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## THE CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT IN ETHIOPIA AS A CHALLENGE TO OUR CHURCHES AT THE TIME OF GUDINA TUMSA AND TODAY.

In a recently published "Book of Prayer" in Sweden there is a section called "calendarium." Every day refers to a person, saint, martyr or someone who has played an important role in the church and society in the past or recently. For July 28 we find the name of Pastor Gudina Tumsa, with the following short text: "Leader for the Mekane Yesus Church in Ethiopia. He was killed in 1979 by the communist regime of the country because of his conviction that the communistic nationalism never could replace the Gospel." By being included in this calendarium it is one way in which the Church of Sweden wants to pay respect and also remember the inspiring and courageous leadership of the late Rev. Gudina Tumsa.

Gudina Tumsa was a close friend to many of us. Personally, I kept a photo of him on my working desk from the time of his disappearance in 1979 until the time in 1992 when we knew more of what had happened to him and he had come to final rest on the 27 of June 1992. On November 1.2003 I had the opportunity to visit his burial-place in the western outskirts of Addis Ababa and read the text on his gravestone: "As for me, the hour has come for me to be sacrificed; the time is here for me to leave this life. I have done my best in the race, I have run the full distance, and I have kept the faith. And now there is waiting for me the victory prize of being put right with God, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that Day... (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

Let me proceed by taking this opportunity of thanking the organizers of this seminar for the invitation and also their continued initiative to deepen the understanding of the rich legacy of Gudina Tumsa. I have also all reasons to congratulate the Gudina Tumsa Foundation for useful publications and important development-projects among needy and exploited people.

For me personally it is a joy and honour to participate in this enriching seminar. Many of us have been together in the past in different working positions and meetings related to Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus. The theme of this week in the church-year in Sweden is: "The unity of the church." I like to look at this gathering as a visible sign of that great vision and command of our Lord Jesus Christ, cf Eph.4:12-6.

Let me also give a short information about myself. During the period 1963 – 1975 I served as missionary-pastor in Nakamte – Secretary of the Eastern Wollega and Addis Ababa Synod and as Director of the Mekane Yesus Seminary. Between 1975 – 1993 I worked as Mission-secretary of the Church of Sweden Mission for Eastern Africa and the Middle East. Part of that period I also served as Secretary of the Committee on Christian Mutual Responsibility, CMCR, and Chairman of the Gospel Broadcasting Service, GBS, with its temporary base in Nairobi. As of August 1993 until August 2002 I served as Bishop of Luleå diocese of Church of Sweden.

### EECMY basic values

Let me again repeat that for me Gudina Tumsa was a great, inspiring, courageous church leader filled with holy zeal. He became also a close and trustworthy friend, who showed good pastoral care for the missionaries. For me Gudina Tumsa was the leader and strategist, who was behind the formulation and praxis of the basic values of the EECMY, which made this church so wellknown and an example to follow, not least for the churches in the north. I will allow myself to summarize some of those basic values typical of the EECMY and part of the legacy of Gudina Tumsa according to my understanding. Obviously these points also remain a challenge and a possibility for our churches today and tomorrow.

- **Proclamation of the Good News of the Kingdom of God**, which includes to teach, baptise and nurture new and old the believers.
- **The Holistic praxis based on a Trinitarian theology**, which calls the church to respond to contemporary human needs by witness and loving service and also be part of the transformation of unjust structures of society and whenever needed siding with the oppressed and exploited by being a voice of the voiceless.
- **Faithfulness to the Word of God and its divine revelations**, which reaches its peak with the promise, life, death and resurrection of **Jesus Christ as LORD AND SAVIOUR**.

- **The ecumenical stand of the EECMY** to be part of the world-wide church and at the same time be active in strengthening the ecumenical endeavours among the local churches.

- **The readiness for a costly discipleship.** Gudina Tumsa, killed by the dergue represents in his person and his teaching the best of Ethiopian theology of the cross. He has also been called "the Dietrich Bonhoeffer of Ethiopia". In this context I also want to mention the name of Tsehai Tolessa, the beloved wife of Gudina Tumsa. She has also had to pay a terrible price as a faithful follower of Jesus Christ. Her own story from the nine years in prison is an incredible story of suffering and victorious faith. In addition to these two names many, many other evangelical Christians have experienced what a costly discipleship means.

#### Gudina Tumsa – in my experience

I had the privilege to work with him and talk with him at numerous occasions over a period of many years. My first encounter with Gudina Tumsa was in Bako in 1963 when I was totally new in Ethiopia and assigned to lead bible studies at a teacher training course in Bako. By that time he had left Nakamte and was serving in the Kambata area. We were assigned to work in Nakamte and Gudina Tumsa shared some of his information and good wishes for our work. When serving in Nakamte area I often visited congregations and outreach preaching places including the Didessa valley, very much in the footsteps of Gudina Tumsa. During his studies in the USA my wife and myself were in close contact with his family and most of all Woj. Tsehai, as they had their home in Nakamte.

As Director of the MYS I was in close cooperation with Gudina Tumsa in organizing and hosting the seminars on "Christianity and Socialism" in 1974-1975. Of special interest with regard to the present topic will be my cooperation with Gudina Tumsa in relation to some students who have been described as *frontfigures* of the charismatic movement within the EECMY, namely Tesfaye Denegde from Arjo, Belina Sarka and Tolessa Gudina from Bodji and Itessa Gobana from Dembidollo. I will come back to that a little later. During all this time I got to know Gudina Tumsa in many ways. I will always remember him as a person with the following characteristics:

- a very intelligent and gifted person,
- a faithful, loving and trustworthy leader,
- a person with complete dedication with a passion for the Gospel,
- an uncompromising and courageous church leader,
- an analytical person, facing reality in the life of the church and society with relevant analysis – planning and diligent in furthering it into action,
- Genuineness in faith, words and deeds – a man of prayer,
- Last but not least Christocentric in his personal faith and his teaching. Like St Paul he often declared: "I am eager to preach the Good News..." (Rom 1:15). Why? "Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand" (Rom 5:2)

On April 20, 1958 Gudina Tumsa was ordained together with eleven other candidates. In his book "Christian Ministry – Patterns and Functions within the EECMY" by Johnny Bakke it is said about that ordination "The evangelical movement received some new leaders, who should take a prominent place in the development of the united church soon to be formed."

#### Gudina Tumsa and his basic understanding of the gifts of the Holy Spirit

Before going more into the issue of the charismatic movement I will try to say something about Gudina Tumsa's understanding of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. As far as I can understand, Gudina Tumsa had a broad and clear biblical and Lutheran understanding of the person, work and gift of the Holy Spirit. This originated in his understanding of the baptism in the name of God, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. In the baptism "God saved us, through the Holy Spirit, who gives us new birth and new life by washing us. God poured out the Holy Spirit abundantly on us through Jesus Christ our Saviour." (Titus 3:5b-6). The gift of the Holy Spirit is therefore given to everybody in the baptism in water. No Christian is without gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The biblical material also gives reasons to believe that the Holy Spirit equips his disciples with a manifold of gift, gifts which are given for the common fellowship and in service of fellowman as described in I Cor 12:4-11.

" There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit gives them. There are different ways of serving, but the same Lord is served. There are different abilities to perform service, but the same God gives ability to all for their particular service. The Spirit's presence is shown in some way in each person for the good of all. The Spirit gives one person a message full of wisdom, while to another person the same Spirit gives a message full of knowledge. One and the same Spirit gives faith to one person, while to another person he gives the power to heal. The Spirit gives one person the power to work miracles; to another, the gift of speaking God's message; and to yet another, the ability to tell the difference between gifts that come from the Spirit and those that do not. To one person he gives the ability to speak in tongues, and to another he gives the ability to explain what is said. But it is one and the same Spirit who does all this; as he wishes, he gives a different gift to each person."

In addition to this basic understanding I believe that Gudina Tumsa, would strongly underline that the charismatic experience must be understood within the scope of the church's life. At the same time he accepted it as a source of renewal in the life of the believers and the congregations. In his relation to the developing charismatic movement I can discern that Gudina Tumsa represented two clear standpoints:

- \* he confirmed and welcomed the spiritual gifts which his fellow-christians had been equipped with,
- he wanted that the charismatic movement and its leaders remain in and be an integral part of the church and the local congregation.

#### The charismatic movement in Ethiopia with special reference to the EECMY

In the 1950s and 1960s the Pentecostal missions in Ethiopia experienced a spiritual revival. In 1965 the 'Full Gospel Believers' Association' was established. The Association was popularly called *Molo Wongel*. In the first years after its inception the numerical growth of the movement was substantial. Later the movement met strong opposition from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the Ethiopian revolution. There was even opposition which evolved within the EECMY. Eskil Forslund in his book "The Word of God in Ethiopian Tongues" states that: "the older members of the EECMY considered the emotional style of the services and sermons of the charismatic preachers to be rather strange. The movement was also seen as a threat to the doctrinal basis and the established service order of the EECMY. Through seminars and consultations the EECMY tried to ease the tension and to find ways of keeping those members with a charismatic inclination inside the Church."

The stand of Gudina Tumsa in this issue can be understood by the following comment by Johnny Bakke in the book previously referred to: "It would be utterly wrong to believe that a united EECMY leadership opposed the charismatic youth. Gudina, for example, said to the author that, in his opinion, only those who had a touch of the charismatic renewal would be really useful in the ministry of the church."

In 1972 and later at the general assembly in Yirga Alem in January 1973 the issue of the charismatic movement was brought to the attention of the church leaders. A quotation from Öyvind M Eide's book "Revolution and Religion in Ethiopia" gives us the following information: "Here Engelsviken (a lecturer at the MYS) presented a report on the movement. After comparing it with the Lutheran doctrine he strongly recommended the EECMY to acknowledge the legitimacy of the spiritual experience, and exercise pastoral wisdom and spiritual leadership in order to lead the members into a doctrinally healthy way of Christian life. The discussions, however, revealed resistance within the church, partly because of conflicts locally with members of the movement and partly because of political considerations. In spite of support by Gudina Tumsa, it seemed as if the EECMY feared the political consequences of the acceptance of Mulu Wongel. The general assembly resolution stated only that 'The paper was accepted as information'."

Having had the privilege to follow the development in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, ELCT, over a long period I want to point out that this sister-church has faced the same issues.

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challenges and possibilities in the encounter with the charismatic movement. This is well documented in a book called "Uamsho na Karama", which means 'revival and gifts of grace'. This book is written by Elinaza E Sendoro, Bishop of the Dar es Salaam diocese of the ELCT. As in Ethiopia the main emphasis in the charismatic movement was on healing, speaking in tongues, exorcism and prophecy.

Pentecost in Nakamte 1972.

The beginning of the charismatic revival in Nakamte took place in the time of Pentecost in 1972. A number of young people, including Tefaye Denegde, were gathered in prayer. Suddenly they were filled with the Spirit and started to speak in tongues. The revival spread to the youthgroup and further into the bible school and the congregation. The congregation was very soon divided into two camps, for and against. In the same period Belina Sarka had a very decisive spiritual conversion and his life and behaviour changed radically after that. This whole development brought turmoil and tension into the congregational life. At this time Gudina Tumsa, General secretary of the EECMY intervened and was instrumental in changing the attitude of the elders of the congregation, in the way that they at least to some extent came to accept the charismatic youth.

#### Two incidents at the Mekane Yesus Seminary

- In 1973 I happened to be the Director of the Mekane Yesus Seminary, at a time with a lot of strong political and religious tension. Among the applicants for the Degree programme were Tesfaye Denegde, Belina Sarka and Tolessa Gudina. We accepted them with open eyes and gladness, being of *the opinion that the charismatic movement would bring new dimensions to the church, and that the* seminary ought to be a place of spiritual deepening and reconciliation between the different spiritual traditions. Looking backwards I dare to say that the training of the MYS was able to give these students a Lutheran theology and thereby provide a model how to integrate a Lutheran theology and liturgical life with charismatic experiences. Öyvind M. Eide makes the same conclusion in his book stating: "The charismatic youth from Iluabor and Nakamte, who were educated at the Mekane Yesus Seminary and who grew in spiritual maturity, represent a significant sign of the renewal of the leadership of the church."

However, the presence of some charismatic students at the MYS, not least during the academic years 1973-1975 resulted in opposition from the other students. It came to my knowledge that the charismatic students for a long period were gathered in what can be described as all-night, very loud prayer meetings in the dormitories. The students, not participating in these prayer-vigils, complained that they were unable to sleep and rest during the night. After several meetings in session with all students it was finally agreed that the prayer meetings should be held in the seminary-chapel and thereby in principle be open for anybody. My argument, with good support of the rest of the staff was that prayer groups need not be exclusively for charismatics, they should be open to all and thereby allow interaction among charismatics and other members of the student-body.

- During the academic year 1974/75 Tesfaye Denegde told me that he wanted to leave the seminary, since he felt that the seminary-training did not actually give him what he needed. He had also had a dream indicating to him that God called him to move out of the compound and go into direct evangelism. One evening, when this matter reached a peak, I took Tesfaye in my car and brought him to the home of Gudina Tumsa. They knew one another very well. They talked for hours and the following day I was informed that Gudina Tumsa had decided to accept Tesfaye's wish to leave the seminary. At the same time he had convinced him to become a youth-secretary of the EECMY. Some years later and after completed theological training Tesfaye Denegde became a pastor of the Mekanissa congregation and played an important role to keep the charismatic revival within the EECMY.

#### Our churches today ... can this happen with us?

This is a big question keeping in mind the complexity of our churches and societies in northern Europe. However, I believe that what has been mentioned as basic values and praxis of the EECMY and characteristics of individual Christians are relevant sources of spiritual renewal and life for our churches-congregations and individual Christians, not only for today but also for tomorrow.

In our countries there is much of indifference and rejection of the Biblical revelation and not least of the church as an institution. This is a great worry and concern for us.

At the same time people in the postmodern societies are missing something fundamental for their lives and therefore so many people of all ages are longing and seeking for the real meaning of life. This lack and at the same time openness is a possibility and call for the churches to present the Good News about God's love in Jesus Christ.

The whole situation is wellknown to God. For Him nothing is impossible. He is the Creator, who creates anew from nothing. He is the God of eternal love. He is our hope. I also find more and more fellow-Christians who are deeply aware of the problem and are praying for revival and new life. Like the disciples in Luke ch.5 they are saying: " Master, we worked hard all night long and caught nothing. But if you say so, I will let down the nets..."

While working and waiting we pray with the words of the aronitic benediction: " The Lord make His face shine upon us, and be gracious unto us. The Lord lift up his countenance upon us, and give us peace.

Uppsala in September 2004,  
Rune Backlund  
Bishop emeritus