

On the Interrelation between Proclamation of the Gospel and Human Development

by the Church Officers of the ECMY

Introductory Note: Complaints had been raised by the ECMY against the lop-sided availability of funds for development projects (as over against the evangelism work of the church), and against the criteria set from abroad by missions and donor agencies with regard to requests for and use of funds from the missions and donor agencies. As much of the money was being channelled through the Lutheran World Federation (in particular, the Departments of Church Cooperation and World Service), it was suggested that the ECMY set forth in detail its point of view and address its concerns in a letter to the LWF. Strong input in what was produced came from the thought and reflections of Gudina Tumsa. The Officers of the ECMY agreed with Gudina, who was appointed chairman of a three-man drafting committee for the ECMY's response: Rev. Olaf Sæveraa of the Norwegian Lutheran Mission (Associate General Secretary of the ECMY at the time) was asked to do the actual writing, with input also from Rev. Manfred Lundgren of the Swedish Evangelical Mission. The Letter of the ECMY Officers, dated variously in May 1972, and sent to the LWF, with signed copies to the various missions and donor agencies, has come to be seen not only as central to Gudina Tumsa's thinking, but as a marker also of ECMY and African theological thought. This Letter (sometimes referred to as a "Memorandum" or "Document") of the ECMY Officers to the LWF initiated an ecumenical discussion at an "Ethiopia Consultation" called by the LWF Commission on Church Cooperation at Villach in Austria (November 4, 1972) and at a jointly sponsored WCC/Division on World Mission and Evangelism and LWF/Commission of Church Cooperation consultation on "Education in Mission" at Hothorpe Hall in England (November 17-20, 1972). (See also the Introductory Note on Document 10, below.) (PEH)

In January 1971, the 7th General Assembly of the Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus passed a resolution requesting the Lutheran World Federation to approach the Donor Agencies in Germany and other countries with a view to reconsidering their criteria for aid and include direct support for congregational work, leadership training and church buildings.

This action was prompted, on the one hand, by the fact that the Church realised her own inability to cope with the fast-growing congregational work and the opportunities for evangelistic outreach in this country. On the other hand, the Church had become more and more concerned about the prevailing imbalance in the assistance given to the Church by its overseas partners. It is true that the Church had become more and more aware of her obligation to serve our fellow men and society by engaging herself in community and social development projects. The Church could not responsibly let the opportunities to get funds for development projects go by without making the fullest possible use of them. Over a number of years, the Church has therefore considered it her responsibility and privilege to work out project requests which would meet the criteria decided by the Donor Agencies. It is also with great gratitude that the Church acknowledges the generosity on the part of the Donor Agencies in granting funds for so many development projects presented by the ECMY.

At the same time, the Church, in faithfulness to her Lord, realised her obligation to proclaim the Gospel to the ever-growing crowds expecting more than bread. The Church cannot possibly remain silent where a genuine spiritual need is prevailing and people in thousands are flocking to newly established churches, and in places where there are no churches, to hear the GOOD NEWS. Finding that her own resources are insufficient both in personnel and funds, the Church has called on a number of Churches and Mission Organisations in the West to come and help. In spite of the encouraging response received, the Church is not able to cope with the situation.

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In turning to her Overseas partners and sister Churches in the West for assistance in the work which has been regarded as the prime responsibility of the Church both in the field of development and proclamation of the Faith, it has become evident over the last few years that the Churches and Agencies in the West are readily prepared to assist in material development, while there seems to be little interest in helping the Church meet her primary obligation to proclaim the Gospel. From the African point of view, it is hard to understand this division and the dichotomy created in the West and reflected in the criteria for assistance laid down by the Donor Agencies.

The ECMY therefore felt that it was her responsibility as well as her duty to call the attention of the Lutheran World Federation to this, in our opinion, most vital issue. In consequence, the president of the ECMY, H.E. Emmanuel Abraham, addressed a letter to the General Secretary of the LWF, Dr. André Appel, on March 9, 1971, enclosing the above-mentioned resolution of the 7th General Assembly of the ECMY.

It is with satisfaction that the ECMY has come to understand that the concern of the Church, expressed in the Assembly resolution, has been taken seriously by the LWF and that consideration is being given to it. We are sufficiently encouraged by this to reiterate the request outlined in the resolution and in the letter from the President, as well as to give the request more substance by presenting a brief supporting document explaining in more detail the reasons for our concern. In doing this we should like to refer to three issues:

1. Our understanding of man and his needs
2. The old and new imbalance in assistance from the West
3. The present situation in Ethiopia and its challenge to the Church.

Our Understanding of Man and His Needs

It is generally known and admitted that we live in a divided and terribly unjust world, where some people have more than enough and others do not have enough even to survive. We talk today about "rich" and "poor" nations, about "developed" and "underdeveloped" or "developing" societies and even of the "Third World." In doing this we are using only generally adopted socio-economic measurements to determine which society is rich or poor, developed or underdeveloped. The standard of human life and that of society is normally evaluated in terms of economic growth and material wealth, or in technology and production. Based on this materialistic Western concept of development and in an effort to find a remedy, at least two things seem to have been largely overlooked, namely:

- a) That there are values in life beyond those of modern technology and economic betterment, without which man's development will never be meaningful and lasting.
- b) That man is not only the suffering creature who needs help, but that he is also the most important development agent.

In our view a one-sided material development is not only self-deceiving, in the sense that man needs more than that, but it is also a threat to the very values which make life meaningful, if carried out without due attention to a simultaneous provision to meet spiritual needs.

We know that we need more of modern technology. We need more equipment and know-how to use it. We need to learn more effective methods to replace the primitive ones in agriculture and other production. We have still to learn and gain much from the Western world, from the experiences and discoveries they have made in various fields, and we hope that the Western Churches and Agencies will continue to share with us their wealth of knowledge, skill and funds.

However, when we in effect are told, by virtue of criteria unilaterally decided by the Donor Agencies, what we need and what we do not need, what is good for us and what is not good, then we feel uncomfortable and become concerned about our own future.

Looking at the so-called developed societies we realise that in the midst of their affluence man is still suffering from all kinds of evil. The values which make life meaningful seem to be in danger of being lost in these societies. It seems to us that what is happening in the affluent part of the world today points to the fact that technology and economic growth, beyond the ability of people to control and responsibly use, is leading to development in reverse, where man has to suffer new evils. The present ecological or environmental crisis in the form of physical and moral pollution indicates the danger of this one-dimensional development.

We therefore see the development of the inner man as a pre-requisite for a healthy and lasting development of our society. Unless our people are helped to the spiritual freedom and maturity which enables them responsibly to handle material development, we are afraid that what was intended to be a means of enhancing the well-being of man can have the opposite effect and create new forms of evil to destroy him.

We believe that an integral human development, where the spiritual and material needs are seen together, is the only right approach to the development question in our society. The WCC Central Committee also pointed to this when it was stated in the meeting in Addis Ababa in January, 1971, that from the Christian point of view development should be understood as a process of liberation by which individuals and societies realise their human possibilities in accordance with God's purpose. Charles Elliott in his book, "The Development Debate", goes as far as to say that "humanism closed in on itself and not open to the values of the spirit and to God who is their source could achieve apparent success. True, man can organise the world apart from God, but without God he can organise it, in the end, only against man. An exclusive humanism is an inhuman humanism.

There is no true humanism but that which is open to the Absolute and is conscious of a vocation which gives human life its true meaning. Far from being the ultimate measure of all things man can only realise himself by reaching beyond himself. As Pascal has said so well: 'Man infinitely surpasses man.' The spiritual is thus easily linked to the secular vision, indeed the two merge."

Throughout man's civilised history he has been plagued by the dilemma that even though he may know what is good and right and even want to do the right things, yet he fails to achieve it. It has therefore rightly been said that "Our problem is not primarily to know what is good. Our problem is to find something which will make a man do good when he knows the good". (Dr. Alvin N. Rogness, Lutheran Standard, Feb. 1, 1972). St. Paul spoke of this in Romans 7,15-20. There is, however, for many today a struggle to accept this rather depraved view of man. Man is still seen as the most noble of all creatures, with a power within him to be guided by his higher intellect. Man is capable of reasoned response. If he knows what is right he will do it. "Knowledge is virtue" is the motto of this appealing humanism. Can history support such a view of man? Obviously not. Though certain flagrant abuses of justice have been removed from the affairs of man, unjust practices like racism, oppression and corruption continue wherever man is found. Thus man's basic need is not simply to be informed of what is good and right. Man's primary need is to be set free from his own self-centred greed. Here is where the Gospel of Lord Jesus Christ comes in as the liberating power.

The other aspect, which in our opinion has been overlooked and for which there is very little room within the present framework of the criteria of the Donor Agencies, is the question of man as an agent in the development process. The basic question which is asked is: How many will benefit from this project? The community which the project is supposed to serve is seen more as an object than as an agent for betterment. This basic approach has resulted in two problems.

Document 8:

- a) Too narrow and well defined projects which require professional experts, and which in turn are bound to be remote from those who should be involved.
- b) Too few possibilities of long-term support by way of broad training at the grass-root level.

In order to get the ordinary man involved with a view to becoming an agent in the development process, provision must be made to work with unimportant groups over long periods of time. Within the Church structure this brings us down to the congregational level where in our view this potential is available. In the SODEPAX report from the Driebergen Consultation in March, 1970, it is pointed out that the Church provides a unique possibility to carry out development ideas. It says: "Each pastor working in a rural community could potentially be a change agent in favour of development; each Christian women's or youth group could be a centre for the diffusion of innovations. Equally important, because of its grass-root penetration the Church could provide one avenue for the democratisation of development by allowing scope for participation and expression by the local rural population." Here again the artificial division between Church work and development is an obstacle in the attempt of the Church to develop the manpower potential it has within its congregational structure.

We submit that a fresh approach to development aid through Church channels would be to consider man and his needs as a totality. This would mean that the present artificial division between spiritual and physical needs would be done away with, and provision would be made for an integral development of man in order to enable him to play his role as an agent in the development process. In our view, the most urgent and the most important investment needed at the present time in the ECMY is in manpower development, and here we see no division between congregational work and development projects. They must go together, because the Creator made man that way.

We also maintain very strongly that it is the need that should determine where assistance should be given, and not criteria laid down by the Donor Agencies which reflect trends in the Western societies and Churches. It is the need in a given local situation that should be the guiding principle for assistance, and therefore there ought to be more flexibility in order to meet extraordinary opportunities in an African Church which does not necessarily share all the views of Western Churches and Agencies.

Old and New Imbalance in Assistance

The old emphasis in the mission of the Church had been on the verbal proclamation of the Gospel. All other activities in the educational, medical or technical fields were regarded as being of secondary importance, or even as "means to an end" namely, avenues by which the message would reach people. In the promotion of the Mission work, social responsibilities, or help towards material betterment of the living conditions among the people, were usually mentioned only as side-issues of expressions of Christian charity.

The new emphasis is on social action, community development, liberation from dehumanising structures, and involvement in nation-building. Proclamation of the Gospel has become a side-issue, which should be referred to those who may have a special concern for the spiritual welfare of people. The two should be kept apart. It has been said that Christian service is "an end in itself". These two extreme positions are equally harmful to the local Churches in Developing Countries, which see it as their obligation to serve the whole man. It has been suggested that "false piety" is responsible for the old imbalance in assistance, and "a sense of guilt" is responsible for the new imbalance in the assistance to the work of the Church. It seems as though the prevailing view in the West assumes that the Evangelical Missions have not in the past paid due attention to the material and physical needs of man, and that they

were only concerned about the salvation of souls, doing very little to bring about change in society, that they called themselves, "evangelicals" and declared wherever they went that they were there to evangelise non-Christians. By this attitude of a false piety they created an image of Mission work as being only or at best mainly verbal proclamation of the Gospel.

This however is not the true picture. The Western Churches and the Western world at large had been misinformed by the Missions themselves. Although they spent a larger portion of their total resources on social activities, the Missions never reported it, or reported it in a distorted form, due to false humility and false piety. It would seem that they operated on the principle "your left hand should not know what your right hand is doing." We must therefore hold the Missions themselves largely responsible for the situation which has developed, and the misunderstanding that has resulted in the break-down of the relationships between development and proclamation, or between witness and service, which from the Biblical and theological point of view are inseparable. Here is, in our opinion, a field where a proper study of the Foreign Mission era could bring about a new understanding of the integral development approach which in fact was a significant part of Mission work, although it was not admitted, nor rightly understood, by all involved.

The false piety we have mentioned did not only result in distorted information about Mission work, but also in a distorted understanding of social activities as "means to an end". The Gospel was not understood as the Good News for the whole man, and salvation was given a narrow individual interpretation, which was foreign to our understanding of the God-Man relationship. God is concerned about the whole man, and this concern is demonstrated in the Gospel. The imbalance in assistance created by some Missionary attitudes has been harmful to the Church in its consequences.

The new extreme position taken by more recently formed Donor Agencies has drawn a line between Mission and Development which

is completely artificial. The new emphasis is reflected in the criteria laid down for the distribution of funds.

It has been suggested that the prevailing understanding that the Church had largely failed to carry out its mandate in the world, resulted in a feeling of shame and guilt, which resulted in a reaction to make up for this "failure". When the motto, "we must minister to the whole man," was adopted, it was implied that the Church had not been ministering to the whole man in the past. There was dismay and a feeling of guilt that gripped the Church when about twenty years ago the injustice and exploitation of colonialism began to come to the surface. Somehow, the Church felt that she had to defend her actions in those "colonised" countries. The Church was faced with the questions and often the accusations: "Has the Church been an instrument of oppression? Has the Church been so busy saving souls that the physical and political needs of man were ignored? Has this not led to an indoctrination of passive subservience as the ideal Christian conduct, which left colonialism almost unopposed?"

As the Church rocked under the impact of such guilt (this was always implied as a sin of omission) the cry went up, "Ministry to the whole man." As the emerging Nation States began to exercise control over the influences that they admitted into their countries, the Church was forced suddenly to make explicit in all her activities that which had always been implicit. Certainly the Church had always emphasised medical work, education and other community improvements, but in the early sixties it was necessary to make all such work all the more visible to accommodate the new nationalism and refurbish the "Mission" image in the sending countries. This led to undependable (from the theological stance) division of ministry and witness. The "real" ministry of the Church was seen as service, and this service as an end in itself. The ulterior motives of conversion, evangelistic outreach and spiritual nurture should be done away with. These matters should be dealt with separately and in a different context.

This overreaction to the Church's failure to engage in social and economic matters in the past, and the sense of guilt on the part of the wealthy Western Churches, led to a new imbalance in assistance to the younger Churches. All this happened in the West, but why should this historical and theological development in the West be the only determining factor in the aid relationship between the older and the younger Churches? The National Churchman in Africa today is unencumbered by an "image" which has to be maintained for the benefit of a guilt-ridden constituency "back home." He is free to interpret the commands of his Lord in the context of his brother's situation (which he shares intimately) without having to apologise for the power of the Gospel.

Thus it was providential and foreordained that we, the National Churchmen today, should begin to question the hesitancy and the equivocation in the proclamation of the Gospel that we witness in some of the Agencies which support our work.

When the ECMY felt the time had come to call the attention of the LWF to this issue, she did it with the conviction that something could be done to bring assistance into balance. It is our firm belief that Christian service is neither "a means to and" nor "an end in itself", but an integral part of the total responsibility of the Church. The division between witness and service, or between proclamation and development, which has been imposed on us, is, in our view, harmful to the Church, and will ultimately result in a distorted Christianity.

Having made this our concern clear, we hear some people say: "Why should we change the criteria because of wrongs done in the past?" Others say: "The present arrangement is only a division of labour. One cannot do everything, and therefore this division must be there for practical reasons." In our opinion, such remarks are only meant to avoid this issue, which is the artificial division of things which belong together.

The Present Situation and Its Challenge to the Church

Among the many remarkable things that happen in Africa today, the rapid growth of the Christian Church is probably one of the most surprising. The phenomenal expansion of Christianity across Africa in the last few decades is simply frightening for the responsible Church leaders. Dr. David Barrett¹ in his thorough analysis of the situation has, on the basis of available statistics, suggested that within the next thirty years the centre of gravity of the Christian world will have shifted southwards from Europe and North America to the developing continents of Africa and South America. He points out that while the Western Churches will have doubled their membership in the twentieth century, the younger Churches will have multiplied seventeen times. If we take this development seriously, it puts a tremendous responsibility on the whole Christian world. If the historically young Churches will represent the "centre of gravity" in the Christian world in three decades, they must be prepared.

Dr. Barrett points out some of the consequences of the present expansion of the Christian Church in Africa and one of them is an urgent and massive help in order to prevent a widespread breakdown of the Church. So far, very little planning has been done both among Roman Catholics and Protestants. The growth-rate indicates that "the construction of four times more physical plant, such as Church buildings, religious education for children; mass production of Christian literature, literacy programs and so on are urgently needed.

What is happening in this respect in our Continent at large is also happening in the ECMLY. The problems which Dr. Barrett has pointed out for Africa as a whole are also our problem today. We are alarmed by the development and challenged by the opportunities to such a degree that we must share our concern with the sister Churches in the West which, we believe, have both the desire and the means to help us. Here we should like to quote some parts of the

¹ International Review of Missions, Vol. LIX, No 233, January 1970.

ECMY General Secretary, the Rev. Gudina Tumsa's Report [see Document 11, below] at the LWF/CCC Meeting in Tokyo last year [1971].

Alarmed by the high growth-rate, the General Assembly decided in 1969 that a plan whereby the Church could be able to know where she stands be worked out. During the two-year period from 1969 to 1970 the necessary data were collected for assessment. In the process of working out a plan it became clear that in the past three years from 1968-1970 the average growth was calculated to be 15%. Membership growth in 1970 alone was 27%. However, if we stick to the more moderate growth figure of 15% the membership of the ECMY will be about doubled by the end of 1975, which means that the ECMY will then have a membership of about 285,000.

To meet this expansion about 137 pastors must be trained during this period, as well as about 1,000 evangelists. Realising the urgency of making use of the present opportunities in Ethiopia, our 7th General Assembly passed a resolution requesting the LWF to approach the Donor Agencies in Europe and the USA with a view to reconsidering their criteria for aid, and include direct support for congregational work and leadership training, so that the ECMY would be able to cope with the rapid growth taking place at present. The earnest wish of the ECMY is that this request be passed on to the member Churches of the LWF to be communicated to the congregations in order that they may know our problems and desires, and it is our sincere and earnest hope that the LWF will do its utmost - in the first place in passing and making known our concern to the Churches and secondly that the LWF may influence the present Donor Agencies to review their criteria for allocation of assistance, thereby giving due consideration to our evangelistic outreach plan.

Our hope is that sister Churches do not judge our needs solely on their own criteria and on the conditions that they have stipulated. We want to proclaim Christ because we believe it is our responsibility. We want to proclaim Christ because our people are hungering for Him.

We trust that in this document we have made the reasons for our concern clear, and that the current theological and missiological trends in the West will not be the sole determining factors for aid, but that African views will be taken more seriously and considered against the background of the present situation.

Addis Ababa, May 9, 1972

Source: the 358th Church Officers' Meeting, Minutes CO-72-63



LWF Consultation on Proclamation and Human Development, Nairobi, Kenya (1974); Rev. Gudina Tumsa in conversation with Dr. Ulrich Duchrow, Director, LWF Dept. of Studies