

Lutherans and Catholics: The Journey toward Oz. Reflections on Conscience, Faith and Freedom

Colleagues,

Marie A. Failinger is today's guest writer. She describes herself as "a lifelong Lutheran, a law professor at Hamline University School of Law, and editor of the Journal of Law and Religion." She recently blessed me with a chapter in my 75th Birthday Festschrift, which is just as teasingly Lutheran as this week's ThTh posting. A version of this paper was delivered in response to Fr. J. Bryan Hehir, Parker Gilbert Montgomery Professor at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, at the "Faith and Freedom: The 40th Anniversary of Vatican II and the Declaration on Religious Liberty," conference October 17, 2005, co-sponsored by the Fordham Center on Religion and Culture, Francis and Ann Curran Center, and the Institute on Religion, Law and Lawyers' Work, see www.fordham.edu/ReligCulture. Marie insists that add this line: "My thanks to Ed Schroeder, whose support and critique of this work has been extremely helpful."

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

Lutherans and Catholics: The Journey toward Oz.

My assigned task today is to talk about how Lutherans might think differently about religious freedom, conscience and authority. I speak in dialogue with Catholics and other Christians, knowing that my audience is perhaps not all Christian, or even all religious. But, I hope you will not hear, in my attempt to be responsive to the question and the person, a claim that excludes any of you from the conversation.

If we were to tell a story about how we Lutherans understand the difference between ourselves and Catholics on the relationship between moral choice and moral truth at the heart of religious truth, it might go something like this. In the Catholic story, Dorothy is on a tortuous journey along the Yellow Brick Road to Oz, the Land of Truth. Along the way, as the Wicked Witch beholds her through the crystal ball, Dorothy encounters four trials. They test her ability to stay loyal to the search for truth. First, there is the trial of need, symbolized by the huge apple tree that refuses to be picked to fill her empty stomach. That trial the Scarecrow outsmarts. Second, there is the trial of suffering, the Witch's attempt to set Scarecrow on fire. (And here, as Fr. Larry McCormick suggests, we might remember St. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, martyred in 113 by being thrown to wild beasts in the Coliseum, whose feast day is today.) That trial is evaded by the Tin Man. Third, there is trial of fear, the "dark and creepy" forest full of lions and tigers and bears that menace her life. Dorothy and her friends finally make it out of there. Finally, Dorothy succumbs to the temptation to avoid the problem of good and evil: she falls asleep in the bed of poppies. But she is ultimately rescued by her friends and the Good Witch watching over her. In the Catholic version, exercising the virtues of practical wisdom, perseverance, courage, and care, and with some divine intervention, Dorothy and her companions emerge

from the forest into the light of the City of Truth. They may be a bit intimidated to be there, but they are sure they have come to the right place.

In the Lutheran version of the story, Dorothy and her friends never leave the forest thicket. The temptations of need, of suffering, fear, and the temptation to avoid moral problems are a daily part of their lives, the last day as much as the first. They can't measure their progress by the shining light of the Land of Truth ahead of them. Rather, they have to settle for the hope brought by an unexpected voice breaking through the dark forest onto the road, assuring them against all the evidence that there is every reason to hope. Unfortunately, the voice SEEMS to them to be gone as soon as it is heard. Of course, despite what they see around them, Dorothy and her companions still really want to believe that they are on the Yellow Brick Road. But in the Lutheran version, as they move forward, they find only an ever deepening web of menacing thorns. In fact, if they have the courage to look closely enough, they find these thorns to be growing out of their very own hearts, ever more tangled and thick. It is only in the moments that they care for each other in the deepening forest, as they sit down to share a meager lunch of bread and cheese, hunched against each other in the cold night, that they hear the voice of the Land of Truth they seek.

In the Lutheran version of the Wizard of Oz, human hope is not located in our glimpse of the City of Truth. Rather, it is located in the promise that confounds the reality we live every day: it is located in the promise we cannot verify by ANY human means: though the thorns thoroughly conceal the City, it is really there. Or, more in keeping with the movie's story line, our hope is in the unbelievable promise that home has always been there for us, if only we will give up our own self-preoccupation with OUR truths and our own search to EARN for

ourselves for what has been promised and given to us all along.

Thus, the Lutheran view of the relationship between truth, human freedom, conscience and the moral expectations of community is a paradoxical and elusive brew. Lutherans say “no” to many alternative constructions of this relationship. We say “no” to behavioralist claims that human beings really have no freedom of moral decision and action. We say “no” to the modernist view that all moral decisions are the personal choices of human beings with virtually unlimited moral freedom. We deny an expressivist construction that “I should do what feels right.”

But Lutherans also say “no” to a legalistic construction of the truth, one that suggests that “out there,” we will be able to find a clear set of rules about the way we should live our lives in this world, whether in a text or anywhere else. Lutherans have a doctrine of natural law that recognizes God’s creative work in living relational structures that bring order to human action and human community—in Luther’s time, the household, the state, and the church. But we say “no” to the view that the truth can ever be fully discovered in such structures—or any fixed and immutable structure of the universe—or by a moral journey using our skill, wisdom and virtue.

For Lutherans, God is nothing if not a God who moves and breathes and changes as a part of history. God is not a truth-destination; God breaks in as a voice of truth at the most unexpected moments of our despair about human events. But then, as we reach out to trace God’s features and know God’s will, God runs and hides from us. For us Lutherans, there is only one true and clear message that informs how we live our lives, the claim that is the heart and soul and mind of Scripture: I am a sinner and saved, not by my own reason or strength, but solely

by the blood of Jesus Christ.

As a result, the common-sense idea that human beings can learn to know the good, do it, and then feel good in their consciences that they are truly acting as Christians does not hold for us Lutherans. Paradoxically, we Lutherans do not believe that one's "conscience" can confirm even one's faith: rather, "the testimony of the conscience . . . contradicts faith in the promise."

Luther recognized both the antecedent and the consequent functions of conscience-that is, both its role in making moral decisions and in judging the actions of persons after they have occurred. However, in wrestling with his soul, he turned his primary theological attention to the consequent: to the guilt we humans experience when our judging conscience tells us that we have chosen the evil.

Luther believed that original sin affects both reason and will to an enormous extent: within both reason and the will, good and evil are constantly contending. Thus, all moral conclusions that the most brilliant rational mind of the Church or world reaches-pick your best saint or philosopher-have to be regarded as just as suspect as any common sinner's willful refusal to do that good, because they are just as likely to be self-justifications. That is, any grand moral scheme or specific moral judgment is likely to be just a fancy explanation for why what we want to do in our own self-interest is right. It is likely to be a rationalization that we are really the 'good guys' because of what we choose and what we do. It is not that Luther discarded the idea that the mind was inclined to truth and the will to good actions. His insight simply made it impossible to suggest that human rationality, the will, or the actions themselves-any of them-could be untainted by sin. In this view, Mother Theresa, George W. Bush, and Saddam Hussein

stand equally condemned before God.

For Luther, conscience is important when it is guilty, not when it seems pure. Luther argued that our innate desire for the good and our consciousness that we are free to consent to the good make it possible for us to realize, in conscience, when a sinful choice has been made and to feel guilt. The conscience, thus, makes it possible for us to realize that we are condemned, that we are utterly worthless before God. That moment does not often happen because we are so good at justifying ourselves. But when it does happen, even though in that moment our conscience suggests we are hopeless, we for the first time become open to the possibility of salvation, which is the only real truth.

For Lutherans, this puts in some confusion the question of how Christians should make antecedent moral decisions such as those by an individual who stands against the state or the church “in conscience.” Luther claimed that good works would follow our surrender to the cross, as we began living out of faith and not works. He did not believe that the saved Christian’s rational faculties or will would be cleansed of sin so she could deduce what the moral law required her to do. Rather, Luther argued that morally good action would flow from a Christian’s faith like an unstoppable river, that it would well up in response to the need of the neighbor, a response that embraced the affective as much as the cognitive, the Christian’s whole being. Through the Holy Spirit, God’s law moves from the inside out, not imposed externally upon us but as our delight in God’s law expresses itself: faith becomes active in love for the neighbor.

However, at the very same time, because we are simultaneously sinners and saints, there is no Christian—not one—who is not still living a life infected with self-absorption and self-

delusion. If Christians are faced with a moral decision, then, how do they know whether the response that is “within” them is the overflow of faith active in love or simply the rationalization of a sin-infected conscience? This dual character of the Christian life might freeze the overwhelmed Christian into inaction, for any action he would take is necessarily immoral and insufficient before God. That would be wrong because each Christian is called to act deeply and decisively as co-governor of this world’s affairs, drawing from resources of natural law and its governances, human experience, and the Word. Conversely, a conscience fully freed from the law would seem to be the devil’s playground: who knows what elaborate justifications the “simultaneous sinner” might concoct to excuse his sins against God and his neighbor under the guise of faith active in love?

We might be tempted to resolve this dilemma in a number of ways:

1. We might propose a two-spheres solution When Christians are making decisions relating to the affairs of this world, they should just go ahead and parse universal moral principles for specific moral responsibilities and when they act in Christian community, their love should express their faith. However, this “separate spheres” solution misunderstands Luther. When Luther spoke of God’s “left-hand” and God’s “right-hand” reigns, he was not talking about God’s separate activities in a secular sphere of life and a sacred sphere or Christian community. Rather, in all of earthly life, no matter where and who is involved, God is acting to create and preserve the creation, His “left-hand” governance. He is also acting to save all humankind from our sins, His “right-hand” governance. We live in the whole world as Christians, out of our faith and out of our reason at the

same time.

2. We might also suggest that the Christian's conscientious decision is right if it is confirmed by the revealed law of Scripture. Indeed, Scripture is the one source of confirmation Luther really trusted, but even there, he described a paradox: as one fulfills the law most perfectly, he is most likely to be condemned by the law because he is most likely trying to justify himself. Conversely, it is just as one's conscience judges him to be most worthless, most violating the law, that he is probably closest to the kingdom of heaven because he is most open to receiving the gift of salvation.
3. Third, we might propose that a conscientious objector to institutional practices seek to confirm his conscience with external authority, such as the community of the church. However, the turn to authority per se is not an easy answer for Lutherans, either. To the extent humans are infected with sin, so human institutions are infected. Luther had a very robust sense of the work of the devil in this world. Even though the Gospel will ultimately prevail—of this Luther is sure—the devil works the hardest at turning away the human heart in the church, the state, and the household, the very institutions God has designed for the spread of the Gospel and the preservation of human community. Thus, to tread on a sensitive topic, a modern-day Luther might remark upon the clergy abuse scandals plaguing both Catholic and Protestant churches by responding, “Duh! Just where did you EXPECT the devil to be spending his time?”
4. Depending on “received tradition” or “common wisdom” handed down from the generations to confirm one's conscience is just as problematical. Tradition or human wisdom is just as likely to reflect the “spin” of self-

justifying people pursuing their own self-interest on the backs of the oppressed and needy as it is to be a trustworthy corrective to individuals' moral misperceptions or evil wills. Any number of examples in the past two hundred years of history--the complex moral arguments for the Nazi state, human slavery and women's oppression, just for starters--show that human self-justification, exponentially magnified in human "wisdom traditions," becomes almost intractable oppression.

So, Lutherans continually dance between thoughtful and planned moral choice informed by Scripture, tradition, and the need of the human community, and always infected by desire and self-justification; and response out of the eruption of boundless love toward our neighbor. Given that dance, it is hard to know when we can trust a decision of the "conscience" to challenge external authority, whether the church or the state.

Briefly, how might this theology speak to the arguments for religious freedom Dr. Hehir has raised in the written remarks prepared for this lecture?

- 1. Yes, human beings are created in the image of God and thus, their right of religious freedom is rooted in human dignity.*
- 2. Yes, moral discernment is a gift of God's creative activity, and especially when an individual is working out of his office, as parent, as pastor, as judge, as lawmaker. Thus, the authority of the office is to be respected by the disobedient, as much as the conscience of the disobedient is to be respected by the authorities.*
- 3. Yes, the government must use force, if necessary, to preserve public order or the human community, even against those who believe they are doing God's will and acting in God's name. Moreover,*

1. *The use of coercion against the conscience is as much to be feared because the coercer may be justifying himself as it is because it might violate the dignity of the coerced. To give the coercer the power to continue in his soteriological delusion is as wrong as to strip the disobedient of her right to follow her conscience. Thus, the right of individual conscience, and the corporate free exercise of religion, are necessary as a means to bring authority structures to repentance. The fact of religious freedom in a culture stands as a symbolic affirmation of the First Commandment: only God knows, only God rules, only God saves.*
2. *The use of coercion, state or church, to force individuals to believe or act contrary to conscience violates the basic relational reality of the Gospel. Coercion does not simply deny the human dignity of the person per se. It also negates the reality that all human beings are in relationship with God, who is waiting for and expects a response from them. To interrupt either the call of God to each of them to come home, or to shortcut their freedom to respond that they are ready, with coercion is to disrupt all that matters. And for what? For the sake of something that we cannot even know, that is, an elusive truth about how the world is to be preserved.*
3. *At the same time, all Christians, including those with authority in church and the state, must be prepared to call fellow human beings, including conscientious disobedients, to account for their self-justification. Every Christian, with the power of the sword if necessary, must stand against the oppression of the neighbor. Every Christian must*

deny humans' claims that their evil works are good, that cowardice and selfishness and corruption are necessary in "real life" or mandated by conscience. Only if we have the courage to ask each person to experience his utter sinfulness before God as we witness to the hope of home can we serve as God's true instruments in this world. Only if her conscience is laid low can any human being to open her hand to the gracious hand of a crucified Christ. And that IS the whole world.

Marie A. Failing

Evangelical Church and Theology in the Ethiopian Revolution, Part II

Colleagues,

Here's Part II of Paul E. Hoffman's own memoirs of Gudina Tumsa occasioned by his review of Øyvind M. Eide: Revolution & Religion in Ethiopia. The Growth & Persecution of the Mekane Yesus Church 1974-1985. Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

Evangelical Church and Theology in the Ethiopian Revolution, Part II

“Christianity and Socialism” – Conflict or Accommodation?

Revolutionary events took a bloody turn in late November 1974 when a split occurred in the military and opponents of the dominant faction and some of the previous persons in power were executed. One of those killed was General Aman Andom. Emmanuel Abraham, lay President of the [Mekane Yesus] church, was still under detention. In early December “Ethiopia Tikdem!” (“Ethiopia First!”) became the call of the revolutionaries and a new military campaign against the Eritrean rebels was announced. “Socialism” (without further definition) was declared the goal of the Revolution. We on the faculty of the Seminary had been given the task (since the summer of 1974) by the General Secretary [Gudina Tumsa] to work with the LWF Department of Studies and himself on plans for a new consultation on Christian Social Responsibility. [12] Gudina immediately set the new title for the planned consultation as “Christianity and Socialism”, which was held at Mekane Yesus Seminary in February 1975. [13] I immediately set out to trace the historical origins of the idea of “socialism” and was given the task of working out a course on Christianity and “ideologies” to be taught to the students. We were all asking ourselves: What role, if any, should the Mekane Yesus Church have, or should it seek, or be prepared for, in the Ethiopian Revolution?

The Mekane Yesus Church in the Revolution – a “Pastoral Letter”

An initial answer to this question was hammered out immediately following the first “Christianity and Socialism” Seminar at

Mekane Yesus Seminary, February 20-25: A "Pastoral Letter" with the sub-title: "The Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus in the Ethiopian Revolution" [14] was produced. As I reported in the "Introductory Note" (prefaced to its inclusion in Witness and Discipleship) : "Gudina Tumsa invited a number of the persons who had participated in the Seminar to go with him, on the weekend after the Seminar, to Ghion/Wollisso. After a wide-ranging discussion in which all participated, including (and especially) Gudina, Rev. Paul E. Hoffman, a teacher at Mekane Yesus Seminary, was asked to draft a possible word or statement to be adopted by the ECMY in the new political situation in the country, which, with the assistance of Dr. Gunnar Hasselblatt, he did – till far in the night. The next morning, what was drafted was presented, discussed and revised, Gudina, as General Secretary of the ECMY, and the one to carry the matter further within the ECMY, having the last word on the wording. The matter was brought by Gudina to the Church Officers, who decided to wait for discussions in the Executive Committee before issuing what became the "Pastoral Letter." [15]

It is a pastoral AND highly political document which deserves in this connection to be quoted in full:

1. Ethiopia finds itself in transition. The old regime has gone. Ethiopian Socialism has been proclaimed. New economic policies have been announced. Hopes and expectation have been awakened. However, as the structures of the old society have not been fully replaced, confusion, uncertainty and hesitation are widespread.
2. The Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus is part of the body of Christ in the world. It is a Church which proclaims the Gospel in its full sense and is sustained by the Sacraments. Deriving from the poor, the Church rededicates itself to living for others, serving the

whole person, meeting his spiritual and physical needs. ... It sees its continuing task to be the full liberation of the whole man. It welcomes the opportunities which the new situation provides for building a more just society.

...

3. The Church has been called into being as an instrument of proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and for service. Because of this calling, the Church differs from other institutions. It is a society for witness to the Gospel of Christ and service to our fellow men, not a company set up for profit. Its employment policy is of necessity determined by this its particular character.
4. The institutions of the ECMY (hospitals, schools, development projects) are not aimed at the self-preservation and prestige of the Church. ... The Government has indicated its intention to take care of all the educational, medical and development needs of the people. The Church welcomes this move of the Government and plans to hand over these institutions. This has been the expectation of the Church from the start. The ECMY envisages that opportunities for development and service programmes will be found in which it will be possible to cooperate with [local] communities in the future [the envisioned "peasant associations" and "urban dwellers' associations" are meant], thus continuing to contribute to the development of the new Ethiopian society.
5. We welcome the prospect of participation by the people at all levels of decision making, where the power of the people is channelled from bottom to top. We aspire for justice, respect for human rights and the rule of law. Ideologies cannot be considered as absolute. Complete allegiance is due to God and God alone. We recognize the urgent need of making the people aware of unjust practices. ...

6. *In the revolutionary situation in which the country finds itself, internal tensions and animosities must be overcome if Ethiopia is to achieve justice for all. It is the duty of Christians, as individuals and in congregations, to pray and work for peace and reconciliation. As the body of Christ in the world, the Church itself is made up of many people and various classes. In claiming the name of Christ, we must overcome differences of opinion by dialogue, suspicion by trust, and hatred by love. Such dialogue, trust and love must be extended to those outside our particular fellowship, to Christians of different confession and to persons of other faiths and ideologies. Our fellowmen are brothers created by God and redeemed by Christ. Special prayer should be made for our sister Church in Eritrea and for peace in that Province.*
7. *In its proclamation and prayer, the Church interprets the situation in which it lives and finds in Scripture an understanding of God's dealing with men. Through His Spirit, the Lord Jesus Christ calls for repentance and announces the coming of the Kingdom of God. It is this Kingdom which we must seek above all else. In order to liberate man from the power of sin, selfishness, death and the evil one Jesus Christ died upon the Cross. God is the God of all creation, the God of history. He has called into being a people to serve Him in the world. He liberates this people from oppression, brings them into the judgement, defeat and exile, and restores them time and again. God's final judgement and victory will only come after a time of distress and upheaval. The people of God have been called to discipleship, pilgrimage, even suffering in this world, because true life is found only through suffering and death. The Church is challenged to find itself by giving itself for the true liberation of*

the whole man. In this, its witness to the Gospel of Christ and its service to man, it teaches that salvation as wrought by Christ must be experienced in this life, but that fullness of life is to be realized at the Second Coming of our Lord and Saviour. Addis Ababa, February 1975

Gudina's "handwriting" can be recognized in this Pastoral Letter, which was addressed to the synods, congregations and membership of the EECMY, but which was formulated so as to be taken note of also by the revolutionary government and the wider public. He succeeded, I believe, in getting us who worked on it, and the leadership of his church in agreeing to adopt it, to accept his understanding of the specific situation of his church in that particular moment of the Ethiopian Revolution, and at the same time to interpret that situation in the light of the Gospel, discipleship of Christ, and the reality and promise of the Kingdom of God.

"Co-operation of the Churches" in Ethiopia

Three more seminars on "Christianity and Socialism" were held in 1975 and 1976.[16] In the second Seminar participants were specifically invited from other churches. Out of the seminar came the proposal for a "Christian Council" or Ethiopian "Council of Churches". The difficulty was to get the Ethiopian Orthodox Church to accept and participate in such an organization. After discussion, I was asked by Gudina Tumsa, who spoke strongly in favour of such an idea in the current situation in the country, to draft a proposal for what became (only for a brief initial period) an organization headed by Gudina himself, who lobbied the various churches seeking their commitment to join such an organization: the "Council of the Churches' Co-operation in Ethiopia". At the General Assembly of the EECMY in January 1978 Gudina put forth his understanding of

the challenge of ecumenism in Ethiopia in a paper entitled "The Responsibility of the ECMY towards Ecumenical Harmony." [17] Refusal, on principle, by the Orthodox Patriarchate to allow official Orthodox Church membership in such an organization doomed the project. Church and government pressure forced Orthodox informal, unofficial participants in the initial planning for the organization to withdraw. The result, instead, was simply creation of an all-Evangelical "Fellowship". Practical cooperation in disaster relief and a certain amount of coordination with respect to development projects did develop with Orthodox and Catholics out of the initiative of the Mekane Yesus Church – without, however, ecclesiastical or "ecclesial" significance being attached by the Orthodox (and Catholics) to such practical cooperation and coordination.

The Call for Indigenous Theological Thinking

Under the pressure of revolutionary events in society – and within institutions of the EECMY – Gudina produced in July 1975 a "Memorandum. To: Ato Emmanuel Abraham, President, ECMY Re: Some Issues Requiring Discussions and Decisions." [18] The issues he proposed for discussion and decision in this "Memorandum" were in large measure already touched upon or hinted at in the "Pastoral Letter". Some of these issues were chronic problems whose urgency became apparent because of the direction the Revolution was taking. It was not at all clear to what extent missionaries would be allowed to continue to work in the country, or for the church to receive funds from abroad. There were those among the revolutionaries who were looking to China as a model for Ethiopia where foreign missionaries and funds from abroad and organizational ties to overseas churches and related bodies were prohibited. The points he raised show how Gudina Tumsa was attempting to guide the church and equip it to face challenges which lay ahead.

Among the points Gudina raises in this "Memorandum" was his understanding of theology. Under item 9., "Identity of the Church" he writes:

The sources of Christian theology are found in the Scriptures as well as in the Classical Confessions inherited from the Fathers and have come to us through the Church of Jesus Christ.

The Reformation tradition, as well as the traditions of the revival movements which took place during the 19th century (especially in Scandinavia: Rosenius and Hauge), out of which the Lutheran missions have grown and started work about the second quarter of this century in Ethiopia, are part of our Christian heritage.

An indigenous theology in the Ethiopian context may be defined as a translation of the Biblical sources, the various Confessions, and traditions transmitted to us throughout the history of the Christian church, to the patterns of the thought of our people, that they may feel at home with the Gospel of love as revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Contextual theology is making the message of the Gospel of the risen Lord meaningful and relevant to our life situation, economic life, political life and social life as a whole. In our case, theology must grow out of concrete daily experiences, from our dealing with the ordinary affairs of life as we experience them in our situation, in our cultural setting, in our economic life, in our political experience and in our social practice.

Has the ECMY any theological experience to share with her sister churches, a contribution to the church universal? The ECMY is in the process of developing an indigenous theology grown out of her experience in dealing with the Ethiopian situation, taking the spiritual and physical together in an

inseparable manner (emphasis PEH). This theological position of the ECMY was communicated to the Lutheran World Federation and has attracted interest beyond expectation from ecumenical bodies around the world.

Gudina's position on contextual, situational theology is a challenge to all of us. The key element of the EECMY's "theological experience" was, as articulated by Gudina Tumsa, "taking the spiritual and physical together in an inseparable manner". Could it be that Gudina's rejection of "the Two Kingdoms' doctrine" as "inappropriate" in the Ethiopian and African context was because of this insight into and assertion of the inseparability of "the spiritual and the physical"?

"Moratorium", "Interdependence", "Self-Reliance"

At just this time (August 1975) Gudina Tumsa and I were asked by the Church Officers to debate before a meeting of the Executive Committee of the EECMY the issue of a "Moratorium" on requesting and receiving foreign financing and personnel for the work of the church,[19] a burning ecumenical issue and one of the urgent issues at the time in Ethiopia raised in Gudina's "Memorandum". In the debate, Gudina spoke, from the theological perspective of the "church universal", for rejection of "moratorium", affirming the concept of the inter dependence of the body of Christ in the world, whereas I, sceptical of appeals for "interdependence", pressed for immediate and concrete steps for self-reliance in the revolutionary situation in which the Mekane Yesus Church found itself. The result of deliberations on this topic, in the Executive Committee and at the General Assembly of the church at Nedjo (Wollega) in April 1976, was the decision to achieve self-reliance in a deliberate and planned way within a period of 20 years (something which under prevailing circumstances, unfortunately, did not or could not take place).[20]

Gudina's Public Rejection of Materialist Ideology as "Unbelief"

For understanding Gudina Tumsa's open rejection of and opposition to materialism (and, by implication and in consequence, Marxism) it is important to digest the debate which took place between him and his brother Baro Tumsa, at the specific invitation of the Church Officers, at the Nedjo Assembly. Baro at the time was a member of the government politburo, an avowed Marxist who presented his views in a paper entitled "The Church and Ideologies." [21] Gudina's paper was entitled "Unbelief." [22]. The ensuing heated exchange in the Assembly between the two brothers set Gudina on a public confrontation with the military which had adopted Marxism as its ideology, and set the stage for the subsequent persecution of the EECMY "on the western periphery", in particular the Western Synod of the EECMY. [23]

"Mutual Christian Responsibility"

Both the overseas partners (the representatives of missions and other donor agencies in partnership with the EECMY) and representatives of the EECMY and its synods found it essential in the revolutionary situation in Ethiopia to structure their consultative relationship. The missionary organizations in the country had been disbanded in the process of integration of the missions into the structure of the church, and foreign personnel, though paid from overseas, were serving on call of and under the authority of the EECMY.

In early 1976 Gudina Tumsa requested me, as I was about to leave for a visit to Europe, to give thought to the constitution of a cooperative partnership organization. I produced a first draft for such an organization, a "Committee on Christian Responsibility" (a name he suggested) to which I added "in Ethiopia" (basing it in general on the equivalent

regulations for the "Tanzania Assistance Committee" and the South African "European Partners'" organization, and presented it to him on my return. I heard nothing further on the matter until mid-1978, just before my family and I were preparing to leave Ethiopia on a call to serve the Berliner Missionswerk. Gudina requested that I revise the draft I had previously made, saying that Emmanuel Abraham and he were convinced that the organization should be a committee of the EECMY, not of the overseas partners, a committee which the EECMY should convene, inviting the representatives of the missions and other donors to attend. He proposed that "mutual" be added to the title and that the matter of "Christian Responsibility" not be limited to Ethiopia. The organization was formed and bears the name: "Committee on Mutual Christian Responsibility" (CMCR) which meets once a year for mutual consultation on call of the EECMY and under the chairmanship of the President of the church.

The Lordship of Christ and an Ultimate Confession of Faith

Gudina Tumsa's basic theological stance he repeated as a personal confession of faith in what I have called his "last will and testament". He wrote this statement of faith on the eve of what he knew would probably be martyrdom, going into retreat by himself to do the writing. As far as I know, Gudina consulted no one while writing it.[24] In the last document from his hand, written in late July 1979, "The Role of a Christian in a Given Society"[25] from which I quote extensively, the "given society" he speaks of is, of course, Ethiopia under the clearly Marxist military dictatorship of Mengistu Haile Mariam. Gudina had twice been arrested and tortured. He had been released some days before under political pressure from abroad and had been allowed and been expected to leave the country, but he refused to do so. From what he wrote one can see that he believed that it was God's will that he stay and witness to the truth, even if it should mean death.

Section I he devotes to "A Christian in a Society" which he concludes by describing what the Christian recalls and confesses when he/she participates in the Lord's Supper:

Recollection of God's mighty deeds in the past, experiencing forgiveness of sins today and expecting the Second Coming of the one who has shed his blood for us, is a way of being equipped for a life of witness in society.

He delineates his understanding of Christ's Lordship for a Christian in his "given" society in Section II, "A Christian is Responsible to God and Man". His Lutheran pietism is evident. His contact with the newly risen charismatic movement – in the United States and in Ethiopia – is equally apparent:

A Christian is a transformed person by believing the Gospel of Christ (justification), and is in constant process of being transformed (sanctification) by the power of the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit, who dwells in the Christian. God has counted the believer as righteous without any contribution on his/her part, with the exception of accepting the gracious gift of God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Christian is made a citizen of the kingly rule of God. By belonging to the realm of that rule, the Christian is charged with the responsibility to proclaim: "The right time has come, the kingdom of God is near. Turn away from your sins and believe the Good News" [Mark 1:15]. In carrying out this assignment from heaven to be fulfilled on earth, the Christian is aware of two things. The first is that the risen Lord is ever present within, and secondly that the Christian is never alone. He has joined, as a companion of Jesus Christ, millions of Christians who have responded in obedience to the command of the Head of the Church and are engaged in working for the

acceleration of the Day of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Creator and Redeemer of the Christian has total claim on the life of the one who confesses him as Lord and Saviour. When the Christian confesses that Christ is Lord, he proclaims that Jesus Christ is the King of Kings, the President of Presidents, the Chairman of Chairmen, the Ruler of Rulers, the Secretary of Secretaries, Leader of Leaders and the Head of the Heads of State. Christ is the Lord of the universe and the one who guides historical developments to their right fulfilment according to the purpose of the Creator. At the same time, he guides us both collectively and individually in such a way that the hairs of our heads are well known to him, so that we can relax in carrying out the Commission he has given to his church. This assignment has the first and top priority in the life of the believer.[26]

Gudina goes at length into the obligations which any Christian, as he sees it, has toward Government.[27] "In my opinion a Christian has to make a choice [God or Man] only when he is faced with the demand not to confess Christ as Lord, and when he/she is denied the right to teach in his name (Acts 4:16-20)."[28]

The "Conclusion" (Section III) I quote in full:

It must be crystal clear to the Christian that he/she has a double purpose to live for:

- a. As someone has said, when a person is called to follow Christ, that person is called to die. It means a redirection of the purpose of life, that is death to one's own wishes and personal desires and finding the greatest satisfaction to living for and serving the one who died for us and was raised from death (2 Corinthians 5:13-14). In other words, the Christian has been*

crucified with Christ and has no life which he claims to be his own. The life the believer leads is a life of faith, and the risen Lord lives in him (Galatians 2:19). It is a life set free from the power of sin, and it is beyond the capacity of death to destroy it. Because it has its source in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, that resurrection life is at work in the life of the believer. Being in Christ the Christian is already the possessor of eternal life by being placed in a new order of existence, where the law of life is the love of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:13). And where the power of the resurrection of the Lord is at work, the life of the Christian is a life of witness to the risen Lord.

- b. It has been stated [above] that a Christian is a citizen of a given country and as such under the laws and policies of that country. Because he is under the laws of the country of which he is a citizen, it is his duty to pray for the peace of that country and cooperate with his fellow-citizens for its well-being. The only limitation to his cooperation or obedience to the laws of this country is if he is commanded to act contrary to the law of God (Acts 5:29). [29]

In this his final theological reflection there is no reference to the Two Kingdoms, neither in affirmation, nor in rejection.

He wished that the confession he was making be made known (his written testimony was formulated in July 1979 for presentation at the next General Assembly of the church [January 1980]). He did not seek martyrdom, nor when the prospect appeared did he flee from it. He saw the legitimacy of going into exile, becoming a refugee, though he refused exile, refugee status and emigration for himself. He did not claim that making the ultimate sacrifice was every believer's call. Nor did he claim that any of his insights should be authoritative or normative

in other circumstances. All theology, in his view (as has previously been said), should be understood as situational, contextual. His witness in the context of the leadership role he came to play, and the situation he found himself in, should be taken seriously and judged in the light of that context and that situation.

He paid for the stance he was led to take with his life.

Berlin, December 2005

Footnotes:

- 12. A previous consultation on "Christian Social Responsibility" was held by the EECMY, in cooperation with the LWF Dept. of Studies, in Addis Ababa in May 1973.*
- 13. See the lecture by Gerd Decke, "The Role of Gudina Tumsa in a Critical Dialogue between Marxism/ Socialism and Christianity", in: Life and Ministry , pp. 101ff.*
- 14. Doc. 7 with Introductory Note in: Witness and Discipleship, pp. 77-80.*
- 15. Ibid., p. 77. See also Eide, p. 117f.*
- 16. April and November 1975 and October 1976.*
- 17. Doc. 2 in: Witness and Discipleship, pp. 13-23.*
- 18. Doc. 6 in: ibid., pp. 55-76.*
- 19. Gudina Tumsa & Paul E. Hoffman, "The Moritorium Debate and the EECMY", Doc 5 in: Witness and Discipleship, pp. 45-54.*
- 20. see Eide, pp. 123ff.*
- 21. Doc. 4 in: Witness and Discipleship, pp. 35-44.*
- 22. Doc. 3 in: ibid., pp. 25-33.*
- 23. see Eide, pp. 127ff.*
- 24. My family and I had left Ethiopia (I on call of the Berliner Missionswerk to be its Secretary for the Near*

East) the year before.

25. *Doc. 1 in: Witness and Discipleship, pp. 1-12; Eide, Appendix IV, pp. 280-284.*

26. *Doc. 1 in: Witness and Discipleship, p. 5f; Eide, Appendix IV, p. 282.*

27. *ibid., pp. 2ff and 280ff respectively.*

28. *(emphasis Gudina's) ibid., pp. 8 and 283 respectively.*

29. *ibid., pp. 11f and 284 respectively.*

Evangelical Church and Theology in the Ethiopian Revolution

Colleagues,

In 1995 we were ELCA Global Mission Volunteers in Ethiopia. We stay in contact with a few folks there. Ethiopia is one of the world's unhappiest nations. That was also the case when we were there. There is renewed turmoil these days, though it's not front page news here in the West. Actually threefold turmoil. 1) near civil-war within the nation itself (e.g., 131 opposition members in the legislature jailed by the ruling party for "treason and genocide"), 2) renewed border dispute with Eritrea, the neighbor to the north, and 3) deadly Muslim-Christian conflict in at least one province. During our time there, Ethiopia had just survived a Marxist reign of terror, and the freedom-fighters who overthrew the oppressors were striving to make things right. They seem now to have assumed the oppressors' role. One of our colleagues at the Mekane Yesus Seminary in Addis Ababa in 1995 was Paul E.

Hoffman. Paul and I have been friends since seminary days—he in the (old) LCA and I in the LCMS. Our paths have criss-crossed frequently during the ensuing half-century. He's a rostered ELCA pastor (retired), spent most of his pastoral calling outside the USA, is now retired in Berlin, Germany. He was THERE when the Marxist takeover occurred. So there's no better candidate for this feature-length review than PEH.

We'll post it to you in two segments. Part 2 next time.

Herewith a request for the listserv receivers. Were you, or anyone you know, at Luther Seminary in St. Paul MN [1963-66] when Gudina Tumsa (whom you'll learn about below) was a student there? If so, both Paul and I would cherish conversation with "eye-and-ear-witnesses" who knew him then.

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

Paul E. Hoffman:
Evangelical Church and Theology in the Ethiopian Revolution

A Book Review – and Documentary Comment on the Stance of Rev. Gudina Tumsa, General Secretary of the Mekane Yesus Church during the Revolution

Ed Schroeder has asked me to review a very important book, which I am very glad to do. Documentary Comment follows on the ecclesiastical and theological stance of the Mekane Yesus Church whose General Secretary was executed extra-judicially at the end of July 1979. How are we to understand and react to his

legacy? [Fn. 1]

BOOK REVIEW

Øyvind M. Eide: Revolution & Religion in Ethiopia. The Growth & Persecution of the Mekane Yesus Church 1974-1985. With a Foreword by Carl Fr. Hallencreutz. James Currey, Oxford; Ohio University Press, Athens; Addis Ababa University Press, Addis Ababa. 2000. 300 pp incl. appendices, bibliography and index

Øyvind Eide is Theological Director of the School of Mission & Theology in Stavanger, Norway. In this subsequent revision of the doctoral dissertation he submitted to the Theological Faculty of the University of Uppsala and its School of the Study of Mission (1996), Eide gives an account and analysis of the impact of events in the Ethiopian Revolution (which broke out in February 1974) on the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY). It is also an account of the reaction of this fast-growing folk church among peoples of southern and western Ethiopia (in particular, among the Oromo, the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia) – in other words, the reaction of peoples on the “periphery” of power – to what became the Marxist-Leninist military dictatorship of Mengistu Haile Mariam (which fell to the forces of ethnic and regional liberation movements in May of 1991). Eide himself, sent by the Norwegian Missionary Society (NMS), was a parish pastor of the Western Synod of the Mekane Yesus Church from 1973-76 and a teacher at Mekane Yesus Seminary in Addis Ababa from 1980-82.

At the time, as a clergyman of the Lutheran Church in America (now of the ELCA) who was serving as Associate Director of the Department of Studies of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in Geneva, I was called by the Mekane Yesus Church to be a teacher (chiefly of Church History) at Mekane Yesus Seminary (MYS) beginning in September 1973 and sent by the German Hermannsburg

Mission, now the Ev.-Lutherisches Missionswerk in Niedersachsen (ELM). I served at Mekane Yesus Seminary until the summer of 1978 when I became Near East Secretary of the Berliner Missionswerk. Eide and I, in other words, had each been only several months in the country when the Revolution started.

The Mekane Yesus Church (with a membership of 20,000) was officially constituted in 1959 with the cooperation and support of Lutheran foreign missions from Scandinavia and Germany and from the former American Lutheran Church. The Lutheran World Federation, with strong cooperation from the EECMY, began its international radio ministry, "Radio Voice of the Gospel" (RVOG), from Addis Ababa in 1963. In the spring of 1974, synods which had grown out of the foreign mission work of the Presbyterian Church (USA) joined the EECMY. Today, the church – one of the fastest growing churches of Africa – has a baptised membership of well over 4,000,000.

Eide's general subject matter is the nature and character of the modern Ethiopian state and its relation to religion (Orthodox, Catholic, Evangelical, and Muslim) and how the various religions/churches fared during the revolutionary upheaval. After World War I, Protestant missions had gradually been allowed into the country and Evangelical churches had taken root under the protection of the ruler of the country who had proclaimed himself Emperor Haile Selassie I in 1930. He was deposed by the revolutionary military in September 1974.

The focus of Eide's study is on what happened to the EECMY during the various phases of the Revolution, headquartered at the "center" (in the capital, Addis Ababa), and what was happening at the western "periphery" – in particular in the Western Synod of the EECMY (at the time the largest of the regional synods of the church and the synod in which Eide himself had served) which experienced, beginning in 1978, a

major thrust of religious persecution during the Revolution.

Eide begins by setting forth his "Focus & Methodology" and what he explains as "The Dynamics of Centre & Periphery" in the social, ethnic and political structure of modern Ethiopia (earlier referred to as "Abyssinia"), which under (Orthodox Christian) Amharic rule in the late 19th century had expanded its power to the south and west to incorporate non-Christian (Muslim and pagan) peoples and ethnic groups which had not been up to then within its borders. The largest ethnic group within Ethiopia were and are the Oromo, who, like the other southern peoples, are linguistically and culturally distinct from the Abyssinian (Orthodox Christian) rulers from the north.

Apart from a small but significant Evangelical (Lutheran) Church in Eritrea (the formerly Italian colony not incorporated into Ethiopia until 1961) (a church which grew out of the Swedish Evangelical Mission on the Red Sea coast), it was among the Oromo in the west of Ethiopia that the Gospel in Evangelical/Lutheran form had taken strongest root and been given specific ecclesiastical shape. Eide goes on to delineate in Part One, "Church & Politics on the Eve of Revolution" (up to February 1974), the relation of the EECMY to the Ethiopian state. The close relation of the EECMY to the Ethiopian state under Emperor Haile Selassie can be seen from the significant fact that a member of the Mekane Yesus Church was a minister in the Imperial cabinet and became the voluntary, spare-time lay President of the church.

Parts Two and Three deal with the time-focus of Eide's specific research: "Revolution" (February 1974-March 1978) (pp. 95-148) and "Persecution" (March 1978-January 1985) (pp. 149-234). That research included, of course, published works on Ethiopian history, the Revolution and the history of the Evangelical movement in the country, but also unpublished sources and

interviews in Ethiopia, Germany and Scandinavia. An "Epilogue" (pp. 235-248) gives an account of the period after January 1985 and up to the overthrow of the Mengistu regime in May 1991.

Eide expounds the attitudes and policies of the central leadership of the church on the eve of revolution and then during the revolutionary period, not least the stance taken by Rev. Gudina Tumsa (Guddinaa Tumssa), General Secretary of the EECMY from 1966, a stance which led to his death at the hands of the central government on July 28, 1979. Eide dedicates his book "To the memory of Gudinaa Tumssa and all those who suffered during the persecution". Four documents included in the appendices derive in whole or in part from Gudina's hand: the (pre-revolutionary) influential paper of the EECMY "On the Inter-relationship Between Proclamation of the Gospel and Human Development" (1972); the Pastoral Letter on "The Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus in the Ethiopian Revolution" (February/March 1975); Gudina's pertinent and controversial "Memorandum ... Re: Some Issues requiring Discussions and Decisions" (July 1975); and what I have called his "last will and testament", "The Role of a Christian in a Given Society" (July 1979) written on the eve of his extra-judicial execution by the Marxist military. The latter cannot be understood without reference to Dietrich Bonhoeffer's "The Cost of Discipleship".

Eide's study has broken new ground and is a major contribution to Ethiopian history as well as to African church history. It amounts to a case study in missiology: how a "mission church" dealt with the challenges thrown up by the socio-political events of what became a Marxist revolution.

[EHS: In a separate note Paul asks me to include this explanation of the frequently-used term "evangelical" in this

posting.]

* “Evangelical” is a self-designation. “Evangelical” in Gudina Tumsa’s writings, in Øyvind Eide’s book and in my Documentary Commentary is used in the way it is employed in the official name of the Mekane Yesus Church (EECMY: Ethiopian Evangelical Church – Mekane Yesus) and in the particular way it is used by the (Lutheran, pietist) “Swedish Evangelical Mission” (SEM) in Eritrea and Ethiopia out of which the EECMY arose.

“Evangelical” refers not only to the (Lutheran, but also, in part Presbyterian in background) Mekane Yesus Church, but also designates a family of churches of otherwise divergent confessional and ecclesiological persuasion (Mekane Yesus, Baptist, Mennonite, Pentecostal) comprised in the “Evangelical Fellowship” which has come into being in Ethiopia. It describes these churches in contrast to the Orthodox and Catholic churches. It is used in the sense employed when historians refer to the “Evangelical Awakenings” of the 18th and 19th centuries in both Europe and North America.

During the decade 1968-1978 the EECMY was legally prohibited from using the word “Ethiopian” in its name, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church having argued that it alone was truly “Ethiopian”, the other Christian groups coming from abroad being foreign. Documents from this period refer to the Mekane Yesus Church as “EC-MY” or “ECMY”. There is in the former capital, Gondar, an Orthodox Church named “Mekane Yesus” (“Place of Jesus”). The (Lutheran) Evangelicals in Addis Ababa 100 years ago chose the name “Mekane Yesus” for the congregation they formed, which is understood to be the “mother church” of the EECMY.

THE STANCE OF GUDINA TUMSA IN THE REVOLUTION

“Crossings” readers who, after tackling Øyvind Eide’s book, would want to follow up by reading further in the life and thought of Gudina Tumsa – who was influenced not only by Swedish Evangelical/ Lutheran pietism but by his studies at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, MN, and by the political activism he encountered in the US during his stay at Luther from 1963-66 – are directed to two small paperback volumes that have subsequently appeared from the “Gudina Tumsa Foundation” (GTF) in Addis Ababa. These are:

The Life and Ministry of Rev. Gudina Tumsa, General Secretary of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY). Report Volume & Lectures of the Missiological Seminar Sponsored by the GTF at Mekane Yesus Theological Seminary, Mekanissa, April 18-21, 2001 (Addis Ababa, 2003)

and

Witness and Discipleship. Leadership of the Church in Multi-Ethnic Ethiopia in a Time of Revolution. The Essential Writings of Gudina Tumsa, General Secretary of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (1929-1979). GTF, Addis Ababa, 2003.

Eide, in his lecture at the seminar on Gudina Tumsa’s Life and Ministry in 2001, pointed out that Gudina in discussing with him in 1975 the “two kingdoms’ doctrine of Lutheran theology”, “maintained that this model of relating the church to society was inappropriate to Ethiopian reality”! [2] I don’t ever myself recall such a statement from Gudina, though I worked closely with him in a number of contexts from 1974 until a year before his death in July 1979. But I must admit that I am not surprised by his having made such a remark. Let me explain somewhat at length.

The Stance of the Church – Responding to Challenges

I became involved in intense discussions in Addis Ababa (at the

“center”, to use Eide’s terminology) as to how the Revolution (which began in February 1974 as a “Creeping Revolution”) was to be understood, and how the Mekane Yesus Church should/could/might, if at all, respond ad intra and ad extra to the Revolution. The discussions centered on Evangelism and the nature of faith, on Christianity and Socialism (Christianity and Marxism), on the Identity of the Mekane Yesus Church and its dependence on foreign personnel and finances, on the church’s Social and Development Institutions in the revolution, and on Ecumenism and a structure for inter-church cooperation in the Ethiopian context. On all these points Gudina Tumsa as General Secretary of the EECMY was the initiator and chief participant of the discussions. Subsequently (after retirement in 1994), as an advisor to the Gudina Tumsa Foundation (GTF) for the editing of Gudina’s papers, I have also been privileged to see and appreciate how contextual Gudina’s thinking over an extensive period actually was.

The Concrete Reality of Jesus as Lord

Almost three years before the Revolution broke out, Gudina Tumsa had presented a “Report on Church Growth in Ethiopia” [3] at a consultation (in Tokyo in May 1971) of the newly-formed Commission on Church Cooperation of the LWF. Gudina takes note in his “Report” of “complex social factors” contributing to what appeared to be a growing mass movement among the peoples of the south and the west to the Evangelical form of Christianity. The mass movement can be seen from various “angles”. The following quote from this “Report” indicates that not the concept of Two Kingdoms, but the assertion of the Lordship of Christ was the way Gudina Tumsa saw and “appropriately” interpreted church and society and God at work in “Ethiopian reality” (to use Gudina’s term as reported by Eide):

“Central to the proclamation and witness of the [new Evangelical] believers is the idea that Jesus saves. This is repeated very often, and one can never miss it in one form or another. There is no distinction between curing from malaria, pneumonia, or saving from sin. “Jesus Christ saves” means that He literally cures from physical diseases, as well as from the burden of sin. The simple preaching of the Gospel was very often accompanied by healing, exorcism, or by some other signs which were interpreted to be the new God demonstrating His power. ... Looking at the mass movements from a political angle, it cannot be denied that people who have been under landowners have found strength in turning to Christianity. They understand their true humanity in a new way. Of course, they are limited – but they are strong enough to make the best of what can be done under the present system: in fighting for their rights. It made a great impression on the people of the Konso area in Gamu Gofa when the Evangelical Christians united and, through one of their leaders, filed a case against a certain official who had taken a large portion of their land. They fought to the High Court and won the case. Politically, this is but the beginning (Matthew 24:8). It is no wonder that their revival songs are hymns of praise to God who made it possible for them to get back their land.”[4]

Commitment to the Priority of Evangelism

There can be no doubt about Gudina Tumsa’s personal faith and confession of Jesus Christ as Lord. With his coming to personal Christian faith and confession as a lad, a “burden” had been laid upon him to preach the Gospel to others. Gudina had been a voluntary evangelist even after becoming a “dresser” (a nurse), and he continued to be an evangelistic preacher during his two-year theological course under the Swedish Evangelical Mission (SEM) and his service as a pastor of the Central Synod of the EECMY in Nekempt, capital of the Oromo-speaking province of

Wollega to the west of Shoa. His subsequent work for the EECMY outside his own ethnic area (in Kambatta in southern Shoa) and then his studies at Luther Seminary in Minnesota broadened his vision and understanding without crimping his zeal. Though he wished at times that he had had more time and opportunity for further theological study, it was not out of a desire to become a theological academic, but better to relate the Gospel to the challenges he faced as the General Secretary and as a leader of his church. I can testify to his continuing concern for Evangelism and outreach. In June 1974, I was asked by Gudina (who had just been elected President of the newly- formed Addis Ababa Synod of the EECMY, in addition to his being General Secretary of the church) to sit on the Evangelism Committee of the Synod, which dealt with coordinating the outreach work of the Synod and of its congregations and the planting and nurture of new congregations and preaching places. I took part in the deliberations of this committee until my family and I left Ethiopia in mid-1978. His zeal for the Gospel of Christ never abated. Whatever else came into play, his faith and confession of Jesus as Lord led him to make his final confession before organs of the Revolutionary state – and to his death – at the end of July the following year.

“Integration” of the Mission Institutions and “Wholistic Ministry”

Gudina Tumsa had become Executive, then General Secretary of the EECMY in 1966, just as the EECMY and its synods were preparing to take over responsibility for the educational, social (including medical), and development institutions and programs initiated and financed by the missions and international development agencies. These institutions and programs were to be “integrated” into structures created by the EECMY and its synods, but with continuing financing from overseas. Gudina as General Secretary was in the forefront of

pressing for and administering this process of “integration.”[5] It was in this context that the Church Officers of the EECMY, with decisive input from Gudina, had developed the concept of “Wholistic Ministry” as explicated in a position paper (“Document”; “Letter”) addressed to the Lutheran World Federation in May 1972, “On the Interrelation of Proclamation of the Gospel and Human Development.”[6].

The argumentation was aimed at overseas “donor agencies”, some of whom, if not questioning the legitimacy of church involvement in sponsoring development projects, were nevertheless understood to be demanding a complete separation of Christian proclamation from programs of economic development (considered to be a completely secular process). Over against this, the Mekane Yesus position paper asserts “an integral” “understanding of man and his needs”, to which the proclamation of the Gospel is a fundamental part of the response of the church which cannot be allowed to be missing. The paper was intended as a theological statement as well as a policy statement by the church.

Assertion of an African View of Reality

A letter of Gudina’s from November 1972[7] gives further insight into his thinking. He does not reaffirm the Lutheran doctrine of the Two Kingdoms in the context of Ethiopia or Africa, but asserts “that an African view assumes the totality of man which is not in line with the Western ways of thinking”: He goes on to say:

“It is, in my opinion, just time to raise such questions [as were raised by the Mekane Yesus Church in its position paper] by the African churches. I believe that an African theology will be developed along the line that has been defined in the Mekane Yesus Document. ... In my opinion, reconsideration of

criteria and review of policies by the Western churches require a theological re-thinking ... In Africa there are some thinkers who are interested neither in the Western nor in the Eastern ways of thinking. The one divides one man into various parts, while the other denies the reality of the religious dimension of human existence. In Africa we are not interested in this. We have, if we are to develop healthy societies, [to] look at life as a total unit and try to cater to its needs.”[8]

“Contextual Interpretation”

Gudina Tumsa had a decisive part in formulating an address prepared by the Church Officers of the EECMY and presented by Gudina in person to a Special Consultation which was conducted by the LWF in Nairobi, October 1974, to discuss in a wider forum the issues raised by the EECMY in its position paper of 1972. It was entitled “Serving the Whole Man: A Responsible Church Ministry and a Flexible International Aid Relationship”[9]. This address asks: “What is a responsible ministry of the Christian church in today’s world and in a given cultural, social and political situation?” The explosive Ethiopian context at the time of this Special Consultation should be borne in mind: The military had effectively disempowered the Emperor by the end of February 1974. At the end of April the members of the Imperial cabinet that had resigned were taken into custody, including the spare-time lay President of the Mekane Yesus Church, who had been Minister of Mines, His Excellency Emmanuel Abraham. He was not released till the end of the year. About the time of his detention the EECMY had sent a letter to the new government welcoming the proposed revision of the constitution, asserting that “complete religious freedom can be realised only by establishing a secular state, guaranteeing equal freedom to all religious groupings.”[10] In September 1974 the Emperor was deposed and a 106-member military committee or “Derg” declared itself to be

the power in control of the country, the “Provisional Military Administrative Council” (led by a member of the Addis Ababa Mekane Yesus congregation, Lt. General Aman Andom, an Eritrean). Just prior to the deposition of the Emperor, Gudina Tumsa had participated in a discussion over the local radio program of the LWF’s “Radio Voice of the Gospel” expressing his personal preference for a future constitutional monarchy with social democracy along Scandinavian lines as a model. In this situation Gudina Tumsa states the position of the Mekane Yesus Church. Because of its significance I quote at length:

“In our opinion, there is no universal and simple answer to the question what constitutes a responsible church ministry. We believe that the Gospel itself when faithfully proclaimed and faithfully lived gives the necessary guidelines for a responsible church ministry. A true theological definition of a responsible church must always grow out of an “actual situation”, or, to go even one step further, true biblical and evangelical Theology must always allow for a contextual interpretation of the Gospel and the action strategy of the church, and priorities must be decided upon in faithfulness to this interpretation (emphasis PEH).

“It is true that a contextual definition of a responsible church ministry is always a risky undertaking, because in every situation and in every event both divine and demonic elements are at work, and, as has rightly been said, one can easily be carried away with the wind of the times and allow the church to become a tool of other powers than the Lord. ...

“We would like to mention three basic objectives which in our opinion constitute the biblical mandate given to the church by its Lord. These objectives are inseparable, but emphasis on each one of them will have to be changed in accordance with the contextual interpretation of the Gospel. Any attempt to

separate the three objectives will immediately have implications for the quality of the total ministry of the church.

“The church is first of all commissioned to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all nations (Matthew 28:19-20). This is the evangelistic outreach of the church and the missionary obligation which she can never withdraw from nor delegate. ...

“The other objective is the healing of brokenness and making man whole. The church has a healing ministry to carry out which is more than medical care for the physically ill. It has to do with restoration of man to liberty and wholeness. Here the church simply has to follow her Lord and Saviour, who during his ministry here on earth cared for the whole man. ... The brokenness of man and of the world at large has its real root in the sinful nature of man. Sin is not only situational or an act which destroys the relationships between man and man and between man and God, but it is a reality itself within the individual. The healing of the brokenness in human life can therefore never be accomplished without the Gospel message of forgiveness which has in itself the power to liberate man from the most dehumanizing power in his own life and in his relationships with other men and God. ...

“The third objective of a responsible church ministry must be to engage in the betterment of human existence wherever needed. This includes any lawful activity, from being a prophetic voice in condemning injustice and oppression to involvement in social and community development.

“So much has been said about the social responsibility of the church that there is no need to say more about it in the context of this paper. We only want to repeat again that it is the prerogative of the local church to determine those

activities in which it should be involved, and to what extent.”[11]□

One can assume that Gudina Tumsa was here preparing the Mekane Yesus Church for a constructive, creative role in the changes that might be hoped for as a result of the change in Ethiopia that had come about thus far.

None of those of us who were teaching at Mekane Yesus Seminary at the time were involved in formulating this address. This basic theological stance was that which informed the leadership of the church at the onset of the Revolution and which in the end, however, carried Gudina Tumsa into conflict with the military dictatorship which was establishing itself in Ethiopia.

[End of Part I. Next week’s part II begins with: “Christianity and Socialism” – Conflict or Accommodation?]

Footnotes:

1. I have previously expressed myself on Gudina Tumsa’s legacy in lectures at two seminars on Gudina’s life and thought sponsored by the Gudina Tumsa Foundation and the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus at Mekane Yesus Theological Seminary in 2001 and 2003.
2. “Integral Human Development: Rev. Gudina Tumsa’s Theology, with Special Reference to His Critique of Dominant Trends in Missiology and the Question of Human Rights” (with bibliography), in: *Life and Ministry*, pp. 37-75, here p. 37. See also my paper presented to the same seminar , “Gudina Tumsa’s Legacy: His Spirituality and Leadership” in: *ibid.*, pp. 13-23.
3. Doc. 11 in: *Witness and Discipleship, The Essential Writings of Gudina Tumsa*, pp. 125-135.
4. *ibid.*, pp. 131 and 132.

5. *The process of integrating the educational, social, medical and development institutions and programs at the regional synod level meant at the same time, in the view of the Church Officers (and of Gudina in particular), a concentration of budgeting and policy-making as to finance; see his combative "Report at the Ethiopia Consultation" (Hanover, November 1973), Doc. 9 in: Witness and Discipleship, pp. 95-110.*
6. *Eide, Appendix I (pp. 263-268); Doc. 8 in: Witness and Discipleship, pp. 81-94.*
7. *to Dr. Carl-Johan Hellberg of the LWF Dept. of Church Cooperation in Geneva, dated Addis Ababa, December 12, 1972: see my Introductory Note to Doc. 10 in: Witness and Discipleship, p.. 111f.*
8. *ibid.*
9. *Doc. 10 in: Witness and Discipleship, pp. 111-123.*
10. *Eide, p. 115f.*
11. *ibid., pp. 115-118.*