of the government and thereby also to ensure their support for Ethiopia's war against Somalia. Ethiopian nationalism was presented at the seminar as the common foundation for cooperation between state authorities and religious leaders.

The representatives of the Roman Catholic Church and of the Protestant churches firmly expressed their disagreement, unlike the majority of the participants who supported the government. The vocal opposition of Protestants, including Gudina Tumsa, and of Catholics was not recognized in the public resolutions issued as the outcome of the seminar.

Afterwards, however, a group of religious leaders consisting of Christians and Muslims sent the government a joint letter emphasizing their commitment to building a democratic Ethiopia, but protesting against the government's actions, including the closure of churches and mosques and the violation of democratic principles and religious freedom, ideals which the government had originally vowed to respect.

The rise of the Protestants, with the EECMY in their lead, was a thorn in Mengistu's side. Not only was there a glaring contradiction between Marxist ideology and the faith confessed by Protestants, but the EECMY posed a political threat because of its wide ecumenical relations and international influence. Mengistu wanted the EECMY to fall in line, just like the Orthodox, and submit to government control. He seemed to assume that once the EECMY was domesticated, the other Protestants would either join or remain dispersed as politically insignificant groups. The problem he faced was personified by Gudina Tumsa, who was already widely known outside Ethiopia.

Mengistu made one more effort to bring the EECMY to heel. He ordered Damise Dheressa, the chairman of the government's Social Affairs' Committee to invite Gudina to his office and to request him to join him on a "goodwill tour" in Europe. The purpose of the tour was to demonstrate to foreign churches and to the international

community the prevailing freedom of religion in Ethiopia and the good cooperation between the EECMY and the government. The plan failed. Gudina turned the invitation down, apparently fully aware that the refusal would brand him an enemy of Mengistu's government.

When political violence broke out after 1977 the foreign mission organizations active in Ethiopia had to make special efforts to ensure the security of their expatriate missionaries. Most of them either recalled their personnel or, in some cases, left decisions concerning evacuation to the missionaries themselves. From mid-1977 until the end of 1978 the number of missionaries related to the EECMY was significantly reduced.<sup>143</sup> The evacuations were prepared in close cooperation with the EECMY. Deemed a temporary measure, they were carried out as informally as possible. The return began after the acute uncertainty was over and was completed by the end of 1978. The number of missionaries did not, however, return to the level of the early years of the revolution.

During the "Red Terror" of 1977–1978 the EECMY was occasionally hit by the wider purge that was directed primarily against organizations considered politically disloyal to Mengistu. Confiscation of property was necessary, according to the government, in order to fill the shortage of facilities for military mobilization and for other governmental use. The public reporting on the concrete involvement of the EECMY in health care, literacy programs and land reform did not convince the centralized regime, although some provincial authorities deviated from the government rulings concerning the takeover of church properties.

The severity of the persecution varied greatly between the different synods of the EECMY.<sup>144</sup> The hardest hit were those in which the Oromo people formed the majority of members, while a few synods escaped the harshest persecution altogether and were able to maintain a relatively undisturbed church life. The Addis Ababa Synod had the least problems. The South Central Synod mainly experienced harassments and minor interventions such as the expropriation of cars and certain restrictions, but was able to carry on with most of its activities and to continue cooperation in literacy programs and health services.

All the other synods experienced several waves of persecution, at immense cost to church members, pastors, leaders, and their families. Social development programs and famine relief were seriously hampered or even shut down. The persecution drove many congregations partly or wholly underground for the worst periods, while the church leaders did their best to keep communicating with them. The loss of members was a painful phenomenon for many congregations and synods. The persecution touched all Protestant churches and communities in Ethiopia and caused large-scale damage to the EECMY. Its effects were even more devastating for most of other Protestant churches and communities in Ethiopia.

The scope of the persecution widened once the campaign against dissident political organizations was over and when the government had, with the assistance of the Cubans and the Soviets, regained the control of Ogaden. From 1978 onwards, the government resorted to a wide range of repressive actions against local congregations,

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<sup>143</sup> According to Øyvind Eide, the number of missionaries in February 1978 was 90, which was 77% less than in 1973.

<sup>144</sup> Eide gives a thoroughly documented account of the different forms of persecution that took place in the synods of the EECMY in 1977–85 in *op. cit.*, 183–199.

synod offices and institutions. The formal cause for these measures were now allegations of cooperation with illegal political organizations. Heading the list of those organizations were the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF).

As a matter of agreed policy, the EECMY had in fact systematically abstained from any formal cooperation with these organizations. However, since many EECMY members were Oromos, it was probably not too difficult for the authorities to find among the members of the rapidly growing church some of those who did not know or did not respect the official church policies and who had joined opposition activities.

The church was, however, vulnerable to the allegations of the authorities due to the fact that she did not practice any political, ethnic or religious discrimination in her relief actions for the hungry and sick in Ethiopia. The government, however, held that service to those whom it suspected to be linked to the opposition was illegal. The EECMY and all of its partners were by constitution and by common conviction committed to serving people in acute need without any regard to their national, tribal, religious or political affiliations, a policy that was bound to lead to tension and conflicts with the military and governmental authorities.

The kidnapping and execution of Gudina Tumsa, the general secretary of the EECMY, on July 28, 1979 was staged by the government as a criminal act. Only when Gudina's body was found, after Mengistu's fall, was there firm evidence that Mengistu and the Derg had ordered the kidnapping and execution. Gudina was reburied in Addis Ababa on July 29, 1992. The abduction and killing had profound consequences not only for his family, but also for the life and witness of the EECMY throughout the troubled years. It deeply shocked the international partners of the EECMY and left a lasting scar on the worldwide Lutheran community.

Gudina was first arrested on October 11, 1978. The detention lasted until November 7. He was interrogated about the plans for the Council for Cooperation of Churches in Ethiopia in which he played a leading role. The allegation was that the organization aimed to become a forum for joint opposition by the churches toward the government. Gudina was rearrested on June 1, 1979 together with his daughter Leensaa, whom the People's Militia threatened with torture that would be extended to her father and mother. After being released, Gudina was told that the next time he would be killed.

Oberkirchenrat Christian Krause, who was the main liaison person of the German United Lutheran Church (VELKD) with the EECMY, quickly received word of the second arrest. He spoke to the president of the LWF, Bishop Josiah Kibira of Tanzania, who was at that moment attending the German Kirchentag, about the peril facing Gudina.

Krause and Kibira agreed to leave immediately for Dar es Salaam and to ask for an appointment with the President of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere. Nyerere received them and agreed to change his immediate travel plans for a state visit to Sudan and to arrange for a refuelling stop in Addis Ababa which would make it possible for him to meet the Foreign Minister of Ethiopia and plead for Gudina's release. He also told Krause and Kibira that Gudina would be granted asylum in Tanzania when released.

Krause then continued on to Ethiopia, where he found that Gudina Tumsa had just been freed from his second detention. After learning from Gudina in person about the threats of torture and death that had been made against him, Krause conveyed to Gudina Nyerere's offer of asylum and urged him to leave Ethiopia promptly for Tanzania. Gudina responded to Krause, a close friend, by shouting:

*"Here is my church and my congregation. How can I, as a church leader, leave my flock*

*at this moment of trial? I have again and again pleaded with my pastors to stay on.” He then quoted St. Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians: “Christ died for all that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised for again” [2 Cor. 5:15]. When bidding farewell, Krause was convinced that they were separating for good.<sup>145</sup>*

The following are examples that illustrate the hardships inflicted by the revolutionary regime upon the EECMY, 1977–1983:

- In March-May 1977 the facilities of the Mass Media Program of the EECMY were closed.
- In November-December 1977 the teaching and residential facilities of the Debre Zeit Ethiopian Evangelical College in the Addis Ababa Synod were confiscated.
- On 11 October, 1978, and on 1 June, 1979, Gudina Tumsa, the general secretary of the EECMY, was arrested and kept both times in prison around three weeks.
- On July 28, 1979 Gudina Tumsa was captured and killed.
- In November 1981 the seven-story headquarters of the EECMY that contained its offices and housing facilities in Addis Ababa were confiscated.
- In July 1983 a block of houses of the Norwegian Mission Society in the Western Synod, four houses of the Swedish Evangelical Mission in the Central Synod, and all the buildings of the Tabor Seminary and the Assawa Bible School in the South Ethiopia Synod were confiscated.
- In September 1983 in Dessie, Wollo Province, in the northern work area, all synod offices including the Lutheran office for relief activity, the student hostel for 200 students and a newly completed church building were confiscated.
- By October 1983, 348 churches of the Western Synod and 180 churches of the Bethel Synod in Western Wollega had been taken over by authorities.
- During the revolutionary era some 700 churches of the EECMY were closed.
- Through the whole period, detentions and arrests were an ongoing form of harassment that was extended to all synods and touched hundreds of pastors and lay workers, even several synodical and central office leaders, and their families. The length of the detentions lasted from a few days to more than five years.

It is impossible to measure the full effects of the persecution upon the EECMY, or the suffering, fear and uncertainty it inflicted upon church members, their families and entire congregations. Much of what happened was at the time beyond the reach of the international media. Statistical data can only dimly suggest the scale and brutality of the government’s actions.

The interventions by the authorities understandably also caused division among Christians. While some church members joined the political groups in power, and others veered towards opposition groups, many simply preferred to be invisible. Young people and high school and university students were hit particularly hard. Most of the congregations that lost their pastors, elders and church buildings continued, however, to gather for worship and to take care of their suffering members including youth removed from schools for being Christian. Throughout this period the Mekane Yesus

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<sup>145</sup>The story of the drama is originally recorded in Eide’s interview of Krause in 1991, and later confirmed by Tsehay Tolasa and Tasgara Hirpo. Eide, op. cit., 176–177.

Church, against all odds, continued to grow, with its membership increasing from 209,000 in 1974 to 546,740 in 1984.<sup>146</sup>

Unable either to control or to destroy the Mekane Yesus Church, the government authorities continued to grant visas and work permits to expatriate missionaries and church-related development workers. Applications were carefully scrutinized by the government and delays were frequent and not all applications were approved. When it came to employment, preference was given to nationals before expatriates. The delays caused disruption in health services and other necessities. The applicants' political persuasions or interest in human rights advocacy did not seem to concern the authorities dealing with work permits for missionaries.<sup>147</sup> Similarly, most of the Ethiopian members of the governing units of the LWF and of the WCC received permits to attend international meetings in other parts of the world. What the specific reasons for the occasional refusal of exit visas were, is not known.

It is conceivable that the government found the financial value of the international support flowing into Ethiopia through church-related agencies significant enough for the Ethiopian economy to decide to refrain from restricting the activities of those agencies. Also, the careful diplomacy and self-censorship of Emmanuel Abraham, which some of his critics inside and outside Ethiopia questioned, may have persuaded the government to show tolerance for the church's international relations and for the expatriate personnel of the EECMY.

Information about the hardships faced by the EECMY came to the LWF through several channels. News directly relayed from the EECMY offices to its international partners and to the media was scant. The president of the church, Emmanuel Abraham, consistently sought to maintain open communication with the government authorities. He was determined not to give them reason to suspect that the international contacts of the church would be made to serve political opposition groups and ethnic liberation fronts opposed to the Ethiopian government. Therefore, he also did not want to dramatize the hardships experienced within the church.

Emmanuel Abraham's rule was: "Report only bare facts, not feelings or interpretations!" Therefore he was firmly against giving the media any information in the name of the EECMY that contained personal observations or recounted the grievances of the church. Some of those near to him were not always happy about the self-censorship that this implied.

The harsh persecution of the Protestant churches of Ethiopia lasted until 1985, although the basic tension between Christians and Marxists remained and occasional sporadic harassments of church workers continued even longer.

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<sup>146</sup>Reference to public EECMY reports and to field reports of mission agencies. (Available in collected files)

<sup>147</sup>Lack of focus on the role of missionaries may reflect the self-censorship of mission agencies and also a soft approach adopted by government officials so as to portray the image of a country that follows international standards.



# CHAPTER THIRTEEN

## GENEVA RESPONDS TO THE REVOLUTION, 1974–1990

### 13.1. QUESTIONS TO THE GLOBAL LUTHERAN COMMUNITY

From the perspective of the LWF in 1973, the future of Ethiopian society looked deeply uncertain.

On the one hand, the Emperor, a practicing member of the Orthodox Church, was respected by the LWF, the World Council of Churches and also by the mission agencies. Without his openness to Christians of different traditions present in Ethiopia, much of the work of Protestant churches and communities and of the international church organizations would not have been possible. The moral authority of the aging Emperor, who had devoted his life's work to Ethiopia and to Africa, impressed the leaders and co-workers of the LWF, who took a broadly positive view of his rule and of his government.

On the other hand, the grievances of Ethiopian peoples in the center and in the periphery, and the many problems faced by the government, were well known both in the LWF Geneva office and in the mission offices of Lutheran churches in Europe and North America. The LWF had multiple channels of communication with Ethiopia, extending from church offices to local congregations and communities. The presence of corruption around the Emperor and the entire government was obvious. The Emperor and the ruling elite had at times seemed utterly insensitive to the hunger and suffering of the people. It was against the backdrop of these ambiguities as well as the uncertain political future that the LWF involvement in Ethiopia had to be considered and decided.

During 1973, many informal, confidential and indeed existential debates about the options for the country and its churches took place within the LWF staff. Opinions differed widely.

The idea of supporting Ethiopian opposition groups pushing for the replacement of the imperial rule by democratic socialism as a solution for the plight of the hungry and impoverished majority was also floated in these conversations. The ecumenical support given to liberation movements in Southern Africa was an inspiring precedent to some, including politically radicalized young Christians in North America and Europe. The question was raised whether the pre-revolutionary situation in Ethiopia demanded a forward-looking response from the worldwide church.<sup>148</sup> These perspectives were shared by staff members of the Department of Studies of the LWF who had been part of the student and youth movements of the sixties.

An opposite view was taken by some of the senior staff who had long experience of working with the church in Ethiopia and who felt that the only responsible position was to give moral support to the Emperor. He represented law and order and it was he that had welcomed foreign missions to Ethiopia and encouraged the participation of Ethiopian churches in the ecumenical movement. As a result of these divisions, the LWF initially adopted a low-profile “wait-and-see” policy.

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<sup>148</sup> The LWF Pre-Assembly of Youth in Thonon, France prior to the Evian Assembly of 1970 brought the voice of radicalized students and youth into the assembly discussions about the role of the church in revolutionary settings.

The military uprising against the Emperor in February 1974 marked a turning point. Within a few weeks, all LWF units in Ethiopia were placed on alert. What would be the attitude of the revolutionaries to Christian faith? What would happen to the LWF member church, the EECMY? Was this the end of broadcasting by Radio Voice of the Gospel (RVOG)? What would happen to the hunger relief action of the LWF? Would there be a place in the new context for joint mission and inter-church aid programs sponsored by the LWF and other international church organizations? How could the LWF and the worldwide Christian community respond together to the unfolding changes, the outcome of which was impossible to predict?

The first priority for the LWF was to intensify communication with the EECMY leaders and to offer concrete support to the ongoing ministries of the church. The LWF was involved in the mission and evangelism of the Mekane Yesus Church, in the broadcast ministry of Radio Voice of the Gospel, in the education and training offered by the theological seminary and other institutions, and in the large-scale relief and development operations in the areas of drought. Ensuring the continuity of these activities was vital. Any further actions, specifically those related to the anticipated change in the political system, had to be agreed in consultation and agreement with the leaders of the EECMY. This approach had been tried and tested in previous critical situations. Its heart was in the ensuring of continued support for the member church under any circumstances.

Thus, the point of departure for the LWF response to the revolution in Ethiopia was to assure the EECMY that she was not alone and that the worldwide community of Lutheran churches would accompany her in her search for ways to continue her mission in a time of uncertainty. This meant a drastic intensification of contacts between the Mekane Yesus Church and the whole of the LWF community. It also reaffirmed that the LWF would refrain from undertaking any new action in Ethiopia without first consulting the EECMY.

While continuing to run the established programs in the new context, the LWF was compelled to explore afresh the theological and spiritual self-understanding of the church in the midst of social transformation. The encounter with the drama of a violent revolution in Ethiopia opened the global Lutheran community to fresh perspectives regarding the faith, life and mission of the church in the context of ongoing turmoil and change across the world.

### **13.2. THE LWF STUDY ON CHRISTIAN WITNESS IN MARXIST-SOCIALIST SOCIETIES, 1974–1976**

The first unit of the LWF which responded directly to the initial revolutionary events in Ethiopia was, surprisingly, its most academic unit, the Department of Studies (LWF-DS). Its response, though almost accidental, came to have a profound effect not only on the leadership of the EECMY but on the church's synods and congregations at large. An ongoing Geneva-based theological study program focused on the political roles of the Christian community in socialist societies suddenly became painfully relevant to the erupting political and ideological turmoil of Ethiopia. Joining the EECMY in the exploration of the course of the mission of the church in the epicenter of a revolution proved to be a pioneering moment for the LWF.

The visit of a staff member of the Department of Studies, Dr. Jonas Jonson, to Ethiopia in May 1974 marked the beginning of an active LWF response to the revolutionary

situation. The original purpose of his visit was to meet the EECMY leaders and the faculty of the Mekane Yesus Theological Seminary to discuss Ethiopian participation in the new Marxism and China study program of the LWF.

Jonson made a presentation at the seminary in Addis Ababa on “the Encounter of the Church with Marxism in Various Cultural Contexts, with Special Reference to China”. To his surprise, the paper met with feverish interest. The seminar participants were at the time deeply confused by the evolving political drama that had begun to unfold only four months earlier. A tense atmosphere hung over the discussions. As a result of Jonson’s visit, the Principal of the seminary, Dr. Rune Backlund, issued an invitation to the LWF Studies to co-sponsor as soon as possible a colloquium on “Encounter of the Church with Socialism.” It was a bold action as the theme had already proven controversial and potentially dangerous for the church.

After hectic preparations in Geneva and in Addis Ababa, the proposed colloquium took place on February 20–27, 1975 on the seminary campus. The LWF-DS had sent two of its staff members, Jonas Jonson and Gerdt Decke,<sup>149</sup> to support the colloquium, both also being involved in the LWF China-Marxism study program. The colloquium had originally been planned for a group of 30–40 participants drawn from among church leaders and faculty members. However, at the opening session, the visiting lecturers found themselves before a packed audience of 150 who represented not only faculty members and students, but also leaders from the EECMY head and synod offices, along with numerous representatives of other churches and mission partners.

The LWF envoys presented a wide range of experiences of the churches in China and in the GDR and then participated in a discussion of the challenges and difficulties faced by a church in a Marxist socialist society. The exchanges that took place at the colloquium were intense, the atmosphere reflecting the concrete fears and hopes prevalent everywhere in the country. The organizers took it for granted that the Derg would have planted agents among the audience, even though the intelligence operations of the revolutionary government were at the time likely to be underdeveloped and lacking in expertise in church matters.

Jonas Jonson shared his immediate impressions of the colloquium in his travel report of March 4, 1975 addressed to senior leaders of the LWF:

*...the political developments in Ethiopia had made our theme a very burning one, and when we arrived in Addis on February 19, we found that the seminar would be something very different from the small workshops which had originally been planned, and that the word about it was all over the Protestant community in the city.*

*For five days we lectured from morning to evening on various aspects of Marxism and socialism and their encounter with Christianity in a variety of situations. The seminary chapel was filled to the last seat day after day. An average of more than 150 people attended the seminar. They were seminary students and faculty, representatives from all the EECMY synods, a rather large group of missionaries ... church leadership, many SIM [Society of International Missionaries] people, Baptists, some Roman Catholics a few Orthodox, and RVOG staff and others from all over the city who were interested.*

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<sup>149</sup>Jonas Jonson had written his doctoral dissertation at the University of Uppsala on the church in China and the role of missions during the Chinese revolution. Dr. Gerdt Decke had studied in depth the role of the Protestant Churches in the GDR.

*The discussions were very lively and mostly dominated by Ethiopians. Due to the political situation most people had positive expectations, and there was very little criticism of 'leftist propaganda'... Moreover, people felt that they had little if no background at all, preparing them for any kind of socialist development in the country... and on what it [socialism] might indicate for the church and religion in general. We had a factual, multi-faceted sharing of views and knowledge, of hopes and fears, and generally speaking the seminar was received with great enthusiasm. Many spoke of the kairos, that the time was just ripe for this kind of a seminar.<sup>150</sup>*

Jonson quoted the opening address of Emmanuel Abraham, the president of the EECMY, who had interpreted socialism as "an expression of social justice, community and mutual help" and as such identical with the gospel and "nothing else." He considered Marxist socialism to be a "branching off from Christianity." For him the reason for the apparent breach between the church and socialist leaders was the church's failure to live up to its teaching and its participation in the oppression of the poor. It is noteworthy that he made these comments after the revolution had taken a violent turn and indeed after his first detention from April 30, 1974 to January 27, 1975.

Another participant, Yacob Tesfai, the general secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Eritrea, focused his lecture on Old Testament prophetic notions of justice, on the rights of the poor, and on the right of the community to own the land that it cultivated. He drew links between the prophetic message and the declared goals of the revolution. He also criticized the church in Ethiopia for not having stood up for the poor before the old regime and questioned "the pervasive power of foreign influence and institutions on the church." He made, according to Jonson, a blunt appeal for support for the revolution "now."

The seminar reflected a surprising consensus between the young pastors and the seasoned senior leaders of the church, whereas differences arose between the Ethiopians and the expatriate missionaries present. The revolution also seems to have stimulated the debate over the idea of a "moratorium", meaning a call for a total halt to recruitment of foreign personnel to the African churches in order to accelerate their self-reliance. The appeal for such a moratorium had first been made at the World Conference on Mission and Evangelism of the WCC in Bangkok in 1972-1973, and it had been repeated at the Assembly of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) in Lusaka 1974. Gudina Tumsa, the secretary general of the EECMY, had, however, opposed the idea of a total moratorium, and instead pressed for a step-by-step progress towards self-reliance by poor churches.

The colloquium gave rise to a follow-up seminar one year later. Moreover, the EECMY advised each synod to arrange its own seminar on "Socialism and Christianity." The LWF received an urgent request to assist in organizing a comprehensive workshop to provide tools and to train leaders for the synodical seminars.

The EECMY executive committee also revived an earlier plan to send a team to Tanzania to study the church's experience of "Tanzanian Socialism," the father of which was President Julius Nyerere. A rift seemed to have opened up between "African socialism" and the Marxism-Leninism advocated by the revolutionary leaders in Ethiopia. The preference of the EECMY leaders was to aim towards a down-to-earth

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<sup>150</sup> Memorandum from Jonas Jonson to a group of senior staff members of the LWF 4 March 4 1975. Jonas Jonson's personal archives.

“socialism” rooted in African ways of life, which seemed more pragmatic than an imported ideology.

Immediately after the end of the colloquium in 1975, Gudina Tumsa invited Decke and Jonson from the LWF and Gunnar Hasselblatt of the Berlin Mission to join a two-day informal gathering with EECMY leaders for a discussion on the general situation and the prospects for the church.

The meeting was held on February 27–28, 1975 at Ghion, 100 kilometers south of Addis Ababa. The EECMY group consisted of Gudina Tumsa, Tasgara Hirpo, Membre Selassie and three expatriate faculty members of the EECMY Seminary. The group produced a draft for a *Pastoral Letter: The EECMY in the Ethiopian Revolution*. It was subsequently presented to the executive committee of the church, which after a searching debate accepted it as its official position in March 1975.<sup>151</sup>

The *Pastoral Letter* begins with an affirmation of the EECMY’s confessional foundation and recalls that she is part of the worldwide church, the Body of Christ. The letter declares that the foundation of the life of the church is “to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ in its full sense,” “sustained by the Sacraments.”

It emphasizes the character of the EECMY in the context of Ethiopia: “Deriving from the poor, the Church rededicates itself to living for others, serving the whole human person, meeting his spiritual and physical needs.” It refers to the revolution by “welcoming the opportunities, which the new situation provides for building a more just society,” expressing “full support of a just implementation of land reform.” It dissociates the EECMY from the control of ideologies: “[the church] is a society for witness to the Gospel ... for service..., not a company of profit.” The letter makes it clear that the EECMY is not willing in its pursuit of social justice to become a subservient instrument of either party of the Cold War in Ethiopia.<sup>152</sup>

The involvement of the LWF Department of Studies ensured that both the EECMY and the LWF became acutely conscious of the influence of the global conflict on the Ethiopian revolution and on the ministry of the EECMY. Later actions and statements of the EECMY reflected the depth of the significance of the LWF-sponsored seminars and discussions in making the Church Universal tangibly present in the encounters of the EECMY with the prevailing political forces, and in deepening the theological understanding of contemporary state-church relations. This influence continued to inspire the internal life of the EECMY throughout the rest of the Mengistu era.<sup>153</sup>

### **13.3. THE CLOSURE OF THE LWF BROADCASTING STATION AND THE PROGRAM OF THE RVOG, 1977**

The first open collision between the LWF and the revolutionary government of Ethiopia occurred on March 12, 1977, when a military unit stormed the broadcasting station of the Radio Voice of the Gospel.

The closure of the station came as no surprise to the personnel of the RVOG or to

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<sup>151</sup> Minutes of the EECMY Executive Committee meetings can be found in FELM Archives, Helsinki.

<sup>152</sup> The text and story of the Pastoral Letter is reported in *Witness and Discipleship, The Essential Writings of Gudina Tumsa* (Addis Ababa: Gudina Tumsa Foundation, 2002), 77–80.

<sup>153</sup> Reference to the Minutes and Reports of the Church Council, to later Ethiopian comments on them and to foreign observations (e.g. AELC, Paul Hofmann etc.) Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, U.S.

the Geneva headquarters of the LWF. The revolutionary regime viewed the RVOG as an institution of the old order that was bound to be disloyal to the new rulers. Already before the revolution, the increase of unrest and of dissatisfaction with imperial rule had caused the local staff to predict an early end to the station. Financed from abroad and protected and favored by the Emperor, the station was an obvious target in the eyes of the new regime. The deposal of the Emperor in 1974 signaled to the RVOG staff and supporters the beginning of the end. The records of the discussions within the LWF and among the RVOG staff show a shared conviction about the soundness and relevance of the programming of the RVOG as an international mission and development instrument of Lutheran churches. A few dissenting voices were also noted.<sup>154</sup>

The goal of presenting the gospel without any particular political or ideological bias and as a source of renewal of personal and social life, while respecting the listeners' diverse contexts, was still valid. Both the RVOG staff and the leaders of the EECMY rejected the allegation that the RVOG was in conflict with the policy plans of the ideological leaders of the regime. Moreover, the response from listeners, limited though it was, showed signs of appreciation, understanding and even support of the RVOG programs until the end, which encouraged the RVOG staff to continue their work. They even maintained the hope that the message of their broadcasts would reach the leaders and active participants of the political revolution.

The sequence of events surrounding the RVOG reveals ideological divisions within the new regime. During the first months after the initial takeover in 1974, the station staff received occasional assurances from the military "action group" that the RVOG could continue its broadcasts without any major interference.<sup>155</sup>

After the deposal of the Emperor in September 1974 and after a power struggle within the ruling Derg, and after the executions of former government officials on November 23, 1974, the dynamic changed. On November 24, the station received orders from the Ethiopian News Agency (ENA) to accept censorship of all its coverage of Ethiopian events. The executions were not to be reported.

The RVOG and the LWF in Geneva protested against this violation of the formal license of the station. The director of the LWF Department of Church Cooperation, Carl Johan Hellberg, promptly flew to Addis Ababa for negotiations with the new government. Subsequently, on December 4, the Ministry of Information sent a letter to the LWF informing it that the license of the RVOG remained valid and that the ENA had made a technical error.

In December 1974 the Derg published a policy paper setting out its vision of Ethiopian socialism, emphasizing the importance of the country's cultural heritage, respect for human rights and the goal of social justice. This document was followed by an official declaration, "Economic Policy of Socialist Ethiopia," which set out the principles and plans for the nationalization of banks, industry and business and all other activities that were to be controlled by the state, including radio and other news media. Later, at the end of February 1975, the government representatives informed

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<sup>154</sup> Summary presented in the master's thesis of Mika Palo of September 1994, University of Helsinki, 19–22 and 84–85.

<sup>155</sup> Only one intervention was made by the military group demanding that the RVOG give up its Ethiopian broadcasting: on June 28 it was announced that the military was taking over the administration of the station. Lundgren, Manfred, *Proclaiming Christ to His World: The Experience of Radio Voice of the Gospel, 1957–1977* (Geneva; Lutheran World Federation, Commission on Communication, 1983 (also Uppsala: *Studia Missionalia Upsaliensia* XXXVIII, 1983), 234.

another LWF delegation that had come from Geneva that they had no plans regarding the RVOG.<sup>156</sup>

Uncertainty regarding the government's plans and the future of the RVOG continued until the end of 1976. The station staff and the EECMY leaders had affirmed their interest in the basic goals of Ethiopian socialism and still had a degree of optimism about the long-term prospects for Ethiopia, despite the numerous interventions and threats. While continuing the broadcasts as if undisturbed, the RVOG also planned for the possible closure of the station.

Following the *coup d'état* by Mengistu on February 3, 1977 the first contact of RVOG with the regime was through the forceful intrusion of an armed force unit into the radio station at 5.15 a.m. on March 12.<sup>157</sup> There were no casualties; broadcasts stopped that morning. In the evening, the transmitters were re-activated at the orders of the military and the voice of the announcer declared "This is the Radio Voice of Revolutionary Ethiopia." Thus ended fourteen years of international radio ministry from Addis Ababa.

The fate of the RVOG illustrates the struggle of the church to maintain its integrity under political and ideological pressures. The station scrupulously observed its commitment to communicate the gospel to its audiences without regard to their changing social and political environments. With the change of regime in 1974, the EECMY had made public her positive expectations from the revolution. Literacy campaigns, the expansion of health services and land reform were areas where the revolutionary declarations and the churches' agenda overlapped.

However, the violence of the military government and its decision to drop the pursuit of broad-based democracy in favor of centralized, ideologically homogenized rule made the situation intolerable for the church. The RVOG was left with three options: broadcast the government-sanctioned news, edit it, or reject it.

The RVOG also put these questions to the LWF Cabinet in Geneva. The advice received was not of much help:

*The RVOG should reluctantly face the fact that it was forced to be silent and not to be able to issue all the news ... if the station was to requested to broadcast information that was known to be false ... the station would have to curtail its operation in an appropriate fashion.*<sup>158</sup>

The RVOG personnel and its international board made a joint decision to continue the broadcasting activity for as long as possible as if nothing had happened, while also preparing for the withdrawal of the international staff and ensuring all possible protection for the local Ethiopian personnel in the event of closure.

Lundgren writes about the situation:

*The struggle to maintain RVOG's integrity was at times very frustrating. We knew that to give in for pressure from authorities meant to endanger RVOG's credibility,*

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<sup>156</sup> The LWF delegation met with government representatives in Addis Ababa, on February 23–25, 1975. The delegation consisted of Carl J. Hellberg and the Rev. Marc Chambron from Geneva and Dr. Robert Geisendorfer, of Germany. Lundgren, *op. cit.*, 238.

<sup>157</sup> The event has been described in detail by the Director of the RVOG, who was an eyewitness of the dramatic sequence of events. Lundgren, pp. 246–249.

<sup>158</sup> LWF Cabinet, December 11, 1974, *Aide Memoire*.

*and to be stubborn and ignore the authority's advice would mean the end of the whole operation.*<sup>159</sup>

The distance and independence from the ruling power, which the broadcasting operation had maintained during the Emperor's time, had apparently been noted by members of the initial revolutionary military group. This is probably why RVOG was tolerated at first.

However, following the dictatorial take-over by Mengistu and the closing of the station, the government began referring to RVOG as a tool of "imperialist and reactionary forces... established by the former regime to expand its religious favoritism ... and the bourgeois ideology." It declared that a radio station that "does not reflect the ideology of the working class ... and of the broad masses [dilutes] the revolution and thus creates a dangerous situation of subversion".

Mengistu apparently saw little value in the educational and social contribution of RVOG to Ethiopia's development, but feared its subversive potential as an instrument of dissent against the Marxist-Leninist line of his regime.<sup>160</sup>

In retrospect, the founders of RVOG may have been carried away by a utopian vision of mission independent of power politics. They may not have been aware that the Cold War strategists had not forgotten to mark international church organizations on their respective ideological maps. No organized social entity, certainly not the churches, could watch neutrally from the sidelines. Estimates as to how significant the political influence of churches was, naturally varied from case to case.

Yet, the record of the positive role of RVOG in its work on behalf of marginalized people and the welcome it received across political and social boundaries within Ethiopia are convincing. The explosive growth of the EECMY after the collapse of the Mengistu regime is also attributable in large part to the impact of RVOG.

Following the closure of the station, the LWF tried to claim compensation from the Ethiopian government. The cumbersome process, which involved the directors of the LWF Department of Communication and a Geneva based law firm, lasted until 1988, when a "Compensation Agreement on the Nationalised Properties of the Lutheran World Federation in Addis Ababa" was signed by the LWF General Secretary, Gunnar Stålsett. The funds were sent to Geneva in several installments by 1997. In the end, part of the compensation was used to complete in Ethiopia a building of the Mekane Yesus Church.

### **13.4. RELIEF AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DURING THE PERSECUTION**

The LWF Department of World Service (DWS) played a major role in relief and development activities in Ethiopia, running these two different programs throughout the revolutionary era. Administered by the Community Development Service (CDS), a sub-unit within the DWS, the programs covered a broad spectrum of activities including initiation of literacy programs, building and upgrading health services, establish-

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<sup>159</sup> Lundgren, op. cit., 242.

<sup>160</sup> *Reports of the Consultations between State Offices, 1957–1986.* (Berlin: Institut für vergleichende Staat-Kirche Forschung).



ing clean water systems for villages, constructing dams and reservoirs for irrigation, reforestation projects and training local personnel. The EECMY was responsible for planning and implementing these endeavors through its own Addis Ababa-based development unit. It was fully integrated into the central administration of the church. The Geneva-based CDS made available professional assistance for planning and secured financial support to the church for this work.

Carrying out development activities implied extensive cooperation and consultation with government authorities. Unlike the development activity, which was the responsibility of the EECMY, the international relief operations were carried out by the LWF Department of World Service. Decisions were made by the DWS, as a rule upon invitation from the local church. The head of each operation was an expatriate field director, who had to convene and lead the staff team for the operation. The field directors were recruited by the Geneva office in consultation with the local church or with an ecumenical council of churches.

A formal "Letter of Understanding" signed by the head of LWF department in Geneva and by the head of the inviting church defined the rules for the cooperation between the LWF and the local sponsoring church or council. The term of service for the field office was always defined by the length of the acute human need. Furthermore, the DWS always needed clearance from the government for its operational functions in the country concerned. In Ethiopia, the imperial government had originally given the clearance, and from 1974 onwards, it was given by the revolutionary government.

As a UN-recognized international non-governmental organization (NGO), the DWS enjoyed a special status in relation to the national government, a status which was also assumed to give some protection to the sponsoring church in the midst of political and even military turbulence and to facilitate communication when direct contact between the local church and government authorities was not working.

The revolution and especially the tightening grip of Mengistu's rule brought the DWS field offices under close political surveillance. The field directors did their best to remain politically and ideologically invisible in order to retain the right to import material aid and technical equipment and also entry permits, as well as the freedom to recruit local personnel without restrictions. The monetary value of the ongoing relief and development operations apparently softened the attitudes of the military rulers towards the LWF, which continued to enjoy relative freedom even through the worst periods of the Red Terror and the persecution of Protestant churches.

But there were problems. Field operations were always only authorized for the duration of a particular crisis, while the church represented continuity. The presence of an DWS field office in any country in which there was a member church was without exception based upon the invitation of the church and implied a clearly defined partnership.

In the case of Ethiopia, the cooperation agreement between the EECMY and the LWF provided for the participation of the EECMY in all substantive consultations or negotiations between the DWS field offices and the representatives of the government. From the outset it was clear to the LWF that government measures against the EECMY created a source of tension in these talks even when the subject of the talks was the relief program and not the state of the church. The government authorities did occasionally suggest to the LWF field director that he should exclude the EECMY from their meetings for the sake of smoother proceedings.

For the most part, these pressures did not disturb the partnership between the EECMY and the DWS, although the EECMY president was well aware of the govern-

ment's desire to isolate local churches from the international relief operations and to create a rift between the LWF's World Service arm and the local churches.<sup>161</sup>

The field director faced tough decisions. He had to work out how the relief operations, which were an integral part of the worldwide church, could protect the church from government harassment and persecution without jeopardizing the actual relief of thousands of starving Ethiopians.

Another problem arose from the government's efforts to restrict relief agencies to helping only those communities and refugee camps that were on government-controlled territory, when in fact the famine struck without regard to such arbitrary borders. Some of the contested areas were only under the control of the Ethiopian army by day, falling under the rule of the locally supported rebel forces at night. The DWS field office decided to carry out relief operations during both day and night. It was a high-risk decision and the nocturnal food deliveries required secrecy and discipline. Written reports of the clandestine actions are not yet available.<sup>162</sup>

It is commonly assumed that the quantity and the quality of the hunger relief program of the DWS and especially its recognition by the international community and foreign governments involved in the social and economic development of Ethiopia impressed the political leadership.

The emerging alliances between the DWS and the relief agencies of other churches and with international NGOs inevitably became a channel for the exchange of information regarding the difficulties between churches and the Ethiopian government. The repercussions of the cooperation with the government, inevitable in the case of large scale-relief operations, occasionally generated questions about the relationship between mission and church-related humanitarian activities. Moreover, some Northern supporters of mission and relief activities had to ask themselves whether the churches' humanitarian efforts in effect freed repressive governments to pursue their oppressive course and allowed them to ignore their responsibility for the weak and hungry.<sup>163</sup>

### **13.5. THE LWF FACE TO FACE WITH THE PERSECUTION OF EECMY, 1977–1985**

The period of the Red Terror after the February 3, 1977 coup d'état brutally tested the capacity of the LWF to join the EECMY in her struggle against the increasing efforts of the government to silence her. The participation and the support of the LWF took the form of several different but closely coordinated actions.

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<sup>161</sup> During the visit of the writer to Addis Ababa in 1983, the Danish LWF field director Niels Nikolaisen described in detail the procedures and problems faced by the field office in liaising between the government authorities and the church leaders. In 1975 changes took place in the attitudes of the government. In the same period the longtime president of the EECMY Emmanuel Abraham retired and Francis Stephanos succeeded him. Also, the field director Nikolaisen was transferred from Addis Ababa to Namibia and was replaced by Paavo Färm of Finland in 1987.

<sup>162</sup> My main source of information on the LWF-DWS action during the war between the Ethiopian army and the Eritrean liberation has been Paavo Färm, whom I interviewed in 2009 in Finland.

<sup>163</sup> Questions about the political dimensions of humanitarian relief work have been a prominent element in discussions on the role of churches in conflict situations worldwide throughout the post-World War II era. The author had to react on behalf of Finn Church Aid in February 1990 to the personal statement of a prominent business leader, who declared that he or his company would not contribute a penny to any church or mission agency involved in Ethiopia. "Those monies go to arms deals of Mengistu and his kind."

At times of government intervention or acute tension, staff from the LWF headquarters would travel to Ethiopia to listen to the church leaders and, when feasible, to meet state authorities. The visits confirmed the accompanying presence of the worldwide church at the side of the EECMY, counteracting the government-imposed isolation from the worldwide Christian community. The visitors conveyed to the government the call made by the church for religious freedom, for the respect of human dignity and for social justice in Ethiopia. They alerted the Ethiopian government to the reaction of the international community to the open violence to which the revolutionary regime had resorted, and challenged it with international publicity. These visits were also needed to evaluate the spiritual, moral and material support needed by the EECMY. Through these visits, individual church members, especially church leaders and their families, also received support.<sup>164</sup>

The second form of action in response to the hardening situation in Ethiopia was a determined use of the LWF information services, in particular the weekly bulletin *Lutheran World Information* (LWI), for regular, carefully weighed international reporting and analysis of the events affecting the EECMY. The closure of the RVOG station in March 1977 was a spur to widening the coverage of information on the situation of Christians in Ethiopia. In its news releases on Ethiopia, the LWF Geneva office followed closely the wishes and instructions of Emmanuel Abraham, the head of the EECMY. The editors of the LWF Information Services sought a balance in their reporting between the news originating directly from the member church and that coming from other general or church sources and from government offices and other news media.<sup>165</sup>

In 1977–1978, more and more reports about the Red Terror and the escalating persecution of the EECMY and other Protestant churches reached the LWF Geneva office. The ruthless liquidation of suspect politicians, many of them former colleagues of Mengistu, suggested that ever harder times lay ahead for the churches. In this situation, it was vital for the EECMY that the worldwide church and her specific international partners, the LWF constituency and mission agencies, were kept up-to-date.

The head office of the EECMY obviously did everything it could in order not to appear as the main source of international news on the misdeeds of the Ethiopian government or as an ally of foreign powers hostile to Mengistu's regime. For LWF representatives and all the partner agencies the instructions of Emmanuel Abraham to keep strictly to facts and not to communicate feelings or interpretations represented a binding order.

Some representatives among the international partners of the EECMY pondered – off the record – whether the caution of Emmanuel Abraham was a sign of his submission to Marxist rule. However, it was Emmanuel himself who took the initiative in 1977, the very year of Mengistu's *coup d'état*, of forming the Committee for Mutual Christian Responsibility (CMCR) as an official forum for the cooperation of the EEC-

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<sup>164</sup> The general secretary of the LWF, Carl Mau, made several visits to Addis Ababa at short notice when the EECMY faced special threats or hostile actions by the government. A number of Geneva staff members participated in the group that maintained regular contact with EECMY headquarters, with Mekane Yesus Theological Seminary and with the heads of synods and of special programs. Oberkirchenrat Christian Krause had regular contact with the EECMY, ostensibly in the name of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany but in practice as a member of the LWF team. The president of the EECMY usually hosted these visits, the secretary general Gudina Tumsa and other EECMY leaders also being intensely involved.

<sup>165</sup> A statement entitled "How Lutherans Respond to the World" by Roger Kahle, the English Editor of the LWI, describes the information services policy of the LWF in general terms. LWI 10/81, 6–7, March 12, 1981.

MY with its overseas partners including the LWF, with the aim of ensuring the flow of reliable information on the life and problems of the church.

The CMCR was responsible for coordinating the joint programs and projects of the LWF member churches and organizations with the EECMY, the aim being to strengthen the unity of the Ethiopian church and her international partners in view of the divisive pressures from the government. In practice it served as the framework for coordinating the international response to the worsening situation faced by the EECMY and for developing LWF policies and functions related to Ethiopia. The membership of the CMCR consisted of the representatives of the EECMY head office, five synodical leaders and thirteen international partner agencies of the EECMY. Emmanuel Abraham was the convener and the moderator of the committee. The CMCR met annually, alternating between Addis Ababa and cities in Northern Europe.<sup>166</sup>

Inscrutably, the Mengistu government did not interfere with the formation of the CMCR as it did in 1978 with the Council of Cooperation of Churches in Ethiopia (CCCE), an organization operationally far more modest.

Emmanuel Abraham also initiated the forming of an unofficial, semi-clandestine group for ongoing information sharing between the EECMY and its partners. It consisted of a few selected synodical leaders and four missionaries who were trusted by the EECMY leaders. The group functioned as a hidden arm of the official committee. It had no formal organization and no official recognition within the CMCR and the EECMY, although the mission agencies of the four missionaries had approved their participation.<sup>167</sup>

The members of this group gathered detailed information on the events, trends and decisions affecting the life of the church in all the synods and provinces. It analyzed the attitudes of political leaders and local and regional authorities. The group provided a comprehensive listing of the detentions of pastors and lay leaders of congregations and synods, of the closure of churches and of expropriations of church property.

The key person at the Ethiopian end, who coordinated the gathering of information, was Øyvind Eide, a missionary of the Norwegian Mission Society. His name and the names of other members of the group never appeared on the circulated confidential reports. Nor was Eide listed as a participant in the CMCR meetings, for obvious reasons.<sup>168</sup>

Oberkirchenrat Christian Krause, based in Hannover, Germany, was the international coordinator of the information gathered. He made frequent visits to Ethiopia during those years. He signed and circulated from his Hannover office the detailed confidential reports to the restricted circle of liaison persons of the CMCR in Europe and North America. This service continued through the rough years of the persecution (1981–1984).

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<sup>166</sup> Abraham had on several occasions given specific instructions on publishing news or reports on the EECMY in view of the current political situation in Ethiopia. These were addressed to the EECMY personnel, to the mission partners, to the LWF and to occasional international church visitors. Minutes of the CMCR meetings can be found e.g. in the archives of FELM, Helsinki. The Minutes of the CMCR are an invaluable source of inside information on the life of EECMY through the period of trial and persecution.

<sup>167</sup> The mission organizations involved were the Swedish Evangelical Mission (SEM), the German Hermannsburg Mission (GHM), the Norwegian Lutheran Mission (NLM) and the Norwegian Missionary Society (NMS).

<sup>168</sup> Copies of the confidential reports can be found e.g. in the archives of the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (FELM), formerly Finnish Missionary Society.

A significant part of the information on sensitive issues between the government and the EECMY, which was circulated through the *Lutheran World Information* news releases (LWI), originated from this group. The reports from the group helped the LWF to plan and implement its policy in Ethiopia.

Throughout these years the LWF sent out weekly news releases in English and German (LWI) and once a month in French. The coverage included news from member churches, summary reports of LWF meetings and consultations and of ecumenical events, special documentation on current issues, and staff reports on crisis situations. Documented evidence of the totalitarian character of the revolution was amassed, with special focus on the state-church confrontation. These releases also provided a steady flow of news documenting the witness and service of the EECMY. The annual number of news releases increased massively from the time of the closure of the RVOG station, reaching its peak in the years 1981–1984.

The LWI served both the member churches of the LWF and a whole range of general and church-related news agencies. LWI news releases on Ethiopia occasionally drew the attention of leading newspapers in Britain, USA, Germany and Switzerland. For the LWF information team, reliable situation reports from first-hand sources were invaluable. The English and German language editors were seasoned professional journalists with first-hand experience of wartime and crisis situation reporting for the general press.<sup>169</sup>

Sensational news about the political machinations and the violations of human rights and religious freedom in Ethiopia occasionally appeared in the European media. Such reports were a serious irritant to the government. Some also referred to specific churches by name, including the EECMY. Several statements from the government disputed “false, distorted information about Ethiopia” and atrocities by the regime are on public record even if qualified as “alleged.” The government also resorted to violence against the suspected sources. Subsequent international condemnation of these reactions most likely helped to dissuade the government from further atrocities, at least from the mid-eighties onwards.

Furthermore, the Ethiopian government offices occasionally applied the tactic of spreading disinformation in the form of fake stories of mass-scale violence against Christians, which stories they then officially refuted, in order to create an impression of the unreliability of church information services. The aim was to fabricate evidence of hostile propaganda being spread by churches and by foreign mission agencies and to discredit them in the eyes of the international community. The fact that disinformation was being circulated by Ethiopian news agencies was made public by the LWI.<sup>170</sup>

One absurd measure taken by the Ethiopian regime targeted a German missionary-scholar, Gunnar Hasselblatt. Sent to Ethiopia by the Berlin Mission, Hasselblatt had been involved in relief and refugee services during the revolutionary years, mostly among Oromos. He had developed a deep interest in Ethiopian history and had become an expert on the life and situation of Muslim communities.

During his stay in Ethiopia and after his return to Berlin, he wrote several books and numerous articles in which he reported the hardships and suffering of Ethiopi-

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<sup>169</sup> During the years 1974–1985 Neil Mellbom, followed by Charles Austin and Roger Kahle was in charge of the English edition; Friedrich König headed up the German edition.

<sup>170</sup> It is conceivable that the beginnings of such fake stories may have been in personal statements or messages circulated by well-intended but poorly informed Christian visitors who wanted to express to their home congregations abroad their outrage over the treatment of Ethiopian Christians by local authorities.

ans on the periphery of power. He had also referred specifically to the Mekane Yesus Church. He had been aware of the instructions of Emmanuel Abraham not to link the EECMY with the public allegations of governmental disregard of religious freedom.

However, when back in Germany at the end of 1979 and after learning of the fate of Gudina Tumsa, Hasselblatt felt conscience-bound to make public the brutality of Mengistu's regime to religious communities in Ethiopia. Living in Berlin, he no longer felt obliged to follow the instructions of Emmanuel Abraham. He quoted Gudina Tumsa's own words about the duty of outsiders to speak out when the victims inside were silenced.

Not surprisingly, the Ethiopian authorities quickly linked his writings to the activity of the EECMY. An Ethiopian government representative confronted the EECMY leaders with a list of Hasselblatt's publications and alleged that Hasselblatt's academic publications and press articles proved that he was guilty of spreading political propaganda against the Ethiopian government – and that the EECMY was also implicated. Soon afterwards, two Ethiopian agents travelled to Berlin intending to plant a bomb in Hasselblatt's office at the Berlin Mission headquarters. However, the bomb went off prematurely in their hotel room, leaving one of the agents dead and severely injuring the other.

This incident, widely reported in the German press, changed the tone of discussion within the LWF regarding its responsibility for information services of churches both towards those in Ethiopia and towards the international community. An immediate consequence of Hasselblatt's publishing activity was to bring an end to the partnership between the EECMY and the Berlin-Brandenburg Church and the Berlin Mission. On the political front, the publicity regarding this event further eroded the credibility of the Mengistu government in the eyes of the international community.

The extreme sensitivity of reporting on the EECMY became clear to me during my visit to Ethiopia in November 1983 in preparation of the 7th LWF Assembly. The information I received from church representatives and the LWF field director led me to write, while still in Addis Ababa, a detailed report on the measures taken by the Ethiopian government against the EECMY since 1980. I took my handwritten draft to the office of Emmanuel Abraham to ask his advice about publishing it anonymously in the LWI as "a staff report." After reading it and after suggesting several further pieces of information he firmly backed its publication. However, he warned me: "Don't publish it immediately upon your return to Geneva, but only some three weeks later. They would then be unable to trace the author. We want you back here." With more advice from Emmanuel Abraham on how to handle the manuscript at the hotel and at the airport when leaving for Geneva, I passed the border checks at the Addis Ababa airport without any problems.

The behavior of Mengistu was in stark contrast with the posture of the government of Hungary, which in offering to host the LWF Assembly in Budapest in 1984 created an important precedent: no other Marxist socialist country had allowed official international church gatherings on their territory before. The Budapest Assembly of 1984 was the largest and ecumenically most significant gathering of its kind to be held on the eastern side of the iron curtain since the beginning of the Cold War.

International audiences received information about revolutionary Ethiopia from many sources and through numerous channels. In addition to church news services, the many foreign embassies in Addis Ababa monitored the treatment of churches and violations of human rights and against religious freedom. The embassies of the home countries of missionaries working in Ethiopia played an especially important

role. Although most of their information was only available to their respective foreign ministries, they also served mission agencies and their church communities including the LWF.

Because a significant part of governmental aid for social and economic development in Ethiopia was channeled through church and mission organizations, the clampdown against churches by the Ethiopian government also had financial repercussions. However, the EECMY and her mission partners in Ethiopia refrained from asking governmental aid agencies to use their influence to protect church life against the restrictions imposed.

Nevertheless, the reactions of the Northern governments to the violation of the rules of 'fair play' by Mengistu's government had an effect on the Ethiopian authorities who became less willing to take extreme measures against the churches they did not trust. The protests had been made strictly within the framework of diplomatic protocols and were not publicized. Communication about them with church mission agencies had also been confidential. These diplomatic exchanges were rare but effective. Threats of possible cuts of governmental financial aid for Ethiopian development projects helped to persuade the Ethiopian government to reconsider its behavior.

One more line of actions in Ethiopia deserves mention. This was the campaign, initiated by Emmanuel Abraham in 1977, to construct small, modest village churches in locations where congregations had no roof under which to meet for worship because church buildings had been confiscated. The buildings for which LWF support was sought were to be so modest that no government-based agency would cover them, but sufficient for the purpose of regular worship. The cost for such churches was estimated at \$10,000 to \$12,000 each. The local congregation would cover half of the cost and the other half was requested from the LWF.

During my first visit to Ethiopia in 1979 as the director of the LWF Department of Church Cooperation, Emmanuel Abraham presented me a carefully prepared request addressed to the LWF. Most of the local share would be paid "in kind," in the form of local labor and materials. Materials that were only available for hard currency would be covered through international support. The request was circulated as a special appeal to LWF member churches. It received a generous response, with churches in Eastern Europe also participating.

In the period of 1979–1985 some 150 local churches were built through joint efforts by the EECMY, the LWF and their partners. This action also served as a visible response to the government measures seeking to limit church life. Upholding worship was a way for the EECMY and her congregations to express the faith of the Church Universal to the political authorities who were resorting to persecution.

# CHAPTER FOURTEEN

## THE END OF THE COLD WAR IN ETHIOPIA

The tide began to turn by the end of 1984 and the persecution of the EECMY came to an end the following year.

Five factors drove this change: the withdrawal of Soviet support; the weakening of the position of Mengistu's government because of discontent due to widespread poverty and hunger; the military advance of the Eritrean, Tigrean and Oromo liberation movements; the failure of Mengistu to reach the social goals of the revolution and to create a stable socialist state upon a constitutional foundation; and, last but not least, the increased strength of religion in Ethiopian life including a once-more stable Christian community, as also evidenced by the extraordinary growth of the EECMY.

In the period from the end of 1984 until 1986, Ethiopia ceased to be the focal point of the Cold War in Africa. The founding of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia (WPE) in December 1984 was an effort by Mengistu to boost the credibility of Ethiopia in the eyes of the Soviet leaders as a legitimate Marxist socialist country and thereby also to strengthen the position of Ethiopia within the international community. This was intended to be a sign of the decisive victory of Marxist socialism over the various political groups opposed to the autocracy of Mengistu and also a step towards a unified Ethiopia that was to be ruled by a constitutional government. The Workers' Party of Ethiopia was expected to enjoy overwhelming majority support and to demonstrate to the Ethiopian people the stability and legality of Mengistu's rule. The Derg's decision to produce a new constitution was another bid to increase political stability.

These different initiatives failed to remove the threat of the steadily strengthening liberation fronts to Mengistu's rule. Nor did they stop the rising discontent among the majority of population about conditions in the country.

Meanwhile, the whole socialist system in Europe had entered its countdown phase and the Kremlin was preparing for Soviet withdrawal from Africa. As part of this process, especially after Gorbachev's rise to power, the Soviet Union completed the withdrawal of its support to Ethiopia. Mengistu's complaints about the Soviet Union's betrayal of the Ethiopian revolution seemed to suggest that the dictator knew it was over.

From the church's point of view, this change in political climate was welcome. It opened up new possibilities for organized contacts between the government and the EECMY. Some confiscated church properties were returned to the EECMY and most of the imprisoned church workers were released. The EECMY could concentrate on its basic tasks, which had expanded with the sudden growth in membership and with the alarming human needs that had arisen in the impoverished country.

The government resumed the preparation of a new constitution in 1985–1986. It convened a representative Constitution Drafting Committee to which it also invited the main religious groupings, the Orthodox, Muslims, Roman Catholics and the EECMY. This inclusive approach was in stark contrast with the government's behavior during the Red Terror and its extensive persecution of Protestants and Muslims. The Committee completed its work rapidly, allowing Parliament to adopt the new constitution already in January 1987, and the constitution came into effect on February 22, 1987. On September 10, 1987 the newly established National Shengo (national assembly, parliament) elected Haile Mariam Mengistu as President of Ethiopia.



Mengistu continued his dictatorial rule under the fig leaf of constitutional order. The war against the liberation fronts kept escalating. Foreign military aid was no longer available and the Ethiopian army was stretched. Massive drafts hit the young generation hard and the losses caused by the war touched a wide segment of the population. Moreover, the government carried out huge forced relocation programs under the pretext of rescuing people from starvation caused by drought, but with the actual aim of eliminating the support bases for political dissent by dispersing people and destroying villages.

Periodic droughts and famines in different parts of Ethiopia have been reported for centuries, but the most severe catastrophes have taken place during the second half of the 20th century. Rapid population growth and primitive farming methods together with erosion and decimation of the forests have added to the devastation caused by recurrent failures of seasonal rains, not to mention the government's failed agricultural policy. In addition to these, a further strain for the Ethiopian people resulted from the civil war for the independence of Eritrea, which broke out in 1961 and continued until 1991.

Ethiopia suffered a severe famine in the early 1970s, and an even more devastating drought hit the country during the years 1984–1985. The dimensions of the 1980s disaster surpassed any earlier crisis. Estimates of the number of Ethiopians affected by the crisis of the 1980s vary from 6 to 7 million people, at a time when the total population of Ethiopia was approximately 42 million. The death toll is variously estimated at from 400,000 to one million.

The first signs of the severity of the drought were seen already in 1980, when harvests were poor and people started to move towards more fertile lands. The next year the situation worsened and soon hundreds of thousands of people were wandering from their rural villages in search of food, selling their valuables in the hope of being able to exchange them for something to eat.

Appeals for relief were sent to governments by aid agencies working in the country, but both the Ethiopian government and the international aid community were slow to react. The Ethiopian government was busy preparing the 10th anniversary festivities of the revolution, which were to take place in 1984. The government even banned access to the worst hit provinces from the few foreign journalists who had been allowed into the country and wished to get a picture of the situation. The governments of USA and Great Britain, then led by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, were reluctant to assist the Marxist country. Although aid was coming from various sources, it was far from sufficient.

The entire disaster was finally revealed to the world by a BBC television documentary, broadcast in Great Britain and in the United States in late October 1984, which pictured the destitute camps into which the famished people were gathered and where the death-toll was already alarming. Those grim pictures of suffering Ethiopians finally awoke both governmental donors and the wider public.

The church-related aid agencies working in Ethiopia were among the first to react to the catastrophe and to try to raise international awareness of the looming disaster. Private aid agencies had established in 1974 a group called the Christian Relief and Development Association (CRDA) to coordinate their relief activities in the country. It was soon obvious that mere coordination was not sufficient – joint action was also needed.

At the initiative of the LWF, an ecumenical consortium called Churches' Drought Action in Africa (CDAA) was established in 1984 to launch a joint appeal for US\$

100 million for relief and development in Africa. Alongside the LWF, the founding members of the CDAA included the World Council of Churches (WCC), Caritas Internationalis (CI) and Catholic Relief Services (CRS). CDAA/Ethiopia was formed later the same year.

An important step was taken later, when the Ethiopian Orthodox Church joined the consortium, which subsequently changed its name to Joint Relief Partnership (JRP). The intention of the partner organizations of the CDAA/JRP was to keep it a loose community, not a formal agency.

The challenges of the aid efforts were enormous. After food – mainly grain – finally started to be shipped, the Ethiopian ports were under enormous pressure. Heavy trucks were needed to transport the grain from the ports to inland distribution centers, but even the main roads were hardly adequate for the heavy vehicles. Donkeys had to be used in mountainous areas to bring the loads to the most remote villages.

The CDAA/E partnership was responsible for delivering a total of 428,000 metric tons of food to Ethiopia during the years 1984–1986, i.e. 25% of the total tonnage of relief food. This made CDAA/E the largest nongovernmental supplier of food during this crisis. The estimated number of daily beneficiaries is said to have been over two million.

Besides direct life-saving activities, the relief program had several more lasting results. For the agencies involved it established important patterns for future aid efforts. In the long run it also benefited hundreds of Ethiopian men and women who were trained to work in the different tasks of the operation.

In order to reduce the negative impact of future droughts, the LWF put a major emphasis on soil and water conservation projects aimed at developing potentially irrigable lands. About 120 dams and river diversion projects were completed with about 30,000 hectares under irrigation. This represented about 15–20% of the total irrigable land in Ethiopia.

During these years of vast suffering the government began to modify several of its policies. It opened up communication with religious communities, reduced the persecution of Christians and lifted restrictions that had been curtailing church life. It is likely that the heightened international media attention on the plight of the people and the appeals by humanitarian aid agencies for relief actions influenced the government.

As regards the Mekane Yesus Church, the new political climate made it possible to convene the General Assembly of the EECMY in January 1985, the first such meeting in five years. In that meeting, the long-time President of the EECMY, Emmanuel Abraham announced his retirement at the age of 71. The Church Council elected Francis Stephanos as his successor.<sup>171</sup>

The actions of the Assembly and the Church Council in 1985 heralded a new start for the life of the church. The months that followed brought the release of imprisoned pastors and church officials and the reopening of churches. New steps were taken to strengthen ecumenical cooperation, in which the Ethiopian Orthodox Church now also officially took part.

The growth of the EECMY continued with increased intensity. Francis Stephanos and representatives of other religious communities were elected as members of the National Shengo (parliament) of Ethiopia.

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<sup>171</sup> Francis Stephanos, a lay person, was President of the EECMY from 1985 to 1993. He had a diploma in linguistics and was a teacher by profession. He later moved to the United States.

The new situation reopened questions about the overall stance of the EECMY. Would participation in the drafting of a new national constitution increase possibilities for faithfulness to the mission and ministry of the church? Or would it amount to a betrayal of her position in the conflict between atheistic Marxist ideology and the confession of the church? Was there some viable compromise which the EECMY and the government could both accept? Would such a compromise be seen as belittling the witness of Gudina Tumsa and his martyrdom?

After thorough discussion, the leaders of the EECMY decided to support the participation of Francis Stephanos in the parliamentary committee which was drafting a new constitution for the country. In point of fact, however, it was the foreign mission partners rather than the Ethiopian pastors and congregations who questioned the cooperation of the EECMY with the government. The question raised was whether the church was giving away an essential element of her confession in order to gain favors, or whether the choice was really a mature step of faith at a moment of change.

It is, nevertheless, evident that in the subsequent years the attitude of the government towards the EECMY – and also towards other churches – changed. The release of imprisoned pastors and church officers and the re-opening of numerous churches spoke volumes. There was more communication. However, some significant church properties remained in government hands indefinitely and in some provinces the tension between the authorities and the local churches continued until the ousting of Mengistu in 1991.

In the years that followed, church leaders faced a new question, namely, how to reconcile the interests of the different tribal groupings within the EECMY. The church continued to place the greatest emphasis on the whole gospel for the whole human being, on the wholeness of the mission and the oneness of the church. Balancing 'proclamation' and 'development' seemed straightforward for the EECMY, as it certainly did not for partner churches and their mission agencies in the North. The divine foundation of the church and of her God-given place in the social order remained central principles for the EECMY.

## PART THREE – CONCLUSIONS

### 15.1. IMPLICATIONS OF THE EMERGING COLD WAR ON LWF

The Cold War era coincided with the first four decades of the life of the Lutheran World Federation. It is important to point out that the newly established LWF was then still seeking to locate its place and role within the worldwide church which was itself struggling with the wider context of the post-World War II world. Thus, it is not possible to discern the direct influence of the Cold War apart from other factors which affected the Federation during those decades.

Moreover, to form an accurate and relevant picture of the influence of the Cold War on the global church would require access to a wide spectrum of documented information of the experiences of the member churches of LWF. To collect a comprehensive record based on first-hand sources from all continents would be a task far beyond the time and capacities of even a small team of scholars. Therefore, the scope of this study has been on the history of the LWF from the World War II until the late 1980s, with focus on Hungary and Ethiopia, two countries in which the churches and the LWF experienced most keenly the turmoil of the revolutions of that era, which experiences led to remarkable changes in the relations of LWF and its member churches with governments and societies.

The experiences in Hungary, no doubt, left the deepest effects on the self-understanding of the Federation which at that time was in the early years of its existence and development.

The imprisonment of Lajos Ordass, vice-president of the LWF and bishop of its Hungarian member church, was the first drastic challenge facing the newly established organization. When facing the Hungarian crisis in 1948, the LWF was in the initial stage of developing its organizational structure and thus it had limited international political experience other than its immediate involvement in postwar reconstruction and relief and the beginnings of the assessment of the Lutheran churches' experience of the Nazi rule of Germany. It was not surprising that both the Hungarian rulers and the LWF leaders faced considerable uncertainty about the international dimensions of their actions at the time when the global Cold War was emerging as a major factor.

The person who was to lead the LWF in meeting the challenge of the revolution in Hungary, was the executive (general) secretary, Sylvester Michelfelder. The National Lutheran Council in the U.S. had sent him to coordinate the relief actions of American Lutherans in postwar Europe in cooperation with the WCC, which was in "process of formation". He was invited to join the team of Willem Visser't Hooft, the leader of the WCC in its founding process and of its ecumenical relief and reconstruction activities. Michelfelder's primary responsibility was the coordination of the churches' relief work among refugees in Germany, the majority of whom were Lutheran and whose number was estimated at between 13 and 15 million. Alongside this task his assignment included the assessment and planning of future inter-Lutheran cooperation, which had been carried out by the Lutheran World Convention until its war-time paralysis.

The new LWF team succeeded in rapidly developing an active cooperation between Lutheran church leaders in Europe and North America. That cooperation extended

from practical organizational concerns to theological, political, and currently pressing ecumenical issues. It was an instrument for serving the awakening of Lutheran churches as they assumed an international role in the Cold War setting. It was somewhat by accident that Hungary became a test case for the team.

The chief counterpart to Michelfelder in the wider Geneva based cooperation was from the beginning the General Secretary of the WCC, W.A. Visser't Hooft whose authority as an ecumenical pioneer and leader Michelfelder never questioned and whose critical comments and diplomatic experience saved the LWF in its search for direction from several too impulsive American initiatives.

For Michelfelder, the first step in implementing the vision for the LWF to be a truly global organization that tied its member churches solidly together, was to open close links with the leaders of member churches in Germany and the Nordic countries. He recognized the presence and the participation of churches from Africa, Asia and Latin America as a critically important opening to the global future of the church, yet, he accepted the fact that the direct contribution of churches from these regions to the planning of LWF policies and programs was initially bound to be marginal. Furthermore, the reality of an additional region consisting of the churches of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union was for Michelfelder a huge question mark: what would happen to Lutheran churches in Soviet controlled areas?

A triangle of Lutheran churches in three specific areas formed an obvious strategic starting point for Lutheran participation in the mission and service of the global church. They were (1) Germany, the heartland of Lutheranism, now badly beaten but with a church with a strong theological tradition and an intellectual wealth rising from ashes; (2) the Nordic countries with their "folk churches" shaped by the Reformation, and with their unbroken links to the catholicity of the West, yet worn out by the war and weakened by their self-content isolation; (3) the United States with its unexpected postwar rise of Christianity and with a new awareness of an international mission and service shared by Lutherans with the worldwide church on the common basis of the Lutheran reformation.

In the strategy of building a worldwide Lutheran community, the "old" Lutheran churches of Europe together with the American churches with their rising ecumenical and worldwide commitments and with the help of their mission organizations were prepared to draw "younger churches" of other continents into this new community. The Lutheran churches of the North thus had a formative role in shaping the theological and cultural image of the emerging LWF and in participating in the building of the worldwide Lutheran community. They were a significant link connecting the LWF office with the wider LWF constituency during the early years of the Cold War. Persons who had served Lutheran relief and refugee operations, especially in Germany in the immediate postwar years, injected into the LWF a professional knowledge of the conditions of the people affected by the war on both sides of the iron curtain and by the related ideological confrontations of the emerging Cold War.

The turn in Hungary pointed to the need of new competence of the LWF leadership for understanding the situations of its member churches and for supporting them in their existential encounter with Marxism. Even with its many outside resources, the Geneva team of the LWF found itself having to deal in Hungary and elsewhere in Eastern Europe with problems, dreams and decisions from a hitherto unknown area of the world that possessed an incomprehensible political and theological logic. The LWF's close touch with the WCC did provide some outlets, although not necessarily solutions, that were not confined behind political or national blockages facing people

seemingly open to Marxism and seemingly bound by other cultural and economic traditions.

Behind the immediate shock about the events in Hungary centering around bishop Ordass' prison sentence, his role had a longer-term influence on the LWF. Those events raised for the LWF and its member churches questions concerning the role of the Lutheran church in socialist Hungary and more widely among churches in the whole of the East bloc of Europe. Much of the life of the Hungarian church, such as the profile of the church within the nation, and the differences of convictions among her members concerning Christian life under an intolerant regime, remained opaque to the LWF. The position and the predicament of Ordass was the center of attention. For the LWF it was clear that the Hungarian government was firmly in Stalinist hands. Therefore, time was not yet ripe for an analytic discussion of the identity and mission of the church in such a setting. The situation was without precedent for the new LWF and also for the still unexperienced Communist government.

Until the imprisonment of Ordass, the postwar Soviet influence on those living close to the contested border was widely viewed as an ideological and propaganda threat. An easy use of catchwords such as "scientific materialism!" and "atheistic Marxism" and references to religious persecutions in the Soviet Union after the October revolution tended to bagatelize the threat of the Cold War division for churches and also for the general public.

For LWF leaders the arrest and prison sentence of Lajos Ordass wiped out with one stroke the possibility of an easy settlement of confessional churches with the Marxist ideology. The most immediate challenge was the unjust treatment of a trusted and respected Christian leader, the vice-president of the LWF, by the authorities of socialist Hungary. The language used by the general secretary in his speeches and reports about the spread of communism as a manifestation of "Satanic forces" rising against Christian faith sounded suddenly no longer as an American exaggeration, but as a reflection of the facts. Even the threat of a wider and ultimately indefensible military confrontation came closer to churches in Ordass' arrest and prison sentence.

The LWF experience in Hungary was a major factor in defining the Federation's relationship with Eastern Europe as well as the relationship of the Eastern European churches with authorities. Apparently, the LWF was important for them as a legitimate bond for their contacts with the outer world. It was the LWF's aim to support both the Hungarian as well as other Lutheran churches on their own conditions.

The relief operation in Hungary was one example of the LWF's response to the consolidation of socialism in Eastern Europe. The relief in itself arose from the gospel as a part of the mission of the church. It also opened the way for the acceptance of the church within socialist society and for a lively dialogue between traditional Christians and the new rulers concerning the social objectives of both Christianity and socialism.

The experience in Hungary also opened new perspectives for the LWF in its attitudes to the Cold War which tended to generate hostile divisions between and within countries and to create ideologically irreconcilable confrontations. Marxist leaders widely considered the church to be an asylum for reactionary, i.e. anti-communist activists, and therefore the LWF could not be considered as a reliable partner, but was sometimes even suspected to be in active support of opposing forces.

## 15.2. IMPACT OF BUDAPEST ASSEMBLY ON THE LWF

The subtle change of the Hungarian government's relationship to the Lutheran church – from repressive control to building mutual understanding with both the Lutheran Church and the LWF in supporting increased independence of Hungary from the USSR – requires still more study. Signs of such a change were present at the time of the preparations of the Budapest assembly, although not yet widely recognized. Later research has brought into open more documents, which confirm the change.

The tragedy of the assembly was that it allowed the Cold War division to mislead delegates into the captivity of opposite ideological positions. The confrontations of the previous decades distracted the assembly away from the fundamental and comprehensive mission of the church, in which the divine meets the mortal, and the invisible touches the transitory within human life, all of this taking place within the headaches of the church, within the divisions of communities and of the political world.

For the LWF, an important political challenge seems to have been lost in Budapest. It did not grasp the opportunity provided by the Hungarian government in its pursuit of greater independence and openness for the society. The possibilities of the worldwide Christian community reorienting its attitude to the Cold War and for finding a new meaning for "being the church", for being present in a divided world with its unique sources for hope in Christ, seemed to have been pushed aside at the assembly, both in its preparatory work and in the proceedings.

During the period from 1947 to 1984, the change in the profile of the LWF is, however, conspicuous. Instead of having remained as a bystander to world events, the LWF had stepped into the middle of a global world conflict. Its enlarged and diversified constituency from all continents encountered the Cold War in numerous ways and brought those experiences into the Lutheran worldwide community. The divisive forces of the Cold War had been experienced in its gatherings. The Budapest Assembly, with many of its disappointments, was no exception. Yet, the fact that the LWF once again emerged determined to continue its mission against all odds was in itself an achievement.

Changes during the Cold War did not come as one single form. Numerous phases of the Cold War brought their specific challenges to the LWF and prompted it to reconsider its nature as a global Christian community. The spread and growth of the constituency and significant changes within member churches have also left their traces on the LWF profile. The present narrative does not give an opportunity for a proper look even at the most visible points of reorientation. The names of some events may convey an echo of them.

After the drama around bishop Lajos Ordass, came the division of Germany, the Chinese revolution, the Korean War, the rise of politically right wing Christianity in the USA, the death of Stalin, the rise of the Berlin wall, the Cuban revolution, national independence movements in Africa and Asia, wars in the Middle East, membership of churches from Soviet Union in the WCC and in the LWF, the war in Vietnam, the Church and Society conference in Geneva, the WCC Uppsala Assembly in 1968, the 5th Assembly of the LWF in 1970 – no to Weimar, no to Porto Alegre, yes to Evian, struggles for independence in Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Namibia, the 1974 revolution in Ethiopia, the 1975 Helsinki Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, new openings for contacts with Lutheran church bodies and congregations in the USSR, peace conferences in Moscow. Thus listed these are just names. Yet all of them have had their effect on understanding the role of the LWF in relation to the

Cold War and on changes in the LWF profile.

The search for being more than a free federation of churches with a common confessional basis had been markedly underway for some time and was intensified by the Budapest Assembly. At Budapest, the LWF confirmed its character as a communion. It did it by a still somewhat cautious amendment to its constitution, and more firmly, by suspending the membership of two churches which had not rejected racism.

Moreover, while being torn by past and present ideological pressures and controversies, the LWF also reaffirmed its doctrinal basis that binds it to faithfulness to the Holy Scriptures and to the apostolic tradition, and reaffirmed its unswerving commitment to the mission and unity of the Church Catholic. These affirmations were made in full awareness of the powers of division in the political world and also within the family of God.

The LWF's experience of the Budapest Assembly concerning the Cold War can be summed up as follows:

1. The decision to meet in Budapest, in the territory of the Warsaw Pact, was a timely affirmation of the LWF response to the Cold War by its witness to the unity and the mission of the church as carried out under any political order.
2. The LWF appraisal of the political trends in Eastern Europe and of the present character of the Cold War was inadequate. This caused a partial paralysis of the assembly in dealing with issues of unity and mission theologically and also in relation to a socialist society.
3. The assembly showed how vulnerable the LWF is when faced with divisive forces – this time originating from outside, but adopted inside – resulting in an erosion of mutual trust and in personal conflicts. The experience points to the urgency of facing the controversial past – including the Cold War – in church and society with academic curiosity, and with the openness and freedom conveyed by the gospel.

The LWF Assembly of 1984 transformed the profile of the LWF. The term of the first African President of the LWF, Josiah Kibira of Tanzania, came to its end. Zoltán Káldy of Hungary was elected his successor. Changes within the LWF coincided with the shift in Ethiopia. Contrary to expectations, the events in Ethiopia and the struggle of EECMY were left in the shadows of both the divisive East-West controversies about the candidates for the presidency of the LWF and of the debate concerning the suspension of the membership in the LWF of 'white' South African churches.

The executive staff of the LWF also experienced a thorough turnover from 1985 onwards, when Carl Mau of the U.S. was replaced by Gunnar Stålsett of Norway as the general secretary of the LWF. Changes in the LWF structure were set in motion in 1985 and completed at the 1990 Assembly of the LWF at Curitiba, Brazil. This coincided with the reduced challenge of the Cold War as an incentive for defining the identity of the LWF. The search for the unity of the church took a turn towards the notion of the LWF as a communion of churches, while the immediate need for serving of member churches squeezed by political and ideological pressures became less obvious.

The public statements related to Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa issued by the LWF Geneva office continued to express Christian responsibility for the political environment of the LWF programs and constituency also in the last years of the Cold War, even though their need was less obvious to LWF member churches of the area.



### **15.3. A DEEPENING SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE WORLD**

The Cold War fed an atmosphere of suspicion and fear: fear of communism, fear of nuclear war, fear of provoking violent reactions. This atmosphere affected also the churches throughout the world, creating conflicting frontlines. Fear of communism was perhaps the major divisive force, both between and within Eastern and Western societies and within churches. In communist countries it was feared that churches would become centers of opposition. On the other hand, there was fear that oppression towards churches would strengthen in socialist countries. There were those in churches who warned against forming friendly relationships with socialists. It was also feared that conformists within the church would evoke socialism and thereby actually increase oppression against Christians in the East.

In the West, cooperation with the churches of socialist countries was found problematic for many reasons, one of which was that the western churches had to comply with the requirements of the socialist system regarding e.g. practical arrangements, finances, freedom and confidentiality of gatherings. There were those in western churches who suspected that such consultations were bound to lead to the infiltration of socialist ideas and practices to the west. And of course, there were those whose attitude towards socialism and any contacts with its representatives was totally hostile. In those circles those who were promoting cooperation with socialists were labeled as agents of socialism and traitors of the free society. Also those LWF representatives who actively promoted cooperation of LWF with the churches of socialist countries, were marked with such labels.

Churches in the Eastern bloc had recognized their calling to serve the population with the Gospel and thereby also the society as a whole, disregarding what the prevailing ideology was. It is characteristic for Christian faith to cross all boundaries of societies and states and that it cannot be bound by any ideology without distorting its essence. Often, it was not tolerated that such boundaries were crossed. Especially Marxism was known for its intolerance of crossing social boundaries – but the same was true also on the other side. Reflections of this attitude can be seen in the slogans of East Germany: if the church finds as its task to defend those who are in a vulnerable position in the society, why should it not cooperate in defending the rights of those who are discriminated because of their economic or other status? Would such cooperation lead to adaptation to communist ideology? Another example: why did the socialist system take a stand in opposing the formation of Christian or other religious communities and assume that they would breed anti-socialist aspirations in the society. Cooperation between socially active Christians and politically aware socialists was difficult, but imperative, to solve problems.

A general attitude within the LWF during the late years of the Cold War was that genuine communication between active socialists and non-socialist Christians on social objectives could open way for common goals of Christians and socialists within churches, but that such communication did not yet seem reachable. The heart of the matter was whether finding a common ground would be realistic. A true opening of discussion, and mutual trust between the leaders of the LWF and the representatives of socialist conviction was an obvious necessity. Implications of a positive conviction would have consequences for the church leaders as well as for the socialist leaders. Was this goal inherently impossible or within realistic objectives?

In both Hungary and Ethiopia, the situation was different from countries in which

the churches were totally suppressed and persecuted. Despite the harsh pressure on them, the churches in Hungary and Ethiopia had some space to function and even to maintain relations with international church and relief organizations. These relations opened some opportunities for local churches to work as units of their respective international networks. Thus, the international church community had a chance to glance at the reality of the congregations and the ideological pressures on them on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

In conflicts, many of which originate between ideologies, a contact of individuals across boundaries is most important, while, correspondingly, fear of another ideological commitment deepens the borderlines. Respecting a human being is more important than formal membership of a system, when we talk of social renewal. To regard the instruments of power more important than a human being is a grave mistake. A human being created by God is more important. LWF was most concerned of this division, and was committed to advance discourse across boundaries.

The LWF did not agree to serve any ideological system. No compromise between Christian faith and a totalitarian ideology was possible – there is a conflict between them. Christianity was seen as a threat for the totalitarian system, and the totalitarian system for the church. How could the Christian church adjust to such a system? Commitment to justice should not be dangerous, but it is often seen as a threat. It is characteristic of the recent Christian phenomena to strive to be rooted in a wholistic context, but it is an important question how profound this can be. If communism advocates for raising the poorest from their despair, it agrees with Christianity, but on the opposite side there is totalitarianism and a demand for absolute authority. These are still unresolved questions and temptations to resist.

From the very beginning, the LWF has identified itself as part of the global mission of the church. Over the decades, the forms of LWF's activities have somewhat changed, but the unity and the mission of the church has remained at the core. Thus, from early on, refugee work and reconstruction and, later, development programs implemented in countries ravaged by wars and both natural and man-made disasters have demonstrated the participation of the LWF in the global mission of the church.

The role of the LWF has not, however, been just to heal wounds or repair damage. From assembly to assembly, a strengthened sense of responsibility for the world has brought on LWF's agenda also questions concerning responsibility for social and economic justice, human rights and peace. The Cold War experiences stimulated for LWF also new efforts to participate in mitigating the political tensions between east and west. The strong eastern Lutheran churches in e.g. GDR and Poland reflected efforts for constructive relationships and dialogue with the prevailing political system. The LWF contributed in these efforts also by arranging regional consultations between church leaders and political authorities.

Throughout its history, the LWF has recognized the work for peace as a task of compelling importance. Doors were opened for new practical relationships with political peace movements, such as the Christian Peace Conference (CPC), founded in Prague in 1958. In the 1970s and early 1980s, the instability and tension created by the arms race and the growing nuclear threat contributed to the sense of urgency of peace work.

In its 1970 Assembly in Evian, the LWF passed a resolution, explicitly supporting the initial idea of "a conference on European security". When the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) officially started its work in 1973, LWF was ready to call member churches to support the process. An important step was taken when in 1974 LWF issued a document summarizing the member churches' concerns

and positions on the CSCE process. Several of the LWF member churches passed the document to their respective governments.

The final Acts of the 1975 CSCE in Helsinki, Finland, included a number of points which were in accord with the concerns expressed by LWF and other church organizations. Soon after the signing of the Helsinki Final Acts, the possibilities of churches in Eastern Europe and, most notably, in the Soviet Union, began to improve. Also, contacts and cooperation between East European churches and those in the rest of the world increased. In addition to participation in the CSCE process, the LWF also contributed during those years to a number of religious and general peace conferences and issued numerous statements on peace, the most articulate of which were that of the LWF Executive Committee in Turku, Finland, in 1981 and the statement of the Budapest Assembly in 1984.

Another long-lasting concern for LWF has been the Middle East question, the first consultation on which was arranged in 1975, followed by various pursuits for peace in the area all through the next decades. In a public statement issued in Viborg, Denmark, in 1987, the LWF Executive Committee affirmed the rights of both the Jewish and Palestinian peoples

*“to live on the land of Palestine with safe and secure borders and with binding guarantees for full and equal political, economic and social life. It is upon this assumption, namely that both Jews and Palestinians have a legitimate claim to this land on which they can raise their children and bring forth the fruits of their labor without fear, that negotiations on the future of Palestine must rest.”*

The Viborg statement became the foundation for LWF's further efforts to find just solutions in Middle East, when pressing for international peace conferences, when calling member churches to join in the peace process or when encouraging dialogue between the Jewish and Muslim communities. These examples express the development of LWF towards an acknowledged instrument in international peace building efforts.

The first forty years of its existence, the LWF was shadowed by the Cold War, experiencing the effects of Cold War, while working amidst them. It had to encounter both directly and through its member churches the questions of church and socialism: to compromise or to oppose, or to search for living side by side and for a dialogue in which mutual respect prevails, without either party having to cede in front of the other.

Despite the manifold experiences related to it, the Cold War was not what ultimately determined the agenda of the LWF. The basis of the LWF was and still remains the universal confession of the Church. This basis was to be witnessed in a deepening sense of responsibility for the world and in serving those in need. These goals were recognized most visibly in the revised constitution, approved in the LWF Assembly in Curitiba in 1990, listing as the nature and functions of the organization:

*“The Lutheran World Federation confesses the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church and is resolved to serve Christian unity throughout the world.*

*The Lutheran World Federation*

- *furtheres the united witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and strengthens the member churches in carrying out the missionary command and in their efforts towards Christian unity worldwide;*
- *furtheres worldwide among the member churches’ diaconic action, alleviation of human need, promotion of peace and human rights, social and economic justice, care of creation and sharing of resources;*
- *furtheres through cooperative study the self-understanding and the communion of member churches and helps them to act jointly in common tasks.”*

# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX I

### CHRONOLOGY OF MAIN EVENTS IN THE POLITICAL AND THE LUTHERAN WORLD WITH RELATION TO THE COLD WAR

Year	Events in the Political World	Events in the Lutheran World
1890	Occupation of Eritrea by Italy	
1918	End of World War I	Founding of the National Lutheran Council in the USA
1918	Independence of Hungary	
1919	133 days of Proletarian Republic of Hungary	
1920	Treaty of Trianon League of Nations founded	
1921		Founding of the Addis Ababa Congregation
1922–1944	Horthy's regime in Hungary	
1923		Founding of the Lutheran World Convention (LWC)
1927–1936	Civil War in China	
1930–1974	The reign of Haile Selassie I in Ethiopia	
1936	Turn of Hitler against Churches	
1935–1941	Occupation of Ethiopia by Italy; emperor Haile Selassie in exile	
1938–1939	Spanish Civil War	
1939	Beginning of World War II	
1940–1945	Nazi occupation of Norway	
1941	The Atlantic Charter issued	
1943	Churchill, Stalin and Roosevelt meet in Tehran to discuss dividing Europe	
1944	Churchill and Stalin discuss in Moscow on zones of influence	Conference of Ethiopian Evangelical Churches (CEEC) convened
1944–1945	Nazi occupation of Hungary	
1945	The Yalta Conference between Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin	US Lutherans send a fact-finding delegation to Europe to assess needs for post-war assistance
	Soviet occupation of Hungary begins	Post-war relief activities by Lutherans begins in Europe
	Germany surrenders in May	Sylvester Michelfelder sent to Geneva as a liaison person
	The Potsdam Conference of Allied Powers	Michelfelder appointed as interim executive secretary for the LWC
	USA drops nuclear bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August	Lajos Ordass elected as bishop of the Lutheran Church in Hungary
	End of World War II fighting	10 years' prison sentence to Lutheran bishop Zoltan Túróczy in Hungary
	Founding of the United Nations	International assistance to the Lutheran Church in Hungary begins
1945–1947	Civil War in Greece	
1945–1949	Revolutionary War in China	
1945–1949	Independence War in Indonesia	

1946–1954	French – Indochinese War	
1946	Nuremberg trial on war crimes against humanity	WCC Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) established
	Stalin's speech at the Supreme Court of the USSR	Last formal meeting of the LWC Executive Committee, making decision to form the Lutheran World Federation to continue the work of LWC
	Kennan's "Long Telegram"	Bishop Túróczy released from prison
	Churchill's speech: "... an Iron Curtain has descended"	LWC's aid to Hungary begins
1947	Formation of a new international socialist alliance Cominform	Bishop Ordass' tour in Europe and in the U.S.
	Paris Peace Treaty signed	Founding Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in Lund, Sweden, electing:
	Truman Doctrine against Soviet geopolitical expansion announced	– Bishop Anders Nygrén as President of LWF – Dr. Abdel Ross Wentz as First Vice-President of LWF – Bishop Lajos Ordass as Second Vice-President of LWF – Sylvester Michelfelder as Executive Secretary of LWF
		Major ecumenical and inter-Lutheran refugee relief and reconstruction programme launched by LWF
		The International Council of Mission's world gathering
1948	Communist rule in Hungary; tightening of Church policy	World Conference of Christian Youth
	Israel's declaration of independence, war against Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria	Hungarian Lutheran Church gives up right to broadcast services
	USA's Marshall Plan enacted	First arrest and prison sentence of bishop Ordass
	Yugoslavia expelled from Cominform	Plan to arrange a meeting of leaders of East European Lutheran churches in Hungary blocked by Hungarian authorities
	Berlin blockade begins; Berlin divided	International conference of Christian Students in Hungary
	Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted	Inaugural Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC)
		Open letter by bishop Túróczy, dissociating from supporters of Ordass
		Concordat between Churches and state accepted by Lutheran Church in Hungary
		Lambeth Conference of the Anglican Communion
1948–1950		Freeze between LWF and Hungarian government and the Lutheran Church in Hungary, statement by LWF on imprisonment of Ordass
1948–1953	Process of Stalinization and Soviet control across Eastern Europe which is considered as buffer zone between USSR and Western Europe	
1949	North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) founded	
	The Council of Europe is founded	

	Berlin blockade ends Declaration of independence of the Federal Republic of Germany (GDR); 2.8 million people flee from GDR to the West Chairman Mao's declaration of the People's Republic of China Formation of Comecon Soviet nuclear bomb tested	
1950	War begins in Korea	Ordass dismissed from his office as bishop and released from prison, László Dézsery appointed as his successor Addis Ababa congregation assumes the name Mekane Yesus
1951	State Office for Religious Affairs established in Hungary	Suppression of church-related functions begins in Hungary: e.g. Deaconess Institution dissolved; Journal of evangelization banned; cleaning of "reactionary" staff from church administration Death of Sylvester Michelfelder, Carl E. Lund-Quist appointed as his successor LWF Assembly in Hannover, Germany
1952–1962	Ethiopian-Eritrean federation	
1953	Death of Stalin, short period of thaw in Eastern Europe Popular protests against Communist regime in GDR, Hungary, Romania, Poland and Czechoslovakia Reform program launched in Hungary by new PM Imre Nagy Cease-fire of the Korean war	
1953–1956	Unrest in Eastern European countries	
1954	Khrushchev era begins in the USSR	
1955	Federal Republic of Germany becomes a member of NATO Warsaw Pact founded Imre Nagy ousted from the position of PM in Hungary, replaced by Mátyás Rákosi	First LWF conference of African Church leaders
1955–1975	Vietnam War	
1956	20 <sup>th</sup> Conference of the Communist Party in the USSR Kruschev condemns the crimes of Stalin Cominform dissolved later the same year	Lajos Ordass released of all charges of 1948 against him and brought back in office; Ordass starts a series of reforms in the Lutheran Church in Hungary.
1956	Rákosi replaced in July by Ernő Gerő as PM of Hungary Uprising in Hungary, intervention by USSR 200,000 Hungarians flee abroad	LWF's aid operation begins in Hungary and among Hungarian refugees in neighboring countries
1956	Ernő Gerő replaced in October by Imre Nagy as PM of Hungary; Imre Nagy ousted in November	Ordass nominated as leading bishop of Lutheran Church in Hungary
1956–1988	János Kádár's rule as PM in Hungary	
1957	The Soviet space satellite Sputnik launched	LWF Assembly in Minneapolis, Ordass re-elected as Vice-President Rearrangements in the leadership of the Lutheran Church in Hungary

		Addis Ababa Congregation accepted as member of LWF
		Establishment of Christian Peace Conference
1958	The first US satellite Explorer 1 sent into orbit Arms race between the two great powers intensified	
1958	Execution of previous Hungarian PM Imre Nagy	Final deposition of Bishop Ordass from office, Zoltan Kaldy elected as his successor Meeting of African Churches; agreement to prepare an all-African conference of Churches
1958–1960		First three meetings of Christian Peace Conference (CPC)
1959		Constituting convention of EECMY First Assembly of a Conference of European Churches (CEC)
1961	President Kennedy publishes his “Freedom Doctrine”, including military and development funding for developing countries Bay of Pigs Invasion in Cuba Building of the Berlin Wall starts	All Christian Peace Assembly in Prague, invited by CPC
1962	The Cuban missile crisis between USA, USSR and Cuba Eritrea annexed to Ethiopia, as federation dissolved Arms race accelerated; MAD concept (mutual assured destruction) Campaign for nuclear disarmament (CND) also accelerating	
1962–1972	New economic mechanism into force in Hungary	
1963	The Organization of African Unity (OAU) founded in Addis Ababa Assassination of President Kennedy	LWF Assembly in Helsinki, Finland  Founding of the Radio Voice of Gospel (RVOG) Broadcasting station First Assembly of All Africa Council of Churches (AACC) in Kampala, Uganda
1964	Nikita Khrushchev ousted from power Nuclear bomb tested by China	
1966		Gudina Tumsa appointed General Secretary of EECMY
1967		Zóltán Káldy becomes presiding bishop of the Lutheran Church in Hungary
1968	Invasion of Warsaw Pact forces in Czechoslovakia	
1969–1975	Years 1969–1975 described as “détente”	
1969–1985		Emmanuel Abraham’s Presidency of EECMY
1970		LWF Assembly in Evian, France
1971		Letter of Emmanuel Abraham to the General Secretary of LWF, manifesting a new relationship between African Churches and LWF
1972	SALT I (Strategic Arms Limitation Talks Agreement) signed by Richard Nixon and Leonid Brezhnev in Moscow	Public statement by EECMY officers, challenging the Churches of the North
1973	Large-scale famine in Ethiopia	



1974	Military take-over of power in Ethiopia End of the reign of Haile Selassie I and of the Imperial rule	LWF opens service office in Ethiopia LWF convenes international consultation on Proclamation and Human Development in Nairobi Initial takeover of RVOG
1975	Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), Helsinki Death of Haile Selassie I	Joint EECMY/LWF colloquium on Socialism and Church
1977	Coup d'etat by Haile Mariam Mengistu in Ethiopia declaring Marxism-Leninism the official ideology of the country	LWF Assembly in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania  Takeover of RVOG station by military forces; broadcasts of Radio Voice of Revolutionary Ethiopia begin The Council for Coordination of Churches in Ethiopia (CCCE) is founded
1977–1978	Era of “Red Terror” in Ethiopia	
1977–1978	The Ogaden war between Ethiopia and Somalia; Ethiopia assisted by Cuba and Soviet Union	
1977–1979	East-West dispute on missiles: Soviet SS-20's to be installed in Eastern Europe, NATO agrees in 1979 to place new Pershing II ballistic missiles and new intermediate range missiles in Western Europe, provoking mass demonstrations in Western Europe	
1977–1985		Persecution of EECMY, closing of institutes and taking over church premises, arrests of pastors and lay workers
1978		Death of Bishop Ordass First arrest of Gudina Tumsa, General Secretary of EECMY
1979	Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan	Second arrest and a few weeks later kidnaping and execution of Gudina Tumsa Founding of the Committee for Mutual Christian Responsibility (CMCR) in Ethiopia
1979–1980	Large-scale strikes begin in Gdansk, Poland	
1980		Conference of European Lutheran Churches in Tallinn, Estonia
1983	President Reagan publishes a new missile-defense plan SDI (Strategic Defense Initiative)	Confiscation of EECMY headquarters  Bishop Káldy elected as President of the LWF
1984		LWF Assembly in Budapest, Hungary
1984–1985	Severe drought and famine in Ethiopia	Churches' Drought Action in Africa (CDAA) and CDAA/Ethiopia founded
1985	Mikhail Gorbachev's era begins in the USSR	
1987	New constitution in Ethiopia, Haile Mariam Mengistu elected as President of the People's Republic of Ethiopia Agreement on the elimination of intermediate range missiles (INF) signed by Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev	Death of bishop Zoltán Káldy; Béla Harmati elected as presiding bishop of the Lutheran Church in Hungary
1988	USSR leaves Afghanistan	
1989	Massive demonstrations in Czechoslovakia, Georgia, Hungary, and Baltic countries; unrest in Georgia	

	13,000 GDR citizens cross the border to Hungary and Austria in September	
	Opening of the Berlin wall in November	
	End of Communist rule in Hungary	
	End of the Communist regime in Romania, execution of General Secretary Nicolae Ceausescu and wife Elena	
1990		LWF Assembly in Curitiba, Brazil, new Constitution and structure approved
1991	End of Soviet military support to Ethiopia	
	End of Mengistu Haile Mariam's rule in Ethiopia	
	Warsaw Pact terminated	
	Dissolution of Comecon	
	Soviet troops withdrawn from Hungary and Czechoslovakia	
	Soviet Union dissolved;	
	Declaration of independence in Estonia, Latvia; Lithuania repeats independence declaration of 1990; independence declarations of Georgia, Ukraine, Belarus and, Moldova	
1993	Independence of Eritrea from Ethiopia	
1995		Rehabilitation of bishop Ordass by the Lutheran Church in Hungary
		Death of Irén Ordass

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*“Church in a Divided World: The Encounter of the Lutheran World Federation with the Cold War* stands as an invaluable contribution to 20<sup>th</sup> Century church and global historical understanding. The Cold War is differentiated and given meaning in relation to churches, particularly those of the Lutheran World Federation. In this volume the rare gifts of Risto Lehtonen are evident, and he has been exercising those gifts with insight, comprehensiveness, and dedication for more than a half-century.

Risto Lehtonen’s commitment to the Christian world communion marks his enduring contribution to church and world.”

From the Foreword by Norman A. Hjelm

Norman A. Hjelm was a colleague of Risto Lehtonen on the executive staff of the Lutheran World Federation in Geneva. He has also served as Director and Senior Theological Editor of Fortress Press and as Director of the Commission on Faith and Order of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.





## RISTO LEHTONEN

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*Risto Lehtonen served in executive positions in the World Student Christian Federation, the Lutheran World Federation and Finn Church Aid. From these vantage points he witnessed the impact of the Cold War on the worldwide church. Subsequently, Lehtonen devoted himself to the study of the role of churches during that period of international tension. In *Church in a Divided World* he examines the impact of the global political atmosphere from the 1940s to 1980s on the LWF, with special focus on its Hungarian and Ethiopian member churches.*



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