

Anglican-Lutheran Society Conference

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His presentation, delivered on 12th September 2009 was entitled

Valour, Discretion, Collaboration

Models of Leadership in the Lutheran Church of Hungary During Communism and Their Impact upon the Church Today

I first heard about Trevor Beeson's book *Discretion and Valour* in 1975 when I was a twenty-year-old Hungarian volunteer in Hothorpe Hall, a conference centre formerly operated by the Lutheran Council in Great Britain. Then my English was not good enough to understand all the details of the book but I knew it was about the different attitudes the church leaders adopted to lead their churches in Communist Eastern Europe.

In the years to come I graduated in English at the University in Budapest and became a Professor of English literature and culture. In the mid 1980s I also studied Lutheran theology and have kept this dual scholarly interest in literature and theology ever since. Through my university courses on British and American Christianity and literature I have frequently been very close to Anglicanism but theologically I have always been Lutheran.

Therefore, I am honored and privileged to have been invited to the conference of the Anglican-Lutheran Society. Moreover, I am very happy that this conference is in Finland, a country of our distant relatives, which, strange as it may sound, I am visiting for the first time. The topic is *Keeping Connected* and I hope to be able to connect or reconnect not only Anglicanism and Lutheranism, the Finnish and the Hungarian people, English studies and theology but the past and the present of the Church of Christ as well.

I was asked to offer a lecture on the witnessing to the Gospel in a totalitarian system, a topic I have been frequently concerned with during the past two decades. I will be talking about the struggles within my small Hungarian Lutheran Church in the decades of Communism. But let me immediately offer a corrective: this is not only about my church but also your church, for "the church is catholic, universal," as John Donne, the seventeenth-century English poet said in his celebrated meditation. "No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent; a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less...any man's death

diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind...”¹ We Anglicans and Lutherans are thus parts of the same body and we are here today to share the burdens of the common body.

I come from that part of our common globe where Christian faith, the faith of the Church, was tried and because of persecution. Good for you that you were never exposed to such pressure and persecution. Or, perhaps, bad for you that you have never had this experience. But most probably you have your own latent dangers and pitfalls, such as prosperity and materialism.

I. The Historical Background

Hungary is a small nation with a thousand-year-old history. The Hungarian language is a small, strange linguistic island in the vast sea of Germanic and Slavonic languages. It is related to none of these groups, as it is not an Indo-European but a Finno-Ugric language. The pagan Hungarians converted to Christianity in the year 1000, and ever since the history of the nation has been a constant fight for integrity and independence since geographically and geopolitically it is on the border of east and west. We had Tatar and Turkish invasions in the Middle Ages and early modernity.

For centuries the Hapsburgs wanted to colonize the country; their conflicts were solved by the Compromise of 1867 that marked the beginning of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. However, due in part to re-emerging improper conduct – Hungarian “pride” over ethnic minorities during the peaceful and prosperous Austro-Hungarian monarchy – Hungary lost two-thirds of her territory with the end of the First World War. Due to another ill-fated alliance, Hungary again found herself on the side of losers in 1945.

The Soviets came to liberate the country from Nazi occupation, but they liberated us also from our freedom. The western world admired the courage of this small nation but ungraciously let it down because of its involvement with the occupation of the Suez Canal in 1956.

The history of communism has two phases: we may call the first phase of the late forties and the early fifties “hard communism” or “Stalinism.” This cruel suppression of the Hungarian revolution by the Russian tanks on November 4, 1956, marked the beginning of the Kádár era, or “soft communism,” better known here as “goulash communism.” For a couple of decades Hungary became “the happiest barracks in the eastern European concentration camp.” Party Secretary János Kádár, traitor to the revolution, could provide a relative welfare for the inhabitants, but he had no inhibitions about joining the Soviets in crushing the Prague Spring of 1968.

Some 200,000 people fled the country from the Russian tanks in 1956, and soon after the revolution hundreds were executed. During the three decades of soft communism (1957–1988) we Hungarians were not sent to concentration camps any more. We were even allowed to travel to the west once every three years. All in all, I daresay, this “soft communism” was psychologically and morally more dangerous

¹ John Donne, “Meditation XVII,” in *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*, ed. Anthony Raspa, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.

than Stalinist tyranny. During the Stalinist terror everybody knew who was who, while during the Kádár regime we were gradually hypnotized to take our situation as reality and there was no way out. Most people believed that communism, or socialism as they called it, would have no end. Not even two years before 1989 would any Hungarian, or any citizen of the world, predict that this system would collapse like a pack of cards.

A Minority Within a Minority

The Christian churches have, unfortunately, not proved better than any other earthly institution. That is to say, they were just as ill-prepared for the advent of communism as for its collapse forty years later.

If Hungarians with their ten million inhabitants are a minority among the peoples of Europe, the Lutherans (3%) in Hungary are also a minority among the Roman Catholics (60%), and Reformed Christians (20%) of the population. My story, therefore, is going to be a story of a minority within a minority.

The Roman Catholic church has always held that the country was a *Regnum Marianum*, a country protected by the Virgin Mary ever since King Stephen offered his crown and land to the Blessed Virgin. Their most outstanding leader, Cardinal Mindszenty, identified himself not just with the Catholics but with the whole people and developed a theology and practice of resistance. The communists put Mindszenty into prison: he was released in the midst of the 1956 revolution when he made an impressive radio address. When the Russian tanks crushed the revolution, he got shelter from the American embassy for 15 years.

The Roman Catholic Church then began to adopt a more cautious *modus vivendi* policy, called the “policy of small steps,” which was soon also approved by the Holy See. All the arrangements suited the international climate of the 1960s and also the inclusive ideology of the Kádár regime with its biblical slogan: “He who is not against us is with us.” When Cardinal Mindszenty was allowed to leave the American embassy for western Europe in 1971, he found himself a forsaken and lonely figure.

The leaders of the Reformed church developed a special theology of judgment arguing, in the spirit of the Old Testament prophets, that we should take communism as the judgment of God, since in the past our churches have lined up with reactionary powers - Protestant bishops, for example, had voted for the law discriminating against the Jews. The Reformed, just as the Catholics, have always been more politically committed than their Lutheran brethren. The Calvinists were proud to uphold their progressive political history when they rebelled against the Hapsburgs and the Catholics and were keen on using this credit both in the Stalinist and the soft communist period. A “red” bishop of the Reformed church left the church after 1956 and became the foreign minister of the Kádár regime. The Reformed bishops of the Kádár era developed a so-called “theology of service,” an ideology that tried to tame pious church members to serve not only their Lord but also the communist state.

II. Models of Church Leadership

Ten years ago I analyzed the inaugural addresses of ten Bishops with their historical contexts between 1945 and 1990 I have divided them into four groups: 1) Confessors 2) Compromisers 3) Collaborators, and 4) Cautious Innovators². Let me immediately add that whenever I use the category of “confessor” it does not entail that the person was “stubborn” or unwilling to compromise in minor issues and whomever I call “compromiser” was, to a certain extent, also a “confessor” necessarily. But it means that in unexpectedly difficult political situations there were some who managed to remain loyal to the Gospel and remained unmoveable when they believed that vital principles were at stake. The “compromisers” also tried to remain faithful to the Gospel but they wished to find a rational *modus vivendi*. A “confessor” never becomes a politician while the “compromiser,” though temporarily, adopts the attitude of the “realpolitician,” believing that this course of action is taken for the sake of the church. The collaborator is the one who is only nominally chosen by the church: it is ultimately the state that places him into his office. Sometimes compromisers have become collaborators.

1. Confessor (Valour)

Though I have used the plural “confessors” I can only find one example of a confessor. It is the example of Bishop Lajos Ordass (1901-1978)³. No wonder that there is an oak frieze in a Lutheran church in Minnesota encircling the sanctuary with a “cloud of witnesses” from the Bible and church history beginning with Enoch and ending with the names of Berggrav, Bonhoeffer, and Ordass.

Lajos Ordass (1901–1978) was the Bishop of the Hungarian Lutheran Church from 1945 until his death in 1978, i.e. for thirty three years, but he could exercise his office for altogether less than five years, during two different periods: between 1945–1948 and 1956–1958⁴. He decided to change his original German family name “Wolf” into the Hungarian “Ordass” on the day of the Nazi occupation of Hungary.

Ordass defended the church on the theological principles of the Lutheran idea of the “two regiments (realms):” “Our church knows her duties with regard to the state and democracy, and she wants to accomplish them faithfully. But the church also expects

² The paper was given as a lecture at a conference on Protestant Churches During the Period of Communism in October 1999 in Denmark and was first published in German: Tibor Fabiny, “Bekenner und Angepasste. Skizzen zu einem noch nicht geklarten Kapitel der jüngsten lutherischen Kirchengeschichte Ungarns,” in *Glaube in der 2. Welt*, 6/2000, 14–21. Published in English: *Religion in Eastern Europe*, Vol. XXIV, Number 4, August 2004. Republished in: Tibor Fabiny, *The Veil of God. The Testimony of Bishop Lajos Ordass in Communist Hungary*. Budapest, Center for Hermeneutical Research, 2008. pp.1-23

³ The standard English biography of Ordass is by László G. Terry, *He Could Not Do Otherwise: Bishop Lajos Ordass, 1901–1978*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Cambridge U.K.: William Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997.

⁴ See also my articles on Ordass: “Bishop Lajos Ordass and the Hungarian Lutheran Church,” in *Hungarian Studies* 10/1 (1995) 65–98; “The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and Its Aftermath in the Lutheran Church: The Case of Bishop Ordass,” in §1m Riiderwerk des ‘real existierenden Sozialismus’. Kirchen in Ostmittel-und Osteuropa von Stalin bis Gorbatschow Herausgegeben von Hartmut Lehmann und Jens Holger Schjorring, Göttingen, Wallstein, § 2003, 31–40; “The Testimony of Bishop Lajos Ordass During Communism in Hungary,” in *Zwischen den Mühlsteinen. Protestantische Kirchen in den der Errichtung der kommunistischen Herrschaft im östlichen Europa*, Hg. Peter Maser und Jean Holger Schjorring, Erlangen: Martin Luther Verlag, 2002, 303–320; “Bekenner und Angepasste. Skizzen zu einem noch nicht geklarten Kapitel der jüngsten lutherischen Kirchengeschichte Ungarns,” in *Glaube in der 2. Welt* No 6. 2000. 14–21.

from the state that her teaching and preaching activity should not be hindered.”⁵ Ordass’ purpose was to work out a fair, theologically justified relationship with the state. He offered to support the state but not unconditionally. In Ordass’ theology the church and the state were meant to mutually recognize their spheres of interest and the field of their activity.

The church should not have a political program, neither should she meddle into politics, as it is not her mission. However, when political events interfere or harm the body or the members of the church then it is her duty to speak out publicly on those issues. The great issue in 1948 was the nationalization of the church schools. Ordass found that giving up the schools would mean giving up the historical mission of the church, for him the schools belonged to the body of the church, especially in the time of persecution.

Ordass was also pressured to dismiss the lay leaders of the church. He refused to surrender the schools as well as to dismiss the leaders. The state also wanted the church to sign an “Agreement,” but Ordass was reluctant to accept the text of this agreement. This attitude of his led to the typical Stalinist show trial in September 1948 where he was charged with violating the country’s currency laws. Ordass was freed in May 1950 but rehabilitated only in October 1956, restored to office during the revolution and removed from office, for the final time, in June 1958.

The confessing attitude was motivated by Luther’s theology of the cross, which helps to explain why Bishop Ordass wrote so many meditations on the cross.⁶

Ordass, unlike the Roman Catholic Cardinal Mindszenty, was not a resister. He knew that his mandate was for the defense of his church and the people in his church. He remained Lutheran by not trying to convert his faith into political action and thereby risking the loss of his identity. However, by remaining faithful to his principles, he became a formidable adversary to the communists. David Baer in his book *The Struggle of Hungarian Lutherans under Communism* recognized in Ordass an attitude that ethicists label as “non-consequential” or “deontologist.”

Deontology means a commitment to duty that excludes from moral consideration the effects, even the most negative ones, that result from adhering to duty. For a deontologist, duty has order of privilege over consequence. Often, and certainly in the case of Bishop Ordass, deontology depends on a sense of hidden providence. For a deontologist of this sort, disregarding consequences makes sense because one believes that God controls history even when his providential care cannot be seen and, therefore, that God is responsible for the consequences both good and bad, that result from adhering to duty. Without faith in hidden providence, keeping duty at great cost can appear foolhardy or irresponsible.⁷

⁵ Ordass Lajos, *Válogatott írások*, Bern: 1982, 112.

⁶ See the second half of my article: “The Testimony of Bishop Lajos Ordass During Communism in Hungary,” in *Zwischen den Mühlsteinen. Protestantische Kirchen in den der Errichtung der kommunistischen Herrschaft im astlichen Europa*. Hg. Peter Maser und Jean Holger Schjorring (Erlangen: Martin Luther Verlag, 2002), 303–320.

⁷ David Baer, *The Struggle of Hungarian Lutherans under Communism* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2006, p.77.

2. Compromisers (Discretion)

This compromising line is associated mainly with the names of Bishop Zoltán Túróczy (1893–1971) and Bishop József Szabó (1902–1986). Let me emphasize what I have said before: “compromiser” is not as negative a category as the “collaborator”. I would not go so far as saying that a compromiser is not also a confessor, but this conduct has a rational, explicitly “political” or “church-political” element in its theology. The representatives of this attitude came from the pietist background of missionary societies or the revival movements and they were willing to compromise in so far as, for example, surrendering the schools to the state, because they wanted to protect the proclamation of the word.

It was also a genuinely Christian attitude, but Ordass’ view was, as we have seen, influenced more by Luther’s *theologia crucis* and it was in accordance with the teachings of the confessional writings of the church, namely, that the otherwise secondary (*adiaphora*) issues (such as the schools) during the time of persecution should be seen also as primary ones (*Formula Concordiae*, Article X).⁸

While Bishop Ordass was fighting in defence of the church, Bishop Túróczy and Bishop Szabó were to go along with the demands of the state and compromise. Ordass, in his Autobiography referred to it as the “Túróczy-line.” Túróczy’s conviction was that the schools do not directly belong to the body of the church. Therefore “no martyr-blood should be shed for the schools.”⁹

Bishop Túróczy’s outstanding significance as preacher, organizer, pastor, cannot be denied, his reputation is well-known here in Finland.. But this newly adopted flexibility was to have grave consequence in the years to come.

However, with the decision of the Synod of 1952, motivated by the centralizing tendencies of Stalinism the Western Diocese ceased to exist and thus Bishop Túróczy lost his office. It was due to the restoration of Bishop Ordass in 1956 that Bishop Túróczy was chosen as Bishop of the “Northern” diocese. This was now the third time he became Bishop. In his inaugural address of February 6, 1957, he first spoke about the “supremacy of the Word.” “It is not politics that should determine our attitude to the Word, but it is the Word that should determine our attitude to politics.”¹⁰ Within this short period there was unique harmony between Bishop Ordass and Bishop Túróczy.

Túróczy’s conduct is characterized by Baer with a quote from a Transylvanian poet: *ahogy lehet*, which means “in the way that it is possible.” This type was ready for compromise for the sake of a *modus vivendi*. In an evangelical spirit they found that the time of the “people’s church” and historical Christendom had come to an end. They believed that when old doors closed (like those of church schools) God would open new ones. There would be revivals, evangelizations, and thus hope for the

⁸ As pointed out by Gábor Ittész, in “Létezett-e (létezik-e) harmadik egyházi út? Kerekasztalbeszélgetes.” *Keresztyén Igazság Új folyam*, 9. szám, 1998. 1. 16.

⁹ Veöreös Imre, “Mit szólunk az iskolák államosításhoz?” in *Új Harangszó*, June 6, 1948. Ordass, *Önéletírás*, 293.

¹⁰ Az Északi Egyházkerület Elnökségének beiktatása.” Manuscript.

church to become missionary church. For this pietist attitude the church school was adiaphora, neutral and indifferent from the point of view of proclaiming the gospel. However, this door was also closed down, partly due to the pressures of the atheist totalitarian state, partly due to collaborators among the emerging new leadership of the church.

3. Collaboration

I call collaborators those leaders who are ultimately chosen by the state and who whether consciously or unconsciously represent the interest of the state against the church.

There have been passive and active types of collaborators both in the pre-1956 and the post 1956 period. Frequently collaborators begin as compromisers and gradually become collaborators.

a) The pre-1956 period

In April, while Bishop Ordass was still in prison, the special court of the Lutheran church condemned him. Thus he was deposed by his own church. Only after this could he be freed from prison in May 1950. The Central Diocese had to choose his successor. The only nominee was László Dezséry (1914-1977), formerly university chaplain and now pastor in Budapest. Dezséry was originally a member of the Social Democratic Party and after their merging with the Communist party he became a Communist party member. In October 1948 he wrote a thirty-page "Open Letter in the Matter of the Lutheran Church." In this letter he spoke about the crisis in the leadership and urged the replacement of the conservative leadership by "progressive-minded" persons.

His inauguration speech of June 1950 is a document of a low-style, vulgar conformism: he identifies the liberation of the country with the Christian's liberation from sin unto new life. Due to his initiative the original four dioceses were merged into two in 1952: the "Southern" with Bishop Dezséry and the "Northern" with Bishop Vető. While Dezséry was in office between 1950–1956 the Lutheran church entirely became subservient to the Communist state.

b) The post-1956 period

The "unanimously" elected Zoltán Káldy (1919–1987) was installed on November 4, 1958, the second anniversary of the oppression of the revolution. Zoltán Káldy also came from a Pietist background; throughout the 1940s he was a very popular evangelist. Zoltán Káldy's name is associated with the "theology of diaconia" which became a totalitarian "official" theology imposed upon the church.

Káldy's theology was one-sidedly concentrating on the world, politics, and society. He reversed the order proposed by Bishop Turóczy in 1957 by founding his theology on politics and not politics on theology. His theology was built upon the *hic et nun* of post-1956 Hungary. By equating the "long worship" within the world with the "short worship" of the church he wanted to dissolve theology within the world.

The church was summoned to be politically committed but this politics meant following the instruction of the Communist state which was in no way to be criticized. Thus the church surrendered herself again to the state.

Káldy's "theology of diaconia" was elaborated in his 1964 inaugural address when he received the honorary doctorate from the theological faculty of Bratislava. Káldy's 1964 speech is the document of a new, "totalitarian theology." The term "diaconia" becomes the exclusive focus of each aspect of theology.

One of the greatest defect of this "theology" was a dangerous one-sidedness which wanted to make a total idea out of a partial term like "diaconia." This totalizing tendency was entirely in tune with the totalizing nature of Marxist ideology and Communist practice.

In 1966 Káldy managed to enforce new church laws that conformed to the demands of the Marxist state that declared that for the nomination of church-leaders the prior agreement of the state was needed.

When Lajos Vető retired as Bishop of the Northern Diocese in 1967 the Professor of Church History Ernő Ottlyk (1918–1995) was elected as his successor. Thus Bishop Káldy became senior, or, as he called himself, "Presiding Bishop."

Ottlyk was a conformist and a radically left wing church historian. His simple and vulgar commitment is reflected in his inaugural address of June 20, 1967¹¹ as well as in his "progressive" books which he published.

After it had been decided that the Lutheran World Federation Assembly was to be held in Budapest in 1984 Káldy felt uncomfortable with Ottlyk whose provincial significance and especially his left wing style would not be acceptable for Western European or North American delegates of the Assembly. Káldy needed a person who would be more presentable to represent the homechurch at the Assembly. That person was Gyula Nagy (1918–), Professor of Systematic Theology, who spent several years in Geneva mainly in the service of the Lutheran World Federation.

One should add that there were positive events during Káldy's episcopal activity: a new Protestant Bible translation came out, a commentary series was launched, new hymn books were published, new churches were built, and so on. All these activities were the manifestations of his "theology of diaconia" which one-sidedly emphasized the "deeds" against faith and justification. The most controversial event of this LWF Assembly in Budapest was that he was elected as its President.¹² But he could not stay in office for long: he got a stroke in December 1985 and died in May 1987.

III. Church Leadership in New Light – since 2005

¹¹ Ottlyk Ernő, "Püspöki beköszöntő beszéd az Északi Evangélikus Egyházkerület 1967. június 20-i közgyűlésén," *Lelkipásztor*, 1967/8, 449–458.

¹² László Terray, "Was the 'Reality' Cut Out? The Lutheran World Federation Assembly in Budapest," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*, Vol. 5, No. 6. 1–17. See also: "Hungarian Lutheran Controversy," in *Religion in Communist Lands*, 1985/13, 99–106.

Confessional, Compromisers, Collaborators (I even added a fourth category: “Cautious Innovators” or Contraversials by alluding to Bishops during the political changes of 1989-1990). Within collaborators I distinguished the pre-1956 bishops: Vető, Dezséry and the post- 1956 bishops: Zoltán Káldy, Ernő Ottlyk, Gyula Nagy, in the fourth group I briefly discussed Bishops Béla Harmati and Imre Szebik. I have consciously avoided to call the collaborators simply “traitors” who betrayed the Church. I thought, and perhaps still think, that I do not have the right to use such morally loaded words with regards to persons who found themselves within the unprecedented pressures of an atheist totalitarian dictatorship.

However, something happened in 2005 that has been bringing our image of the past into a totally new light. This story has to do with those people within the church who, as it has turned out, collaborated with the communist secret police.

Some clarification of the background seems to be necessary. The transition from communism to democracy was the result of peaceful negotiations between the reform communists and various branches of the opposition in 1989. Thank God that there was no bloodshed. But neither was there an elevating catharsis. In transmitting power, there was a consensus between the last Mohicans of communism and the victorious parliamentary parties that there should be no “witch-hunting.” József Antall, the first prime minister of the freely elected government, was given a list of those involved with the communist secret police by his predecessor. The new prime minister disclosed the list only to a small circle in his government. The communist secret police was a very powerful and sophisticated system similar to the East German Stazi.

In Hungary, as in some other former communist countries in eastern Europe, this collaboration remained hidden for more than fifteen years. These lists have frequently been cards in fierce political power games. Hungary is an extremely divided nation between the political left and the political right. In fact, both parties have their own former secret agents, and therefore none of them really supported the uncovering of this dirty past.

There were some rumors about some former and present church leaders as well. The archives, have, however, not been available for the public until quite recently. In February 2005, there was an illegal internet list posted by a certain “expert” who identified several Roman Catholic, Reformed, and Lutheran church leaders as agents. When two recently retired bishops were mentioned among the Lutheran secret agents, it created immediate excitement.

Due to the initiative of its leadership, the Lutheran church was the first to respond publicly to that list. Their public statement created much respect for our small church in the secular media. The church leaders in that statement apologized for those who had been harmed by the agents’ activity. And it was a courageous decision when the church set up a fact-finding committee to research the archives and identify those who were involved. There are historians, lawyers and theologians in the committee.

Let me add that the Synod of the the much larger Hungarian Reformed Church decided only four years later, in May 2009 that they would also set up a fact-finding

committee to identify those pastors who had collaborated with the secret police during Communism.

In May 2006 at the national assembly of our church, where the fact-finding committee gave the first official report of their work, it was said that within the Lutheran church there were some fifty agents with pseudonyms. They identified only four, three of them already dead, the fourth being a retired bishop who had worked for several years for the Lutheran World Federation.

There have been reports to the Synod by the fact-finding committee on May 19, 2006; November 23, 2007; May 16, 2008; May 19, 2009. Some thirty persons were identified by the committee so far.

However, there has been rumour that all the Bishops I have called “Collaborators” and even the ones I called “Controversials” or “Cautious Innovators” have had records with the Hungarian secret police for a shorter and longer period. They all had one (sometimes more) pseudonym which were identified by the members of the fact-finding committee. Not only bishops but respected professors, beloved congregation pastors were also identified on the list. Moreover, names with corresponding pseudonyms were published by a historian in the secular media in a series of articles with the title “Communist agents were in the leadership of the Hungarian Lutheran church for fifty years”¹³. Our Hungarian Lutheran Church is a small one. In our church many people were exposed to the shock that one of their close relatives was also on the list.

In a lecture “Complicity and Perversance” I originally gave in the United States, I shared with my audience how I learned about my father’s involvement¹⁴.

So far the Synod has listened to the reports of the committee. They have approved that these documentations is to be published. The first publication is due to come out before the end of this year.

IV. The Reception of the Facts by My Church and the Relevance of this Issue to the Church Universal

The most important and difficult issue is how the church is going to receive this new and uncomfortable knowledge. Will this work of the fact-finding committee lead to the purification of the church, or, is it going to cause more harm than blessing? Is the church prepared for that? If not, how to prepare congregations, the simple, naive, church-loving people for such news?

In November 2008 a respected historian within the Hungarian Reformed Church was asked to share his research concerning the secret agents within the Reformed Church for a group of Protestant intellectuals. I was asked to give a response about my experience in the Lutheran Church. “Spiritual Processing of the Agent-Issue” – that was the title I gave to my talk¹⁵.

¹³ Majsai Tamás, „Öt évtizeden át ügynökök az egyház élén”, *Élet és irodalom*, September-October 2006.

¹⁴ Tibor Fabiny, „Complicity and Perversance”, in *The Veil of God. The Testimony of Bishop Lajos Ordas sin Communist Hungary*. Budapest, Center for Hermeneutical Research, 2008, pp. 80-94

¹⁵ Tibor Fabiny, „Az ügynökkérdés lelki feldolgozása”, In *Théma XI*, 2009/1, pp.15-29.

Unusually, I began my lecture with a prayer . Then I proposed to answer three questions: I. What is the question? II. Who speaks? III. What to do?

The context of my presentation was that within the audience there were several friends of mine (including some present church leaders) who were exposed to a shock, not unlike to my experience two years before, in suddenly learning that their beloved mentors, professors, whose moral integrity they so respected, turned out to be also secret agents of the Hungarian Communist Intelligence. After the historian's lecture I had to be more pastoral.

In the first part I was launching a quest to find the proper question: what is the question? Is the question about the nature of the network of the Hungarian secret police? Not really. Is the question about those who had a record with the secret police? But how can we make a difference between those who were forced to report and those who cynically served Communist interests under the disguise of clergymen? No, we cannot easily make this distinction. Or is the question about the conspicuous silence of former secret agents why they refuse, or, cannot, confess their burden to their fellow Christians? Yes, this is indeed an important question but not yet the real one. Or, is the question why some highly respected professors let themselves be seen as moral examples by their students while they had this secret dark side of their lives? This is again a question, but not the question.

My conclusion was that I was formulating my question in the wrong way. The question is not "what" but "who(m)". But this question "Who(m)" should not refer to "them" but "us"! It is not "them" who are the question but "we". God is not asking "them" through us (what a hybris was it to suppose we were in the positions of "inquisitors" but God is asking us through "them"? How do we, who were not involved with the secret police, relate to them, who were involved? "We" are the real question! How do we process the agent-issue spiritually? Are we able to be a welcoming, forgiving church? Or, shall we be moralistic and legalistic? How do we create the context of reconciliation and the culture of forgiving? Pope Benedict XVI has some very important observations concerning forgiveness. Forgiveness, he says, is much more than the willingness to forget. Forgiving is hard labour where the destruction of sin must be transcended. Forgiveness has a cost for the one who forgives. The harm of evil must be interiorized by burning it. It means that forgiveness is a learning process of the one who forgives: he/she must burn this burden by renewing himself and into his inner purification the forgiver must draw in the one whom he/she forgives. Individual labour thus becomes a mutual labour.

In the second part: "Who Speaks?" I shared my personal attitude and involvement with the agent-issue.

I told them that parallel to the official fact-finding committee, a small renewal group of our church (the EBBE) decided in the autumn of 2005, at my initiative, to launch a series of lectures in the spirit of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Our purpose was not to hunt for individual cases but to clarify how the community of the church can and should confront this issue from the point of view of the Christian faith. Bonhoeffer's ideas in his great *Life Together* on confessions or *Stellvertretung*

(vicarious suffering) have provided much inspiration. I edited the proceedings of these talks and some extra material in a book called *Truth and Reconciliation* published in May 2006.

Then I told them how many lectures and conferences I devoted to the subject when I eventually learned from my father that he had also had a pseudonym with the secret police. He said he harmed no one and that he had to meet his contact persons and talk with them, of course, secretly. He kept this secret from his three children and our mother for so long. For my audience I have talked about my purgatory-experience of forgiving, how my relationship with my father was radically renewed within the last year of his life which he departed at the age of 83.

Nowadays there is much talk about the “healing memory” within my church. Contradictorily, this voice comes from those who were involved but are unwilling to openly admit it. I am convinced that true and genuine healing can come only from that purgative suffering that Pope Benedict speaks about. There is indeed a cost of forgiving.

“What to Do?” was the third question I asked in response to the lecture of the Reformed professor. My first proposal was to share our personal experience as we are one body and we are meant to carry each other’s burden. Mutual confessing is necessary for the community’s renewal as Dietrich Bonhoeffer said. Luther emphasized the same: *koinonia* must be put into action. Just we as sinful beings live from the sanctity of Christ we should also pass on what we have to those who are in need. My knowledge is not mine but of the simple-minded, my richness is not mine but of the poor, my faith is not mine but of the unbeliever, my sanctity is not mine but of the sinner.

My second advice was to avoid the temptation of donatism. Donatism, the idea that the church is only of the pure, has tempted Christianity since its very existence though Jesus had warned of its dangers in the parable of the wheat and the tares. Nevertheless it tempted Christians in the first centuries, during the time of the Reformation and it is tempting even today. St. Augustine, Luther and the mainline reformers have renounced donatism as heresy. This is a caveat to all those who struggle for a “pure church” and dissect themselves from the “corrupt” church. Jesus has come for the sinners and not for the righteous. Just as forgiveness was made real when Jesus presented the whores to the Pharisees, God likewise creates the space of experiencing the reality of forgiveness today by presenting us the stories of former agents. By this he is warning us: just like the Pharisees then. We are not meant to see ourselves as if we were any better than our fallen brethren.

My third advice was taken from Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) who made a helpful distinction between “legal” and “evangelical” humiliation in his magisterial *Religious Affections*: “In legal humiliation, men are brought to despair of helping themselves; in evangelical, they are brought voluntarily to deny and renounce themselves. In the former, they are subdued and forced to the ground, in the latter they are brought sweetly to yield, and freely and with delight to prostrate themselves at the feet of God.”¹⁶

¹⁶ Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, Edinburgh, Th Banner of Truth Trust, 2001. p. 238

I have come to realize there is something inherently wrong with the handling of this issue in my Church and thus with the work of the fact-finding committee which I enthusiastically applauded when it came about. Months, years pass by and there is no one, or hardly any one from those involved, who are ready to confess and ask for the forgiveness of the Church. I came to realize that for all the diligent research of some members of the fact-finding committee there is basic flaw within the system. As if the unconditional love of the forgiving father were missing. True, there have been statements here and there but each of them had a rather awkward, artificial tone, a mixture of self-justification and apology. The crises of these “speakers” could not lead to a real catharsis.

I came to identify this flaw with the “legal humiliation”. With the law of the Synod passed the former agents are, in Edwards’ words “subdued and forced to the ground” because our Church cannot proclaim the Gospel loudly enough so that “they are brought sweetly to yield, and freely and with delight prostrate themselves at the feet of God”.

Their failure is our failure: the law, the letter kills and there is no spirit to bring them to life.

Sisters and Brothers in Christ!

The issue I have talked about is not a local, parochial issue but that of the church universal. I have brought this case study to share with you, Lutheran and Anglican Sisters and Brothers here in Finland and all over the world. I present our burden as your burden. I appeal here to koinonia. We are one body, you remember.

I hope I did what I promised at the beginning of my lecture: to connect or reconnect not only Anglicanism and Lutheranism, the Finnish and the Hungarian people, English studies and theology but the past and the present of the Church of Christ as well.

Thank you for your attention!