

# Anglican-Lutheran Society Conference

Turku, Finland, September 2009

*Dr Risto Lehtonen is by training both a chemist and a theologian. As a student he was involved in the Student Christian Movement and later became General Secretary of the World Student Christian Federation. He has served with the Lutheran World Federation and for FinChurch Aid. Today, in retirement, he is Chaplain to a care home today. His presentation to the conference was entitled:*

## ***Shifts in Ecumenical Visions: Personal Reflections from Past to Present (1932-2009)***

It is with some fear and trembling I come before you. The topic, 'Shifts in Ecumenical Visions, Past and Present', is based very much on my personal experience. It doesn't quite qualify for the kind of reserve that is part of British education, because it is too personal. Anyway, I wanted to deal with this topic from the vantage point of my life, and originally I thought I could deal with five vantage points but I may have to cut the last part!

***The first vantage point, Anglicans in Finland through a child's and a youngster's eyes.***

A personal memory of the second official talks between the representatives of the Church of England and the Lutheran Church of Finland held on 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> July in the Strand Hotel in Helsinki. This conference is engraved in my spinal cord. The first round had taken place at Lambeth Palace (as we heard yesterday). Though I have no personal memory of the discussions, of course, of that conference, I do remember participating in a short cruise on a vessel of the National Board of Navigation, or perhaps it was the Coast Guard, arranged for the participants on a sunny July day. That was for me, as a seven year old, the main point of the conference! I had a hunch that something internationally important was under way. I didn't understand what it was – but I still enjoyed the cruise!

Much later I wondered whether my father, one of the Finnish organisers of the conference, newly made Bishop of Tampere, deliberately wanted to lead me into early ecumenical upbringing. What I can recall was my curiosity about the peculiar knee socks of Anglican bishops, and a certain mixture of admiration for their accent and their dignified behaviour. In the course of the 75 years since then these memories have popped back to my mind numerous times.

In my childhood years events of the political scene which affected the world, Europe, my country and the life of the Church penetrated into everyday life at the Bishop's House in Tampere. Towards the end of the 1930s I began to understand that these events and political developments had been part of the background of the Anglican-Lutheran talks. It has later been confirmed by research that this was the case. The rise of the Soviet influence threw a dark shadow over people in Europe, not only on us in Finland but much more widely. Even the very distinguished American diplomat and scholar George Kennan, the foremost expert on the pre-war and post-war years of

the Soviet Union, reveals in his memory of the time he was stationed in Riga, Latvia, that this was the big concern about the Baltic area and for Europe as a whole.

I also remember from that time seeing on my father's bookshelves an ever expanding row of books and writings which seemed to deal with Lenin and Stalin and the gruesome experiences of Russian people and of Christians in Russia since the Bolshevik revolution in 1917. It was very conspicuous. I don't know how my father had time to read all those books but obviously they played an important role. For my father, and for many who wanted to strengthen Anglican-Lutheran fellowship, the idea of building an alliance of Lutheran Churches around the Baltic Sea and the Anglican Church included a political dimension. These Churches, each considered quite influential in their national life, were carriers, or so we believed, of a firm tradition of religious liberty, individual freedoms, social responsibility and respect for international law. Such an alliance that was envisioned at that time could have offered a spiritual counterweight to the Soviet atheism and to the communist aim to liquidate the Church. Rumours of the ruthless purges by Stalin, especially from 1937 onwards, added weight to these concerns.

On top of the threat of communism a new threat emerged, especially after 1933. There was a wave of unease about Hitler and the rise of Nazism in Germany. It began to spread into our country and our Church as well as into most of Europe. On the Finnish scene the ascent of these two ideologies influenced the mood of people. They weighed up which might be the greater threat. We had a very long border with the Soviet Union. There were those who considered the political counterforce to the threat of communism offered by Germany as welcome, although soon the majority of our people began to wake up to the threat of the new totalitarianism in Germany, of anti-Semitism and of the rising militarism. Amongst theologians the incompatibility of Nazi ideology with Christian faith was noted faster. It was already quite evident in the middle of the 1930s. Thus, a closer relationship between Lutherans and Anglicans, and even an alliance in this church family, was considered as a potential spiritual bastion against the threats of two anti-Christian ideologies.

The events that followed, however, dashed any hope of having influence on the spread of these ideologies and their devastating effects.

My childhood impressions of the ecumenical movement, especially Anglican and Lutheran relations, ended with the sordid experiences of the war, and also something immediately after the war. A wall of separation fell between Churches in inter-Church relations. The Churches seemed to follow their national governments rather than caring for unity or seeking a joint Christian response to the world political situation.

In 1941, when Finland had fought for six months on the same side as Germany in the war against the Soviet Union, Britain declared war against Finland. That happened actually on our Independence Day. This was followed by the news that the Archbishop of Canterbury, the great and respected ecumenist William Temple, had led an intercessory prayer for the victory of Soviet arms. For many people this was like a kiss of death for Anglican-Lutheran relations on Finnish ground. The mood in the Bishop's House in Tampere was at a low ebb. It was like a personal blow to my father who was very dedicated to this concern.

Nothing much appeared on the ecumenical front to lighten the gloom. Instead, on top of these events, a visit of Bishop Theodore Heckel, who was the Bishop for foreign relations in the official Evangelical Church of Germany, added to the darkness and the gloom in the Bishop's House. I personally remember Bishop Heckel's visit to the Bishop's House very well. His assignment was to try to undermine Anglican-Lutheran relations in the minds of the Finnish church leaders and the people. I can still recall the chill that descended in the whole household when we knew that Bishop Heckel was in Tampere and was going to visit. I didn't think at that time about the political role of the Church when the Bishop of Tampere received Bishop Heckel. In retrospect, this is speculation, at that time it looked inevitable. The formal hospitality that was offered was totally powerless to dispel the oppressive political shadow.

When I met the son of Bishop Heckel 30 or 40 years after these events in his parsonage, when he was a pastor of the Lutheran congregation in Zurich, Switzerland, he tried to interpret what was his family's impression of these times and of the family father under those terrible years. I then realised that Bishop Heckel must have been a kind of victim of the Nazi rule. A polite, erudite man with a touch of human warmth, he was caught, internally or externally we don't know.

Anyway, these experiences were quite formative for me, the first step in thinking of Church-State relations and the role of the Church in international conflict. The war between Finland and the Soviet Union ended on 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> September 1944 and for us a new war started in the north of Finland against German troops stationed there. They were driven to the Norwegian side where they were eventually imprisoned. The expulsion of the Germans continued until about March 1945. Practically every house and building in Lapland was in ashes after they had gone, testifying to the scorched earth policy of the withdrawing army. The armistice with the Soviet Union and, I think, with Britain as well was signed on 19<sup>th</sup> September 1944 in Moscow.

A few days later the Allied Control Commission arrived in Finland to supervise the enforcement of the ceasefire. According to a popular observer the Commission consisted of six British members and 500 Russian members. I was standing in a line in front of the barrack with my anti-aircraft unit to receive the certificate of completing my Non-Commissioned Officer training in the army. As we stood there three MiG planes came gliding low over us to land at Helsinki airport, the first Russian planes to land. For me, this was the final scene of the war. Our age group was discharged, the very first from the army. We were too young for that business.

Upon my return to the Bishop's House on 4<sup>th</sup> October 1944, one of my first sights was to see my father sitting by the fireplace and throwing pile after pile of his archive papers into the fire. I asked, 'What are you doing?' His reply was very curt. 'The Control Commission has arrived in the country. You never know what is going to happen.' There was turned to ashes the record of much of the Church's international ecumenical relations from the 1930s to the end of the war. I am still angry today that this had to happen. Correspondence and memos about Anglican relations, about German relations, thoughts about the Confessing Church, and also much else - the pastoral care of military and also the ministry to the Russian prisoners of war in cooperation with the Finnish Orthodox Church - all this evidence went to ashes during that afternoon and evening.

A postscript to this era, which is the first vantage point, is the record of the first semi-official contact between the Anglican Church and the Finnish Church while World War II was still continuing. Towards the evening of a mid-December day in 1944, a representative of the Anglican Church, the Rev Herbert Waddams, arrived in Tampere. My role in his visit as an 18 year old war veteran was to meet him at the railway and with my elementary English guide him to the Bishop's House where he stayed for two days. He was not a Bishop. He didn't wear knee socks. But he did have galoshes! And he clearly enjoyed the exceptional breakfasts because we had eggs and bacon which my mother had somehow organised with the help of some of her black market contacts! Again, I have no idea, of course, what the talks between him and my father were about. I only overheard later that my father considered the visit a very promising sign for renewed Anglican-Lutheran relations. He was exceedingly happy that this visit had taken place.

Then, more than 50 years later, the revelation of the political assignment by the British Ministry of Information came as a real shock to me. This Ministry was also responsible for intelligence activity and I realised that the Rev Herbert Waddams was really on a snooping mission, investigating the political atmosphere in the country and the political atmosphere within the Church. And on that he had to report to the British authorities. He had his Church assignment but it was simply a cover for his collecting of information activity, and he didn't reveal what the true nature of his visit was, at least, not to the Church contacts, though probably to the Control Commission. I remember I was slightly puzzled during his visit to Tampere why he was so eager to get telephone calls to the Allied Control Commission. He said that they monitored his travel schedule because we were still technically in a warlike situation. Furthermore, besides finding information, I learned that he had been instructed to advise Finns in general and the Church leaders in particular to be positive about the Soviet Union, to forget about enmity, to establish friendly relations between our two peoples, and to stop talking about the persecution of Christians in the Soviet Union. He tried to persuade us that there was complete religious freedom now, and that the Orthodox Church flourished in the Soviet Union. He had been there in 1943 on a visit with the Archbishop of York. This has all been explored very carefully by [a colleague of] Dr Mika Pajunen who will be speaking this afternoon.

The case of Herbert Waddams, as I remember it, marks for me the futility of ecumenical relations which are pursued with governmental guidance. We should ponder on such events that have taken place, and also on the extent to which we are influenced in our own time and in our different settings, consciously or unconsciously, by the political influence of our own environment.

What, in retrospect, this whole era says to me is that, against all the odds, and the ambiguities of the 1930s, the opening of negotiations between the Anglican Church and the Finnish Church was a very significant beginning of theological and ecclesiological talks. And today, 50 or 60 years later, we can enjoy some fruits of those first efforts, for which we must thank God. Secondly, this era in my life opens an awareness of the interplay between the political forces and the Church policies, in different settings and in different ways, and a suspicion of those efforts which are explicitly guided by the governments. You can remember the Prussian Union – this is why I am still very sceptical of Leuenberg because I think it's a continuation of the

Prussian Union – and why should we continue on that line? And we can also think of the post-denominational Church in China. Who decided that the denominations should be out and the Church should go for the Three Self Patriotic Movement? Was it just an internal Church matter, or was there something else? I don't want to belittle people in other situations. I think we have to recognise the ambiguities and still be humble about our own existence.

This has been a lengthy part, this vantage point one. At my age you begin to remember childhood better than more recent events!

***The second vantage point is Anglican influence on a Lutheran university student.***

After getting out of the army I dived into a very happy student life. Conditions were still rough, but I could enjoy the new freedom and peace and activities under all the shadows of the political future. This was a great period, the first year or two. But this came to an abrupt stop in my personal case because of a surprising religious and vocational crisis. There must have been many elements and they pointed in different directions. Yet one distinctive element in that crisis was my encounter with the idea of the catholicity of Christian faith.

I have to explain a little bit more. The career of a research chemist, I was very firm on that, began to crumble while several alternatives within the ministry and mission of the Church danced in my mind in the middle of that turmoil. Impulses came I think mainly through three channels.

One was the Student Christian Movement which had at that time a strong evangelical flavour while moving slowly and steadily in an ecumenical direction.

The second was a missionary movement with which I came in touch. I lived in a hostel run by the Finnish Missionary Society and that brought me in touch very vividly with the people, and this made a deep impression.

The third, and probably the most influential, came through glimpses into the Anglican Church and into the High Church Movement in Sweden represented in books by Bo Giertz and Gunnar Rosendal and then from British Anglo Catholic circles, books and articles on the early Oxford Movement, John Keble, E B Pusey and others. I picked up most of the library without my father noticing. I finally found my way also to a newly formed group of pastors and church musicians called the Liturgical Brothers who met here in Turku when I moved from the University of Helsinki to the University of Turku. It was, however, the book by Henry Cardinal Newman *Apologia pro Vita Sua* which finally threw me into a deeper spiritual crisis.

I began to ask myself questions which I found him asking in that book. Can I any longer find a spiritual home in my Church? It seems to neglect, and even deny, its own catholic heritage. Was I too, as Cardinal Newman described himself, to be confined to Samaria instead of the New Israel? This was a consolation for Newman, that he would at least be in Samaria and Jesus dealt with Samaritans! What did this crisis mean to my future? It surely led me to a final decision to abandon my dreams of a scientific career. My vocation was to be, so I thought, in the ranks of clergy with an emphasis on digging as much as I could of the catholic tradition of our own Church

and learning from other Churches which were more appreciative of their catholic roots than my own Church – and to remain celibate! This idea seemed to fit seamlessly with my interest in mission here in Finland and worldwide. So I made up my mind. After my science degree I moved to training for ministry. Later I joined at the start of the Student Christian Movement.

In the following years, as a student, I ran into several Anglican students and priests and prophets at ecumenical, mainly World Christian Federation, conferences. I met people like Oliver Tomkins, Stephen Neil, Alan Richardson, and many others. My first visit to England was in August/September 1948. It gave me a chance to take some part in Anglican Church life and to visit Wescott House in Cambridge. What appealed to me as a young student was the spiritual discipline fostered at theological colleges and reportedly practiced by Anglican priests in daily Morning Prayer and Evensong, and with the practice of frequent celebration of the Eucharist.

Back in Finland I began to use the Book of Common Prayer in my own devotions, and I pinched from my father's library a copy of the *Sarum Breviary* of 1912 which he had been given when on a study tour of British theological education in the 1920s. I learnt parts of that, *Prime* and *Compline*, by heart. This period in my life brought into my consciousness the imperative of disciplined corporate and private prayer life that was sustained by our liturgical heritage.

Along with this liturgical revival came a growing awareness of social responsibility and ecumenism on which the Anglo-Catholic Fathers of the early last century were strong.

To be truthful, there were also sordid experiences about High Church Anglicanism, such as being questioned at the chapel door by a young Anglican priest at the Oslo Youth Conference when I tried to go into an early morning Anglican celebration of Communion. Was I qualified to come? And I had to give an explanation as to why I thought I was qualified to join in. This was a bit depressing. At a Christian Student Movement schools camp there was a couple of Mirfield students and one started talking to me. The first question was, 'Have you got valid Orders in the Finnish Church?' I should have understood that these were quite legitimate questions for the High Church tradition in those days in England, but they were not necessarily the most appealing!

There is one more episode to mention. With my father's encouragement I faced the prospect of getting my theological training for ordination in Britain, at Cuddesdon. My father had already sounded out something because he was running a scholarship programme for young pastors and theologians, but after receiving a positive response from Cuddesdon I decided against the idea. It was a moment of good judgement! I felt that I would become totally isolated from the main stream of Church life at that stage if I had had my training in the Anglican tradition. But there was also another reason. I had just got to know the Finnish woman to whom I was to be married for the next 52 years!

With all the pains and turns of growing adulthood as a university student the basic orientation of my churchmanship was laid down, and the theme of evangelical catholicity emerged as a prominent theme for my understanding of the Christian faith

and of the place of ordained ministry within the mission of the Church. Of course, the content of evangelical catholicity extends far beyond Anglo-Catholicism and the Swedish High Church Movement. Today I am grateful that the tradition of the Holy, Apostolic and Catholic Church touched my generation. It is richer than any single person can grasp or comprehend and I am grateful for the pioneers of evangelical catholicity who from the Reformation onwards stood up against the temptation of a politically acceptable, sociologically conformist Church and against the rationalism of the Enlightenment and against national and totalitarian ideology. These themes have not left me throughout the whole of my lifetime.

***Vantage point three is the Student Christian Movement era and the World Student Christian Federation***

From the early 1950s to the 1970s was a period of new discoveries and a period of massive upheaval in the Student Christian Movement and also, step by step, in the wider ecumenical movement. In retrospect it appears to have been a very fruitful testing ground for ideas of ecumenicity and of the catholicity of the Church. The World Christian Federation had two major successive programme emphases. First, from 1956 to about 1964, there was 'Life and Mission of the Church'. The second was the pursuit of an ecumenical strategy for student Christian work with Church organisations and chaplaincies.

The 'Life and Mission of the Church' programme tried to find new ground in the post-colonial era to consolidate what had been the experience of the Church in the era when the liberation movements, national independence movements in Africa and Asia, were gaining ground. It also tried to find a way to move away from the colonial concept of foreign mission, world mission. The key discoveries were God's own presence, indeed the presence of Christ in the world. The key words were 'presence' and 'participation' in mission in response to the presence of Christ. These affirmations were interpreted in two ways. One interpretation followed the thinking of a Dutch missiologist who wanted to place the primary accent on God's direct involvement in human history. The mission of the Church was a response to that involvement. The Church was not the primary actor in the mission. It was responding to God's mission which was already taking place in the world. The revolutionary movements of political liberation, human liberation, urbanisation, women's liberation – everything under the title of liberation – these were part of God's action in the world to which the Church had to respond. A new slogan popped up then in the ecumenical movement with which we are all familiar – 'The World Sets the Agenda for the Church'. Today I think this approach has come to the end of its road. It seems to lead to the same goal in which Liberal Protestantism ended up in Germany in Hitler's era. Cues for the renewal of the Church are sought only in the movements of society in the secular world. This seems to me one of the sore points in Church life today.

The second interpretation which impressed me very much then and has grown in significance is that God's presence in the world could also be interpreted as his sacramental presence, the presence of Christ in the Word, in Baptism, the Eucharist, through the Holy Orders, the sacrament of Matrimony and the Last Rites and so on. All this, Christ's sacramental presence, is for the life of the world, not for an exclusive company of the faithful. Without this second interpretation I would probably have difficulty to be loyal to the Student Christian Movement for all those years, through

that revolutionary period. Fortunately I was not alone. In retrospect, the heartbeat of Anglicanism came very close to Lutheran thinking on these matters in those years. And both of us came closer to the Roman Catholic and to the Orthodox Churches than to those dismissing the inherited apostolic teaching and being satisfied to draw their cues from the secular context. Certainly there were many Anglicans and Lutherans who went wild in those revolutionary years, who were intoxicated by the political movements, but this does not mean that they represented the mainstream.

So after a bitter and prolonged clash lasting from 1968 to 1973 between the 'radical contextualists' and what I call 'catholic oriented ecumenists' within the World Student Christian Federation, my association with them came to an end. It was deadlock. We have all witnessed the decline of the Student Christian Movement after that.

A decisive new perception, however, emerged from the experience of the student revolution in my personal case. In the last two years of the revolutionary turmoil I had suddenly discovered, almost as a moment of revelation, an insight into what the Lutheran tradition meant. The radicals of the Left had made the claim that Christians have to gain their credibility in society by their total identification with the cause of the poor and the oppressed. This is the heart of the credibility of the Church. This could happen, in their view, only by Christians joining the progressive revolutionary movement and accepting its political identity and ideology as a tool for the Christian Church. So at that time there were different brands - Anarchist, Marxist, Neo-Marxist and Euro-Marxist Christians.

It occurred to me then, in this moment of revelation, that these claims were in diagonal contrast to the Christian teaching according to which the sole foundation of the credibility of the Church is the grace of God, is God acting in a way that cannot be controlled by society. It is an undeserved gift, not associated with any social objectives. If the Church was to proclaim liberation from the whole of destructive forces active in society as well as in personal lives, it could not replace this liberation through grace with any political or secular programme or ideology.

These thoughts suddenly gave my mind new freshness to the perennial emphases of the Lutheran Reformation, and such phrases as had become code words earlier, *simil justus et peccator*, and the *two regiment* teaching, were among them. Was not the Reformation as a whole from its beginning a protest against politicised Christianity of the Roman Catholic Church, the alliance between the throne and the altar? Was not the regiment teaching just a theological tool, not a doctrine, to underline the difference between the Kingdom of Christ and the political Kingdom? Was it not to help people to accept the gift of salvation when they cannot free themselves from unjust structures, be they in their own workplace or in the markets of global economic mechanisms? This discovery was important in the midst of the ideological struggle of the late 1960s and the years following. It was an era of discovery of the doctrines of *By Faith Alone*, by the sheer grace of God.

***The next vantage point is my work in the Lutheran World Federation for almost 15 years***

When I came to the Lutheran World Federation a new chapter in my participation in the life of the Universal Church began. I first thought it was a descent into the world of a safe, administratively well organised, established and dull bureaucratic theological organisation, and that I would have to find real life outside my work. But I was proved wrong!

There were two elements. One was being faced with the relationship to the political structures and the Churches under Socialist rule in Eastern Europe. I was given a major assignment to prepare LWF policies and programmes in relation to this field. This again brought up the whole question of Church and State. The question we were asked at that time was, 'With whom are you dealing in Eastern Europe?' The official answer was, 'With our member Churches.' But the issue was, was the real Church the official Church or the Church *underground*, not part of the official, visible, organised Church? What was the answer of the LWF? Also, what about the relationship to the governments, the relationship to the media, and what were the rules of operation? Should we make a big public protest against every occasion when human rights were violated in Eastern Europe or should we resort to quiet diplomacy and face the authorities as strongly as possible wherever it was possible?

One example of all this was the Church's role in the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. We in the LWF were much involved but the Conference of European Churches was probably the most comprehensive organisation for this task.

The second emphasis in the LWF was the preparation of a Mission Statement in 1988. It was a process lasting five years, of intense study and consultation with the constituency around the world, trying to hammer out the principles of what we mean by mission, how it is expressed in its theological foundation, strategy and ecclesiology. It involved an examination of the contextuality of the mission without falling into the trap of contextualism, of the frontiers of the mission, the question of the role of ordained ministers and missionary orders, and the participation by the whole people of God in the mission. So this whole business was very crucial.

### ***The last vantage point***

Four years ago, at the age of 79, I began a new career. I am involved in a research project, a study of the role of the Lutheran World Federation in relation to the Cold War. The working title is 'World Christian Community in the Global Cold War'. The words have been chosen to make sure that the ecumenical community, the Universal Church *in concerto* includes the whole spectrum from Roman Catholic and Orthodox to the Charismatics, with the shrinking portion of the mid-stream Protestants in between. So this is the study I am engaged in now. But I think I will stop at this point. Thank you.