

GUDINA TUMSA AND DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

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Abstract: The situations in which Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Gudina Tumsa lived were basically very different from each other, but nevertheless similar because of the parallel challenge through a totalitarian dictatorship with a quasi-religious anti-Christian world view. In many basic theological decisions, both prove to be amazingly similar. Both have been equally gifted in initiating ideas and inspiring people during their lives and far beyond. Many of Gudina's statements have the evocative, associative, fascinating power of Bonhoeffer's sometimes fragmentary, but always provocative, deep and concise reflections. Both their legacies are certainly worthy of interpretation for each generation--the theology of Gudina Tumsa just as the theology of Bonhoeffer has been during the past decades.

INTRODUCTION: CHRISTIAN AND/OR POLITICAL MARTYR

“I believe that God wants to give us in each emergency situation as much power of resistance as we need.” The middle-aged woman next to me looked at me with a serious face that betrayed the suffering of a difficult life full of worries. She sighed heavily. “Amen,” she said. “But God does not give us this power of resistance beforehand so that we do not rely on ourselves, but on him alone.” Again, a deeply moving “Amen” came from her that was picked up by many in this charismatic congregation.

We were in a Sunday service, February 2006, in Arba Minch in the South-West Synod of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus. My successor in the Berlin Mission, Rev. Dr. Reinhard Kees, quoted these words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's at the end of his word of greeting giving an example of a German evangelical witness of Jesus Christ who became a martyr just like the EECMY's former General Secretary, Gudina Tumsa. This woman didn't know anything about Bonhoeffer, but his words reached her directly.

She certainly didn't know anything about Gudina beyond his name. (Gudina is his name, Tumsa his father's name, thus most of the time Gudina only is used here.) In my word of greeting, I had asked somebody to read a central text of Gudina's in Amharic. Breathless silence and nodding of heads were the response. In three places there was an expressive “Amen” from the congregation. That happened in a Gamu church service in Arba Minch as in services in Oromia – Gudina being Oromo, from the most numerous people of Ethiopia, about forty percent of a population of about eighty-five million in 2011.

I shall now read the text and ask you to say the “Amen” of the congregation:

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is God's power to save everyone who believes it. It is the power that saves from eternal damnation [Amen.], from economic exploitation, from political oppression, etc. Because of its eternal dimension, the Gospel could never be replaced by any of the ideologies invented by men throughout the centuries. It is the only voice telling about a loving Father who gave his Son as a ransom for many. [Amen.] It tells about the forgiveness of sins and the resurrection of the body. It is the Good News to sinful man, the only power to save mankind from its sinfulness. [Amen.] It is too powerful to be compromised by any social system. It is too dear a treasure to be given up (Matthew 13:44). Nationalism has its own place, but it can never replace

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the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I hope and pray that the ECMY will be able to make the right decision at this critical moment in her history.¹

These sentences are as relevant in contemporary Ethiopia as they were originally.

Gudina Tumsa was murdered on July 28, 1979, by the socialist military dictatorship, the same evening that he was arrested for a third time. He was fifty years old; his wife Tsehay Tolessa was arrested with him. She survived ten years of imprisonment also with the help of Hermannsburg and Swedish missionaries. Their three daughters and one son went into exile in Germany. Gudina remained in disappearance. The government claimed that he was either in exile or with the OLF guerillas. For thirteen years it kept to this version of lies.

Through the Berlin Mission and its first secretary for the Horn of Africa, Gunnar Hasselblatt, several letter and post card campaigns were undertaken; Amnesty International was informed. The churches in West Berlin and in West Germany as well as in East Germany included the names of Gudina Tumsa and his wife and many other victims in their prayers of intercession. Bishop Werner Krusche as chairman of the Federation of Evangelical Churches in the GDR (German Democratic Republic) and Oberkirchenrat (high level church official) Gerhard Linn visited the Ethiopian Embassy in the early 1980s to ask for the whereabouts of Gudina Tumsa. The GDR State Secretariat for Church Matters was extremely negative towards their having avoided using the proper channels.

At a time when we remember the fall of the Berlin Wall twenty-two years ago and with it the end of socialism on German soil, the issue of the role of the churches in conformity and/or resistance over against the GDR, a state based on fundamental injustice (*Unrechtsstaat*), is being discussed. Therefore, it is instructive to remember the only evangelical church leader who became a martyr in a socialist dictatorship. For many years his church found it difficult to identify with him, because he was considered too political. He was deemed to have gone into conflict with the powerful and to have been executed because of his political views and activities, because of his being an Oromo, and not because of his being a committed Christian.²

Like Bonhoeffer, Gudina Tumsa was controversial—and still is. Was he a charismatic church leader of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus or a political hero of the Oromo, a Christian martyr, or a “narrow” nationalist, the label which the government of the dictator Mengistu used against him? At the International Memorial Consultation of the Berlin Mission and the Hermannsburg Mission on Gudina Tumsa, commemorating the twenty-fifth anniversary of his death and the seventy-fifth of his birth, in September 2004, in Wittenberg, a heated controversy came about. Politically committed Oromos reproached us with keeping Gudina too much within the church without recognizing him as struggling for the liberation of the peoples of Ethiopia from dictatorship, especially the Oromo. This same controversy is moving the Oromo in Ethiopia and in exile, even including the family of Gudina. Until a few years ago one did not talk about him and his legacy in his own church. “That was a taboo; he was said to be too political,” according to his daughters, Aster and Lensa. They are continuing his legacy in a Gudina Tumsa Foundation founded in 1992 by family and friends.

Bonhoeffer, too, is controversial. Although the author of *Life Together* and *The Cost of Discipleship* was appreciated in some pietist circles, the political commitment which led to his participation in a conspiracy of violent resistance, however, was not. The adherents of Bonhoeffer's non-religious interpretation of religious concepts and of stressing the coming of age of the world have problems with his practice of personal and communitarian piety in a *Predigerseminar* (a church training college giving practical training for ministry before ordination), of which he was the director.

People who knew Gudina have said that it is nonsense to divide Gudina into a Christian and a politician. Of course, they say, he was both--committed as a Christian to human rights and to the self-determination of his people and all peoples of Ethiopia.

¹ Gudina Tumsa, *Witness and Discipleship: Leadership of the Church in Multi-Ethnic Ethiopia in a Time of Revolution: The Essential Writings of Gudina Tumsa, General Secretary of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (1929-1979)*, ed. Gudina Tumsa Foundation (Addis Ababa: Gudina Tumsa Foundation, 2003), 76.

² Paul E. Hoffman, “Gudina Tumsa: Christian Martyr or Narrow Nationalist” (n.d.).

COMPARING BONHOEFFER AND GUDINA

DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

The American Lutheran theologian Paul Wee, for many years in the 1970s a representative of the Lutheran World Federation in West Berlin and later in the 1980s responsible for questions of human rights for the LWF in Geneva, presented a paper on "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Gudina Tumsa: the Answer of the Church to the Challenges of Today."³ Wee maintained that presentations of Gudina's life and the history of the EECMY always mention his affinity to Bonhoeffer.

In July 1980, Bishop Martin Kruse (Evangelical Church in Berlin--Brandenburg) wrote an essay in the German Church Sunday Paper (*Deutsches Allgemeines Sonntagsblatt*) with the title, "Bonhoeffer from Ethiopia," and the subtitle, "July 28: A year ago the Ethiopian pastor Gudina Tumsa was abducted." He called for commitment to work for the release of Gudina and his wife, Tsehay. This article was inspired by Kruse's encounters with Gudina and drafted by Gudina's close friend, Gunnar Hasselblatt, then the first Secretary for the Horn of Africa of the Berlin Mission. Hasselblatt founded a committee, "Freedom for Gudina," which engaged itself for years in letter campaigns together with Amnesty International.

The former *Oberkirchenrat* (high level church official) of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany, later president of the LWF and bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brunswick (Braunschweig), Christian Krause, also a close friend of Gudina, said in 1991: "Gudina received all his motivation from the Scriptures. According to my opinion he is only to be compared with Bonhoeffer."⁴

Tasgara Hirpo, the president of the Western Synod while Gudina was general secretary of the EECMY and his co-worker since 1983 with the Hermannsburg Mission (ELM) in Germany, stated at the First Missiological Seminar of 2001: "Gudina was justifiably compared with Dietrich Bonhoeffer from Germany who courageously turned against Hitler's ideology and publicly spoke against it."⁵

A comparison between Bonhoeffer and Gudina shows both great differences in their biographical data and amazing parallels in the center of their Christian existence.⁶

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was born in 1906, twenty-three years before Gudina Tumsa. Bonhoeffer was raised in a well-to-do, bourgeois family of educators and doctors in Breslau, Germany, living from 1912 on in Berlin. Gudina Tumsa was born in 1929 in the Oromo village of Bodji, Western Wollega, Oromia, Ethiopia, the son of poor farmers.

Bonhoeffer was educated in the classical tradition of German philosophy and literature at the so-called "humanist gymnasium" (high school with Greek and Latin) in Berlin and then studied at the universities of Tübingen, Rome, and Berlin. He finished all of his exams including his dissertation in the shortest time (a theological doctorate at twenty-one, a second theological exam and habilitation at twenty-four). Gudina went to school in his village at the age of ten; he became a voluntary evangelist while working as a dresser in Nekemte between 1947 and 1952, before going off to study at the Swedish Mission School in Nedjo from 1955 to 1958 and becoming ordained at the age of twenty-nine as one of the pioneer national pastors. He was admitted to Luther Theological Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota,

³ Paul Wee, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Gudina Tumsa: The Answer of the Church to the Challenges of Today," in *Church and Society: Lectures and Responses: Second Missiological Seminar 2003, on the Life and Ministry of Gudina Tumsa, General Secretary of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) (1966-1979)*, ed. Gudina Tumsa Foundation (Hamburg, Germany: WDL-Publishers, 2010), 15–51.

⁴ Oeyvind Eide, *Revolution & Religion in Ethiopia: The Growth & Persecution of the Mekane Yesus Church, 1974-85*, 2nd ed., Eastern African Studies (Oxford: Athens: Addis Ababa: J. Currey; Ohio University Press; Addis Ababa University Press, 2000), 177.

⁵ Gudina Tumsa Foundation, ed., *The Life and Ministry of Gudina Tumsa, General Secretary, Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY): Lectures and Discussions, First Missiological Seminar, 2001* (Hamburg, Germany: WDL-Publishers, 2007), 96.

⁶ I am deeply indebted to Paul Wee's paper which I have both reworked and reworded and largely expanded.

U.S.A., without the formal academic prerequisites, studying from 1963 to 1966 without any problems, to the amazement of all and inspiring all with his deep spirituality, obtaining a Bachelor of Divinity degree at the age of thirty-seven.

Gudina Tumsa and Tsehay Tolessa were married when Gudina was twenty-two and were parents to six children. Bonhoeffer was engaged to Maria von Wedemeyer when he was thirty-seven but, because of imprisonment and death, was never able to marry and have children.

Gudina became an evangelist and pastor of his church who went on to hold the top leadership position in his church. Gudina was engaged in the issues relating to the evangelization of non-Christians. Bonhoeffer was never faced with such questions except in the form of how to deal with secularized or re-paganized Christians in Germany.

Gudina was an important discussion partner and initiator of discussions in the ecumenical context and in international church relationships concerning mission and development, moratorium, church order, as well as the relationship between Western missions, churches, and donor agencies and African former mission churches, concerning interdependence and self-reliance.

Bonhoeffer was a pastor, serving in German congregations in Barcelona, Spain, and London, England, and inner-city congregations in Berlin, but he was above all an academic theologian in the German classical tradition who never held office in the hierarchy of the church. However, he started important initiatives within the ecumenical movement concerning peace and reconciliation between the nations formerly at war during World War I, and he struggled with the issue of pacifism. Though not holding an office in the established church, he gave practical training for ministry as leader of an illegal seminary (*Predigerseminar*) of the Confessing Church, the part of the church which was anti-Nazi, and he accomplished many official and unofficial jobs for the Confessing Church.

Bonhoeffer became a member of the military intelligence (*Abwehr*) and actively worked with members of the military and of government ministries who were part of the resistance movement. Through his international ecumenical contacts he undertook secret tasks of military intelligence in a conspiracy with the aim of eliminating the dictator, Hitler. This obviously seemed to be the only way to stop the destruction of elementary human rights of people persecuted (e.g., the Jews and the political opposition) and of people destroyed in wars of extermination (e.g., Poland, Soviet Union).

Gudina never left his position as general secretary within the church (1966-1979). At the same time--through his international ecumenical contacts, mainly within the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and its member churches, especially in Germany, Scandinavia, and North America, through the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany (VELKD) and through the Berlin Mission (BMW)--he transmitted important information on the socialist dictatorship of Mengistu Hailemariam, the suppression of the churches, and the denial of human rights. This was done mainly through *Oberkirchenrat* (high level church official) Christian Krause as the contact person of partner churches and organizations, but also through Gunnar Hasselblatt of the BMW. Gudina also participated in political discussions during the Mengistu dictatorship concerning the Oromo movement, which developed in resistance to Amharic centralism under the emperor and then under socialist military rule.

While Bonhoeffer made the choice of active, violent resistance to the Third Reich, Gudina personally apparently took the path of active, non-violent resistance. It is difficult to say what position he took concerning violent resistance to the socialist dictatorship and its "Red Terror" against all opposition from 1977 to 1978.

We are speaking of two very different individuals who lived at different times and in very different historical and geographical contexts. What was it that bound them and continues to bind them together, such that Gudina Tumsa is often referred to as Ethiopia's Bonhoeffer?

The lives of both men were characterized by a deep, personal faith in Jesus Christ; both were committed to the discipline of daily Bible reading, prayer, study and meditation. Both were known for maintaining integrity between what they said and what they did, between what they represented as Christians and who they were as individual people; this rare integrity was part of their faithful witness until the end of their lives. Both rejected the notion that the Christian faith

belonged to one area of human activity alongside other areas; Christ was the centre of life, the dimension of depth and meaning within every discipline and within every human activity. Neither divorced the spiritual from the material, the secular from the sacred."⁷

Through their studies and experiences in the U.S.A., both Bonhoeffer (1930-1931 and 1939) and Gudina (1963-1966) were brought face to face with the burning issues of racial discrimination and economic and political injustice. At the same time, both were exposed to the theological resources and to the people within and outside the church actively addressing those issues. Bonhoeffer met the young liberal Reinhold Niebuhr, who invited him into exile in 1939; Gudina read and was influenced by Niebuhr's mature position of Christian Realism in his political ethics. Bonhoeffer met African-Americans while he taught at Union Theological Seminary in New York, at a time when there was no civil rights movement. Gudina became acquainted with the civil rights movement of the 1960s and the non-violent, active resistance of Martin Luther King Jr.⁸

Both understood that there is a political dimension inherent in the proclamation of the gospel of Christ, that it is directed not only to the personal lives of individuals, but also to the structures and practices of the social, economic, and political life of the community.

Both understood that, in addition to the forces of the state that sought to undermine or compromise the mission of the church, there were also forces within the church that were doing the same. These needed to be confronted.

Both Bonhoeffer and Gudina stood against demonic powers within their respective societies and governments and sought to enlist the support of international friends and partners, because they had a vision of the community of the church of Jesus Christ in the whole world.⁹

Both were given opportunities to avoid the immense personal dangers that threatened them in their own countries; both were encouraged to leave for safe havens abroad (Bonhoeffer to the U.S.A., Gudina to Tanzania). Knowing the risks, both chose to remain with their people, their country, their church.

Both Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Gudina Tumsa, in their own way, protested the violations of human rights and human dignity that were being carried out on a massive scale in their respective countries. Both, because of their opposition, were executed by the security arms of their own governments, through political murder ordered by their country's dictators--Bonhoeffer through a prefabricated court-martial ordered by Hitler and Gudina through an order of Mengistu without the semblance of a court procedure.

RECEPTION OF BONHOEFFER AND GUDINA

Both have left a legacy of discipleship, its costs, and its joys, that will continue to be an inspiration to people within their own churches, the ecumenical church, as well as to people outside the church who value human dignity, human rights, integrity, and the courage to stand up for one's beliefs.

The history of the influence of Bonhoeffer is extraordinary, because his writings have been published for decades, are being read worldwide, and are being applied to many contexts. In the future, this could also become possible for Gudina Tumsa's writings. His main writings have been published in

⁷ Wee, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Gudina Tumsa: The Answer of the Church to the Challenges of Today."

⁸ Oeyvind Eide, "Integral Human Development," in *The Life and Ministry of Gudina Tumsa, General Secretary, Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) : Lectures and Discussions, First Missiological Seminar, 2001*, ed. Gudina Tumsa Foundation (Hamburg, Germany: WDL-Publishers, 2007), 41-43.

⁹ Wee, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Gudina Tumsa: The Answer of the Church to the Challenges of Today," unknown.

English since 2003 (since 2007 in Amharic and Oromo also). Moreover, there is a biography in Øyvind Eide's *Religion and Revolution in Ethiopia 1974-85*, which he dedicated to the memory of Gudina.¹⁰

Gudina's inner-Ethiopian as well as international ecumenical impact with all people who met him consisted of his extraordinary spiritual and intellectual charisma combined with an analytical and visionary mind and a winning, convincing, authentic personality. His appeal now is based to a large extent on both his martyrdom and on the direct, and at the same time intellectually differentiated, language of faith that touches people equally in their hearts and minds. The same effect has developed with Bonhoeffer in the world-wide reception of his work, credible because of his active resistance against a totalitarian dictatorship and his destiny as a martyr.

Concerning Gudina a slow reception is beginning—also through the help of the Berlin Mission since 1993 and others (EMW, LWF, VELKD, ELM) since 2001 in supporting the work of the Gudina Tumsa Foundation on Gudina Tumsa's legacy—in spite of the ambivalent attitude of his own church towards its most important martyr and theologian. He has also been embraced in international mission and church circles by those who had known Gudina and the EECMY from that time.

The excited reaction to the regional seminars that have been organized regularly each year since 2005 through the Gudina Tumsa Foundation and which are being supported mainly by BMW and ELM shows that there is a great longing for knowing about and learning from Gudina's witness and discipleship. The excitement about the translation of Gudina's writings into Oromo and Amharic has been great.

The power of his language, its conciseness, and at the same time the fragmentary character which suggests his openness of thinking have been fascinating together with the unity of his life and work. Elisabeth Hasselblatt, widow of Gudina's friend Gunnar Hasselblatt, Berlin Mission secretary for the Horn of Africa from 1975 to 1993, said in one of the Gudina Tumsa Seminars in the Berlin Mission: "Gudina Tumsa is like Bonhoeffer unfinished. After the revolution he definitely wanted to continue studying theology, especially ethics." This is an obvious parallel to Bonhoeffer's main theological interest of his last years, ethics, due to the need to find answers to the extreme challenges in church and politics in both of their contexts.

The words of Eberhard Bethge, friend and biographer of Bonhoeffer, are equally valid for Gudina: "Until today the church feels challenged by Bonhoeffer [and equally by Gudina] because of his deeply "politicized" understanding of the word of God. Thus, he is both inconvenient and relevant."

Bethge writes the following in the year 1976, thirty years after the end of World War II and Bonhoeffer's violent death, when many witnesses of the time of Bonhoeffer were still alive. We today are in a similar situation concerning Gudina, thirty-two years after his death and twenty years after the end of the Ethiopian socialist military dictatorship, many witnesses of the time being still alive.

Psychologically for many of the older ones Bonhoeffer's [respectively, Gudina's] total personal commitment which they themselves did not enter into has become a barrier and cause for insecurity, often unconsciously, so that they repress the phenomenon or reject it with the traditional theological objections (destruction of the theology of the word and dissolution of the doctrine of the two kingdoms): In Germany, therefore, many people who did not fight against the Third Reich react towards Bonhoeffer with disinterest and rejection [respectively in Ethiopia towards Gudina, many who did not fight the socialist military dictatorship], while he does not have to overcome such resistance in other countries. Bonhoeffer's work is taken up and reflected eagerly all over wherever churches exist under pressure or have lost their existential freedom. And to be sure, wherever groups became involved in experiments of new forms.¹¹

I think this will be true also for Gudina when his writings and his biography become known in Ethiopia and internationally, especially in regard to the political implications of his wholistic theology

¹⁰ Eide, *Revolution & Religion in Ethiopia*.

¹¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Macmillan, 1976), 109–10.

which overcame thinking in separated spheres (doctrine of the two kingdoms, Word of God over against religious experience).

Gudina Tumsa himself was fascinated with Bonhoeffer when he studied in the years 1963 through 1966 in the U.S.A. at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. Øyvind Eide, former missionary of the Norwegian Missionary Society in Ethiopia, now retired professor in Stavanger, Norway, created a great work on the time of Gudina: *Religion and Revolution in Ethiopia: The Growth and Persecution of the Mekane Yesus Church 1974 – 1985*, dedicated to Gudina and other martyrs: "In memory of Guddinaa Tumsaa and all those who suffered during the persecution."

Gudina was influenced and impressed theologically particularly by Reinhold Niebuhr, Martin Luther King Jr., and the civil rights movement, and by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. It is a pity that there are no written testimonies of Gudina's from the time, because all his books and papers were sunk together with the ship by an air attack of the Israelis on the harbor of Port Said, Egypt, during the Six Days War in 1967. Unfortunately, also, all his sermons and personal papers were lost, destroyed, or stolen after his murder when the EECMY office building was confiscated in 1981 by the government.

THEOLOGICAL AFFINITIES

TRUTH IS CONCRETE AND CONTEXTUAL

Eberhard Bethge in his succinct portrayal of Dietrich Bonhoeffer in 1976 states at the end:

Bonhoeffer's work can be grasped in an overview with the help of the catchwords that stand for different phases of his theological development. *Christ existing as community* for the first, more academic phase of the books *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*; *Cheap and costly grace* for the next, more church oriented phase of *The Cost of Discipleship* and *Life Together*; the ultimate and the penultimate for the time of *Ethics*; and finally non-religious interpretation, world come of age, Jesus the man for others, and Church for others for the time of Tegel in *Letters and Papers from Prison*.¹²

For Bonhoeffer these phases do not signify leaps between quite different themes. His theological life theme was always the same: It kept dealing with Christ and Christ's church—whereby the church makes Christ concrete and Christ corrects the church.¹³ (p.110).

Bonhoeffer's theological work can at no time be understood without a concrete Here and Now. It is mixed with daring to act. Bonhoeffer was able to communicate an amazing presence: Whatever is "always" true is not true "today." God for us is "always" God "today."¹⁴ (p.109).

Correspondingly and similarly Gudina emphasizes:

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

¹² Bonhoeffer, 110.

¹³ Bonhoeffer, 110.

¹⁴ Bonhoeffer, 109.

experience them in our situation, in our cultural setting, in our economic life, in our political experience and in our social practice.¹⁵

Eide sees a change in Gudina from normal Western theological thought patterns (i.e. the hermeneutical model theory-practice) towards a model practice-theory-practice (Eide, *Life and Ministry*, p.45f).

THE PERSPECTIVE FROM BELOW: JESUS, THE MAN FOR OTHERS, AND THE CHURCH FOR OTHERS

The perspective from below is the access to Bonhoeffer's and Gudina's theological thinking:

The theological theme, "Who is Christ for us today?" and the theological answer, "Jesus, the man for others," gained shape three times in Bonhoeffer's life.... First it was peace against nationalistic militarism; then antisemitic racism; finally the option of the church gaining the perspective from below.... In his own painful relearning process, the vision of a process of transformation of Christianity finally revealed itself to Bonhoeffer: liberation of one's own church through the return to poverty, through stepping down from the positions of a hierarchical dominance, grown theologically as well as historically, legally as well as economically – down to the path of Christ among humankind.¹⁶

"Church for others" as impulse and vision has probably become Bonhoeffer's most fruitful inspiration world-wide. The option for the poor has become an essential criterion of being the church in the different theologies of liberation.

For Gudina's theology, this vision was not one he had to gain in a process of transformation as Bonhoeffer did. Bonhoeffer called to repentance a church perverted and compromised during National Socialism. For Gudina, the option for the poor was reality from the start: "Deriving from the poor, the Church rededicates itself to living for others, serving the whole person, meeting his spiritual and physical needs."¹⁷ Gudina sees a "contrast between the traditional African idea of life and the Western one":

In his [Jesus'] ministry, we note that forgiveness of sins and healing of the body, feeding the hungry and spiritual nurture, opposing dehumanizing structures and identifying himself with the weak were never at any time divided or departmentalized. He saw [man] as a whole and was always ready to give help where the need was most obvious.¹⁸

At that time, Gudina consciously took up the theme of justice and because of that demanded a change in the salary scale of the church. The low salaries were to be raised, and the higher ones were to be reduced. "Sharing with our brothers and co-workers whatever is made available to our church in the interests of the Kingdom of our God and Saviour" was Gudina's challenge.¹⁹

His church, however, was not ready to follow him in this. Nor did they follow the aim that had been proclaimed in the General Assembly in Nedjo in 1976, namely, to reduce dependence on the rich partner churches step by step and to become financially self-reliant within fifteen years.

Gudina had not discovered the question of social and political justice only through socialism. The exploitation of the peasants and the oppression of the people through the Amharic administration during the imperial time caused Gudina from the beginning to develop a strong commitment to political

¹⁵ Tumsa, *Witness and Discipleship*, 69.

¹⁶ Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, Überarbeitete Neuausgabe, 2. Auflage, Rororo (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 2007), 147.

¹⁷ Tumsa, *Witness and Discipleship*, 82.

¹⁸ Tumsa, 122.

¹⁹ Tumsa, 79.

responsibility. At the same time, he was influenced by the Christocentric theology of the Oromo in Western Wollega. Both are decisive in understanding his later writings, claims Øyvind Eide.²⁰

Already during the time of Emperor Haile Selassie, Gudina made the question of land reform and the feudal structures of exploitation and oppression a theme at the General Assembly of the church in 1972. At his insistence, a petition of the church on this issue was sent to the parliament dependent on the emperor. The emperor, however, did not admit the discussion of this theme. At the same time, Gudina stopped praying for the emperor and his family in church services, because such a prayer was understood as legitimation of the emperor's rule. This was a shock to congregants and a clear spiritual-political demonstration.

Faith cannot be separated from the political questions of the time, according to Gudina. Therefore, theology has to "interpret the signs of the time and clarify the problems as they relate to the life of the church and to that of society."²¹

As followers of Christ, we cannot do less than those who profess that Christ is irrelevant to the problems of this age and so strive to bring social and economic justice to the underprivileged by ideologies thought out by men.²²

The ECMY should be an example to others. The church has been able to set an example in showing interest to the outcast in our society.²³

In the question of salaries and their equalization, according to Gudina, the church is to set an example for the government as for others concerned, not by words but by actions of sacrificial nature. Jesus Christ lived and sacrificed himself for others.²⁴

In this issue there is a very clear parallel between Gudina and Bonhoeffer. Gudina actually may have been directly inspired theologically and practically on this issue by Bonhoeffer. Gudina is one of very few, if not the only Protestant church leader who tried to put into practice Bonhoeffer's concept of "church for others" in a contextual way, what later has been called "the option for the poor." Bonhoeffer, in prison and cut off from direct action and a co-opted, disrupted, and weak church that was being marginalized by the Nazi totalitarian dictatorship, puts it in even more radical terms:

The church is the church only when it exists for others. To make a start, it should give away all its property to those in need. The clergy must live solely on the free-will offerings of their congregations, or possibly engage in some secular calling. The church must share in the secular problems of ordinary human life, not dominating, but helping and serving. It must tell men of every calling what it means to live in Christ, to exist for others. In particular, our own church will have to take the field against the vices of hubris, power-worship, envy, and humbug, as the roots of all evil.... It is not abstract argument, but example, that gives its word emphasis and power.²⁵

To clarify the possibilities of the witness of the church in socialism which had been proclaimed as state ideology Gudina invited the LWF Department of Studies to hold seminars on "Christianity and Socialism" for the pastors and church leaders of all Christian churches in Addis Ababa for the sake of clarifying options of the church confronted by the challenge of socialism. Because of great demand in 1975 and 1976, four seminars were held. I was the speaker providing the main input leading these seminars. I was impressed by the openness of the discussions. The results of the seminars were translated

²⁰ Eide, *Revolution & Religion in Ethiopia*, 60.

²¹ Tumsa, *Witness and Discipleship*, 79.

²² Tumsa, 80.

²³ Tumsa, 73.

²⁴ Tumsa, 73.

²⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 383.

into Amharic and spread within the Mekane Yesus church. Later that proved to be dangerous and caused detention of quite a number of people. State and party did not want to tolerate any independent position vis-à-vis socialism from 1977 on, the period of "Red Terror" when the corpses of those in opposition were lying in the streets of Addis Ababa as deterrent. Particularly, they did not want to listen to a church that held up to them the mirror of their socialist ideals.

TOTALITARIAN IDEOLOGIES VERSUS THE GOSPEL / NON-RELIGIOUS INTERPRETATION OF RELIGIOUS CONCEPTS / THE ULTIMATE AND THE PENULTIMATE / A WORLD COME OF AGE

Gudina developed both an existential and a political interpretation of the Gospel, both included in his concept of wholistic theology--in contrast to Western and Marxist interpretations of the world, which are both secularized, materialist, by definition non-religious interpretations of human life.

On these issues Gudina did not shy away from critical dispute. A sharp controversy with his brother, Baro Tumsa, developed concerning the confession of God. Baro Tumsa was at that time one of the chief ideologists of the party. Gudina had expressly invited him to the General Assembly in Nedjo in April 1976 for the purpose of debate. He criticized Baro's Marxist atheism and materialism as unscientific and inadequate to a wholistic view of human existence.

Man has been created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). And human beings have freedom, creativity, honour, dignity, deriving from that image of God. To have a closed understanding of the world and a materialist understanding of man is to deny essential elements of science and human nature.... The truly effective testimony against unbelief is a life lived by faith.²⁶

With this courageous attack on the dominant ideological world view, he challenged its claim to a supposedly wholistic political-philosophical ideology--and thus he confronted the ruling party and government for which his brother Baro spoke as a member of the politburo. "It must be understood that there can be no reconciliation and no compromise between what the church believes and materialism. Marxism-Leninism and the church can never be friends, Gudina said after the controversy."²⁷ Bonhoeffer in prison in 1944 put the question this way:

What Christianity really is, or indeed who Christ really is, for us today. . . . We are moving towards a completely religionless time: people as they are now simply cannot be religious any more. . . . How do we speak . . . in a "secular" way about God? In what way are we "religionless-secular" Christians? . . . In that case Christ is no longer an object of religion, but something quite different, really the Lord of the world.²⁸

The thought of non-religious interpretation of religious concepts has been criticized because it seems religion and spirituality are considered as irrelevant. That is unthinkable in Africa, as the atheist ideologues of Ethiopian socialism also had to realize. In secularized Germany, believing in science and being religiously disillusioned (although at the same time holding the Nazi pseudo-religious totalitarian world view) this thought was and is an intellectual challenge. However, Bonhoeffer's fundamental criticism is meant to go against the corruption of religion through

our church, which has been fighting in these years only for its self-preservation, as though that were an end in itself. [Such a church] is incapable of taking the word of reconciliation and redemption to mankind and the world. Our earlier words are therefore bound to lose their force

²⁶ Tumsa, *Witness and Discipleship*, 32.

²⁷ Eide, *Revolution & Religion in Ethiopia*, 127.

²⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 279-81.

and cease, and our being Christians today will be limited to two things: prayer and righteous action among men.²⁹

Gudina rejects the total claim of socialism, of a world allegedly come of age full of non-religious interpretations of the world, and puts straight the relation of the ultimate (the Gospel of Jesus Christ) and the penultimate (nationalism/patriotism):

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is God's power to save everyone who believes it. It is the power that saves from eternal damnation, from economic exploitation, from political oppression, etc. Because of its eternal dimension the Gospel could never be replaced by any of the ideologies invented by men throughout the centuries. It is the only voice telling about a loving Father who gave his Son as a ransom for many. It tells about the forgiveness of sins and the resurrection of the body. It is the Good News to sinful man, the only power to save mankind from its sinfulness. It is too powerful to be compromised by any social system. It is too dear a treasure to be given up (Matthew 13: 44). Nationalism has its own place, but it can never replace the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I hope and pray that the ECMY will be able to make the right decision at this critical moment in her history.³⁰

CHURCH AS PARADIGM AND ADVOCATE: THE POLITICAL ROLE OF THE CHURCH

Gudina sees the role of the church as paradigm (an example), as model in advocacy for justice for the underprivileged. The church stands for the liberation of human beings from oppression, but with clear criteria and standards: human rights, justice, rule of law, grass roots democratic participation.

The church sees "its continuing task to be the full liberation of the whole man. It welcomes the opportunities which the new situation provides for building a more just society." It sees self-reliance and land reform as decisive because it has itself been active about it before.³¹

The church is emphasized as a paradigm and as an advocate: "We welcome the prospect of participation by the people at all levels of decision making, where the power of the people is channeled from bottom to top. We aspire for justice, respect for human rights and the rule of law. Ideologies cannot be considered as absolute. Complete allegiance is due to God and God alone."³² The church must be an example in its own life:

The ECMY has been practicing democracy since her establishment in her present form. Our congregations have been and are the source of authority. No one commands power at *any* level of this church unless he/she is elected. The democratic system being introduced into our country has been in practice in the ECMY for years. This must be appreciated and acted on.³³

Insofar as the church is the paradigm for the overcoming of class struggle and enmity between different groups: "Such dialogue, trust and love must be extended to those outside our particular fellowship, to Christians of different confession and to persons of other faiths and ideologies."³⁴ In this text, in direct adoption of Bonhoeffer's notion of "the church for others," Gudina says:

Deriving from the poor, the Church rededicates itself to living for others, serving the whole human person, meeting his spiritual and physical needs. Through its health, educational and other services, the ECMY has contributed meaningfully to the development of Ethiopia and has at the

²⁹ Bonhoeffer, 300.

³⁰ Tumsa, *Witness and Discipleship*, 76.

³¹ Tumsa, 82.

³² Tumsa, 83.

³³ Tumsa, 79. Note that Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (ECMY) was used until 1978; Ethiopian was officially allowed and added to the church's name after 1978.

³⁴ Tumsa, 83.

same time prepared people for change. It sees its continuing task to be the full liberation of the whole man.³⁵

Already before the revolution Gudina had demanded in the last year of the emperor the need for land reform which would liberate the peasants out of quasi-feudal dependency to become owners of the land they work on. (The slogan of the first phase of the revolution was "land to the tiller.") That was a demand that the revolution put into practice at the beginning. Then all land was nationalized or socialized, that is, controlled by the government.

Quite different was the reality of the German church at the time of Bonhoeffer--authoritarian in itself and subservient towards the authorities in the sense of a rigid doctrine of the two kingdoms. That is true to a large extent also for the Confessing Church. In his introductory speech which gained unanimity of acceptance for the 1934 Barmen Theological Declaration, Hans Asmussen had stressed the unpolitical character of the confessional statements of Barmen and, thereby, had won the consensus: "We do not protest as members of our people against the recent history of our people, not as citizens against the new state, not as subjects against the authorities."³⁶

It is amazing that this could be said after democracy and the constitutional rule of law had already been destroyed--all basic human and civil rights, among them the right to freedom of opinion, freedom of the press and of assembly had been cancelled, opposition to the government was being considered enmity against the nation, all social voluntary organizations were dissolved or forced into line, opposition members and Jews were left without rights, concentration camps were being established.

The *Pfarrernotbund* (the pastors' emergency association founded in 1933 in opposition to the Nazi dominance of the church), the *Bruderräte* (brothers' councils, councils of confessing church members in opposition to the centralized Nazi dominance of the Evangelical Church in Germany), and the congregations of the Confessing Church were partly a counter image to the attempt of creating a centralized state church and to the totalitarian state. But they had limited paradigmatic function and were able to exert the function of advocacy only in a very limited way, not even for the Jewish Christians (formerly Jewish persons who had converted to Christianity). Concerning the Reichs Pogrom Night 1938 (the night of November 9, 1938, when the Nazis clamped down on the Jewish population, burning synagogues, killing and maiming Jews, and putting tens of thousands into concentration camps), they felt powerless and stayed silent.

Bonhoeffer had criticized sharply the fear of the Confessing Church to speak out politically, especially concerning the so-called Jewish question, but also concerning a future war of aggression. Because of his participation in the conspiracy against Hitler he was not able to take a public position. Moreover, he was officially prohibited from speaking and writing. In his speech, "The Church before the Jewish Question," he had stated very clearly already in 1933 what he would expect from a church that prays and acts righteously:

First, the church has to ask the government whether or not the government's action can be accepted responsibly by the government itself as legitimate government action.... In relation to the Jewish question this question needs to be asked in perfect clarity.... Secondly, the church is duty-bound to the victims of any social order unconditionally even if they do not belong to the Christian congregation.... Thirdly, when the church sees the government exercising too much or too little law and order, it arrives at the situation not simply to bind up the victims who have come under the wheel, but to block the very spokes of the wheel.³⁷

A year later, in 1934, Bonhoeffer wrote in a letter from London to a friend in Switzerland (without fear of censorship and therefore openly): "All of Christianity is to pray with us that "resistance

³⁵ Tumsa, 82.

³⁶ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 64.

³⁷ Bethge, 56–57. Translation by the author.

up to the ultimate consequences" will come about and that people will be found who are willing to suffer the consequences."³⁸

Years later, he himself became one of these people in political resistance who had to suffer the consequences. In his book, *Ethics*, which he formulated in 1940, when he had decided to join the conspiracy, a devastating confession of guilt which is absolutely necessary for repentance and renewal of the church:

The church was mute where it should have shouted, because the blood of the innocent cried to heaven.... the church confesses to have seen the arbitrary use of brutal violence, the bodily and spiritual suffering of countless innocent people, oppression, hatred and murder without having found ways to rush to their aid. It has become guilty of the lives of the weakest and most defenseless brothers of Jesus Christ (i.e., the Jews). The church confesses having seen robbery and exploitation of the poor, enrichment and corruption of the strong without raising its voice.³⁹

We don't know whether or not there are statements of Gudina's expressing a confession of guilt on behalf of the EECMY during the dictatorship. I think he was killed too early to formulate such a confession. But I am very sure he would have, had he lived to see the end of that regime.

The parallel in Gudina's theology to this "political theology" of Bonhoeffer's is Gudina's great and challenging statement that an unpolitical existence is not worth living:

Wholistic Theology is an effort in rediscovering total human life. Apolitical life is not worthy of existence, uninvolvedness is a denial of the goodness of creation and of the reality of incarnation.... The history of the people of God in the Old Testament starts with the liberation of a group of slaves from oppression. Nothing is more political than this Biblical narrative. In our continent what is prevalent is the basis to define economic policy, agricultural development, foreign relations—"Politics decides who should die and who should live." African theology should develop a political theology relevant to the African political life.⁴⁰

Gudina continues stressing that he feels encouraged and inspired by the fact that the elders of the congregations of the South Ethiopia Synod who were elected to be leaders of peasant associations practice their Christian faith in these leading positions. "Political theology should grow out of such experiences on the local congregational level."⁴¹

CONTEMPORARY, RELEVANT CONFESSION OF FAITH

It's impossible for an African to divide the secular from the religious, mind from body, faith from development. Confessio Augustana [the basic confession of the Lutheran churches] was relevant to the needs of the reformers. African churches of our time have to develop a "Confessio Africana", a confessional stand relevant to African social, political and ideological reality.⁴²

Gudina had not been able to begin this task expressly. But elements of such a confession can be found in his most important statements and passages.

Bonhoeffer sharpens the impossibility of separating the worldly from the religious in the following formula: "Whoever does not cry out on behalf of the Jews, may not sing Gregorian chants." Bonhoeffer basically pronounces himself in favor of a wholistic confession when he speaks against thinking in two separate spheres which he considers as sterile: "The basic concept of ethical thinking that

³⁸ Bethge, 68. Translation by the author.

³⁹ Bethge, 100. Translation by the author.

⁴⁰ Tumsa, *Witness and Discipleship*, 70.

⁴¹ Tumsa, 70.

⁴² Tumsa, 37.

determines everything consciously or unconsciously, the meeting of two spheres, the one is divine, sacred, supernatural, Christian, the other worldly, profane, natural, unchristian."⁴³

Bonhoeffer's theological thinking was considered as too political also by the Confessing Church which wanted the Barmen Declaration to be understood in a non-political way. An example is his participation in drafting an earlier confession. Bonhoeffer, who could not be present at the Barmen Confessional Synod in 1934 because he was at that time serving as a pastor in a German parish in London, received this confessional declaration at first positively. But then he became increasingly critical because the Barmen Declaration does not say anything on the Jewish question, which should have been central at that time for a Christian confession. He had cooperated in drafting the so-called Bethel Confession which questioned the very nature of a Christian church when on the basis of a racist ideology it accepted the expulsion of Jews who had converted to Christianity. Because of that the Bethel Confession had been considered as too political and therefore had not been accepted by the Confessing Church as a basis for confessing.

WITNESS TO THE GOSPEL IN A POLITICAL CONTEXT: CHEAP AND COSTLY GRACE, THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

Like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Gudina Tumsa was murdered because of his political commitment on the basis of his Christian witness. When directly after his second detention the possibility was offered to him by Christian Krause to go into exile with the help of President Nyerere of Tanzania, Gudina rejects this offer as temptation: "Here is my church and my congregation. How can I, as a church leader, leave my flock at this moment of trial?"⁴⁴ A few weeks after that he was killed.

Already in the U.S.A. and invited to take up a teaching position at Union Theological Seminary in the summer of 1939, after six weeks of heart-rending wrestling with himself, Bonhoeffer decided to return to Germany: "It was a mistake of mine to go to America. I have to live through this difficult period of our national history with the Christians in Germany. I shall have no right to cooperate in the reconstruction of Christian life after the war in Germany when I do not share the trials of this time with my people."

Gudina was quoting to Christian Krause, then contact person of the Lutheran churches and missions for the EECMY, 2 Corinthians 5:15: "Christ died for all that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again." Krause reported to Eide: "This had become the key sentence for him in prison." Gudina added: "Never ever will I escape."⁴⁵

With 2 Corinthians 5, Gudina in fact made reference to Bonhoeffer's book, *The Cost of Discipleship*. Gudina had just quoted that Scriptural passage in his spiritual last will, "The Role of a Christian in a Given Society," a few days before his abduction and murder:

As someone has said [namely Dietrich Bonhoeffer], when a person is called to follow Christ, that person is called to die. It means a redirection of the purpose of life, that is death to one's own wishes and personal desires and finding the greatest satisfaction in living for and serving the one who died for us and was raised from death (2 Corinthians 5:13-14).⁴⁶

In the following, last paragraph of his will he states crystal-clear that he was ready to transgress for the sake of the people the laws of an Ethiopian state based on fundamental injustice:

It has been stated that a Christian is a citizen of a given country and as such under the laws and policies of that country. Because he is under the laws of the country of which he is a citizen, it is his duty to pray for the peace of that country and cooperate with his fellow-citizens for its well-

⁴³ Translation by the author. Quoted from Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 137.

⁴⁴ Eide, *Revolution & Religion in Ethiopia*, 177.

⁴⁵ Eide, *Revolution & Religion in Ethiopia*, 177.

⁴⁶ Tumsa, *Witness and Discipleship*, 11.

being. The only limitation to his cooperation or obedience to the laws of his country is if he is commanded to act contrary to the law of God.⁴⁷

Why was Gudina Tumsa murdered? The files of the Ethiopian state security (which had been trained by the East German state security) are not easily accessible, but on demand information was received that they could be looked into if there were an official demand by the EECMY. This has not yet happened. Is it because of certain fears? It is probable that Gudina's building of a church network under the perspective of how the churches could stand up together to the challenge of socialism was a nuisance to the control mania of the dictatorship. Gudina's independence as a whole was considered a nuisance by the regime: Mengistu had tried in vain to win Gudina's cooperation for the purpose of sending him on a propaganda tour through Europe where he was supposed to affirm that in Ethiopia there were no persecutions of Christians or Muslims, but religious freedom.

During the interrogations of his first two detentions Gudina was reproached with participating in political resistance in the form of cooperation with the Oromo Liberation Front. This was denied by Gudina. Furthermore, he was reproached with church independence creating an opposition forum by founding for the first time in Ethiopian history a Council for the Cooperation of the Churches to which even the Orthodox Church belonged. In this way, like in the GDR and in Poland, the churches were to be strengthened as public institutions independent of party and government.⁴⁸

Bonhoeffer, in a conspiratorial way together with others, did what he could for a group of Jews who had to flee, and they succeeded in getting them into Switzerland. Thus, he endangered himself to the extreme. Similarly, Gudina during his last visit 1978 to Berlin challenged Gunnar Hasselblatt, the first Horn of Africa secretary of the BMW, to take care of the tens of thousands of Oromo refugees in Sudan. He suggested founding an aid organization, which happened in 1979 with the creation of the Oromo Relief Association (ORA).

Gudina said during the interrogations that he had never actively taken part in the OLF, but that he had followed developments.⁴⁹ But he participated in many discussions during the time of the dictatorship and knew about the change of his brother Baro from a Marxist ideologue to an Oromo nationalist. He certainly took part in the discussions on how the dictatorship and atheist-materialist socialism were to be overcome. To him a pseudo-religious idolatrous world view that excludes genuine religious faith in God was unacceptable.

GUDINA TUMSA IN RESISTANCE

Bonhoeffer, like Gudina, knew exactly when a political system had become totalitarian, and he reacted accordingly. Finally, from 1940 on, Bonhoeffer went into active resistance admitting as unavoidable the use of force ("to block the spokes of the wheel"). Starting in about 1975, Gudina was at first in critical solidarity with the general aims of socialism, but in clear intellectual resistance against the ideology of "Ethiopia *tikdem*" (Ethiopia first). His position was: "Nationalism has its own place, but it can never replace the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

At the General Assembly at Nedjo in April 1976, he voiced the incompatibility of Christian faith and Marxist atheism only three days after the National Democratic Revolutionary Programme of Ethiopia (NDRPE) had been proclaimed with scientific socialism as a new social myth" and a proletarian vanguard party leading the revolution, a definitely Marxist-Leninist path.⁵⁰ It could well be that he may have shared discussions on violent resistance against the increasing terror of the regime whose Amharic and Marxist-Leninist centralism made it impossible for the different nations, nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia to advance their own self-reliant development. An indication of Gudina's openness to ethnic liberation may

⁴⁷ Tumsa, 11–12.

⁴⁸ Eide, *Revolution & Religion in Ethiopia*, 260.

⁴⁹ Eide, 176.

⁵⁰ Eide, *Revolution & Religion in Ethiopia*, 108, 126.

be the intercession for Eritrea included in the Pastoral Letter, *The ECMY in the Ethiopian Revolution*, of 1975: "Special prayer should be made for our sister church in Eritrea and for peace in that province."⁵¹

There were a number of reasons for his detention and his assassination. From what we know from witnesses of the time, after the fall of the emperor, Gudina became a member of a committee which produced reading material in the Oromo language. His proud identity as an Oromo who could not be intimidated made him suspicious. As a leading evangelical churchman with many contacts in the West he was equally suspicious. That he did not want to serve the dictator in a propaganda tour in the West was certainly a factor. Moreover, at the time of his detention his brother and other friends had gone underground or were in exile. And he had founded a church organization that could be seen as a forum of opposition.⁵²

All this made him potentially guilty of high treason or espionage. From oral testimony of contemporaries, it seems evident that Gudina's commitment to justice was an integral part of his Christian faith because Gudina believed that God is on the side of justice and therefore also on the side of the liberation of the oppressed peoples of Ethiopia.

ON BALANCE: THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE OF RESISTANCE AGAINST TOTALITARIAN DICTATORSHIP

We do not know how Gudina assessed Bonhoeffer's decision for active resistance against a totalitarian dictatorship—and which political ethics he might have developed had he lived after 1979—after twelve years of an increasingly brutal dictatorship with tens of thousands of refugees, many thousands of torture and murder victims, millions of forcibly resettled peasants and others forced into so-called villagizations.

Maybe because of the disillusionment with a dictatorship massively violating human rights and the rule of law and leading numerous civil wars (Eritrea, Tigray, Oromia, Somalia, Sidamo, etc.) he increasingly saw no other way as the path of active resistance conceding the use of violence. Like in many other countries in Africa, many Oromos turned from the destroyed hope in liberation through socialism towards another alternative—liberation through ethnic self-determination.

The situations in which Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Gudina Tumsa lived were basically very different from each other, but nevertheless similar because of the parallel challenge through a totalitarian dictatorship with a quasi-religious anti-Christian world view. In many basic theological decisions, both prove to be amazingly similar. Both have been equally gifted in initiating ideas and inspiring people during their lives and far beyond. Many of Gudina's statements have the evocative, associative, fascinating power of Bonhoeffer's sometimes fragmentary, but always provocative, deep and concise reflections. Both their legacies are certainly worthy of interpretation for each generation—the theology of Gudina Tumsa just as the theology of Bonhoeffer has been during the past decades.

Let us be inspired through their common vision of a "church for others" (Bonhoeffer and Gudina), through the wholistic Gospel of "liberation from eternal damnation, economic exploitation and political oppression" (Gudina) in "praying and acting righteously" (Bonhoeffer).

⁵¹ Tumsa, *Witness and Discipleship*, 83.

⁵² Eide, *Revolution & Religion in Ethiopia*, 176, 260.