

57. "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise." Galatians 3:27-29 NRSV.

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The Testimony of Bishop Lajos Ordass during Communism in Hungary

by TIBOR FABINY, JR.

In the round sanctuary of Vinje Lutheran Church in Willmar, Minnesota, there is an oak frieze encircling the sanctuary with a verse from chapter 12 of the Epistle to the Hebrews: "we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses..." Gold-leaf letters supply seventy-eight names of these witnesses from the Bible and church history: patriarchs, prophets, kings, apostles, church fathers, reformers, missionaries and other leaders. The list begins with Enoch and ends with Lajos Ordass, the only person who was still alive when the carving was made in the 1960s.¹ The Hungarian Lutheran Lajos Ordass (1901-1978) was Bishop of the Hungarian Lutheran Church from 1945 until his death in 1978. However, he could exercise his office for only five of these thirty-three years, in two segments: first between 1945 and 1948, and second between 1956 and 1958. For his public witness during these brief years, he was silenced for decades by the Communist government.

Above all, Ordass was a witness. His life and ministry, his deeds and his words all witnessed to the cross of Christ. He was a twentieth-century successor to Martin Luther, as a theologian of the cross. I emphasize that Ordass was a witnessing *theologian* because during the 1990's in the Lutheran Church of Hungary there was a misleading suggestion that Ordass was not ultimately motivated by theological considerations.² Although Scandinavian theology undoubtedly influenced Ordass, he did not leave us thick volumes of theological treatises; during his ministry he was a man of action and when he was silenced he expressed himself in meditative, contemplative genres. He was not a bookish theologian in an academic sense but he was a theologian of the cross who put his theological insights immediately into practice and life. In his library we can find a hardback copy of the first edition of Walter von Loewenich's *Luthers theologia crucis*³ with Ordass' own marginal remarks showing how thoroughly he studied this work.

The testimony of Lajos Ordass can be appreciated in two ways: first, the form of the testimony, Ordass as a witness of dramatic truth; and second, the content of the testimony, Ordass as a witness of the cross of Christ.

The Form of Testimony: Ordass as a Witness of Dramatic Truth

When Christians falter due to external demand or internal spiritual decline or even unfaithfulness, God always raises witnesses and prophets who steadfastly remain committed to truth despite threat and pressure. With the words of the undeservedly forgotten reformer Matthias Flacius Illyricus, they are the witnesses of truth, *testii veritatis*.

The idea of testimony, therefore, is closely linked up with truth and dramatic quality. Paul Ricoeur writes that testimony designates the action of testifying, that is, relating what one has seen or heard.⁴ Testimony is in the service of judgment; therefore, the characteristic discourse of the witness is that of confession. The witness identifies himself or herself with the true cause and thus is hated by the mob and the officials in power. The witness who is willing to sacrifice his life for such a cause is a martyr. The discourse-situation in which we listen to testimony is that of the trial which takes place in the court. In the secular context we speak about a legal trial, and the trial of Jesus also falls into this category. According to Scripture, however, there is another trial of cosmic-eschatological scope in which humanity itself is at stake. In this trial God is confronted with the Prince of this world, Satan. Satan is the accuser, the diabolos. Jesus, who was the defendant in the earthly trial, is going to be the judge in the eschatological trial. In this cosmic trial he is also going to stand in the place of the defendant. He is thus the judge, the paraclete, and the defendant at the same time. In the testimony of Ordass, the language of "confession" and "trial" both in the legal and eschatological sense have a crucial role. In order to understand this, we must first scrutinize the role of truth and drama in Ordass' testimony.

The words "truth" and "drama" have a peculiar role in Ordass' testimony. With no explicit plan for publishing it, Ordass wrote his autobiography (the first part in 1954-55 and the second part in 1963) under the title, *A Small Mirror for Great Times*. By choosing such a title for telling the story of his life Ordass showed that he was con-

sciously witnessing to the age he lived in. The most important purpose of his memoirs was telling the truth. Toward the end of his life, having been out of office for a decade (since December of 1969), Ordass was summoned to appear before the authorities of the State Office for Church Affairs in the City Hall. The reason was that the manuscript of his autobiography had been circulated out of the country. Ordass said to the authorities, "In my Autobiography not by a jot have I deviated from truth. I am most responsible for every sentence in it."⁵ My own response on first reading Ordass' Autobiography supports this claim:

Ordass' voice comes from a deep distance, it is slow and articulate; we feel this purity to be refreshing, having listened only to a shrieking cacophony for so long. For this is a true, authentic human voice. Why? Because there is no cunning in it, no tactics, tricks or politics. It even lacks rhetoric. He is detached from any kind of sentimentality, he does not want to convince anybody about his truth. It is not he who ultimately speaks but the small events, the concrete and dry facts, that is, truth in its merciless and pitiful simplicity, defencelessness and nakedness. But there is enormous power in such unpretentiousness and apparent weakness. The facts are weighty, they speak for themselves and the witness records them with steady diligence and stores them for memory. Ordass immediately recorded each significant negotiation for himself in the form of *pro memoria*, preserving everything as a living tape-recorder.⁶

Ordass must have been himself aware of the dramatic quality of his life, for the structure of his four-part autobiography, *A Small Mirror for Great Times*, follows the heights and depths of his life like a classic drama. A dramatic work has usually a rising and a falling action; the exposition is followed by conflicts, then there is the climax, and the fall is followed by denouncement and catastrophe. In a longer English study, I have presented Ordass' life and career as a five-act double drama in which two climaxes are followed by two spectacular falls.⁷ In Ordass' life, the first climax or peak was the first Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation in Lund in 1947 where Ordass was elected Vice President. Soon after his return to Hungary there was a spectacular fall: in September of 1948 he was arrested on false charges because he opposed the nationalization of church schools and resisted the removal of the old lay leaders of the church. After his trial he was imprisoned for almost two years. Secondly, after his rehabilitation in 1956 he was restored to his office in the days of

the revolution; in the summer of 1957 he even led the Hungarian delegation to the Minneapolis Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation when he was once again elected vice-president. At the opening worship of the Assembly Ordass addressed about thirty thousand people in his sermon. After his return to Hungary the increasingly dictatorial state of János Kádár wanted to intervene aggressively with the affairs of the church; yet the Communist initiative failed because of Ordass' defence of the church. As a result, in the summer of 1958 Ordass was permanently removed from his office by the power of the state as assisted by some church leaders. He lived in total isolation until his death in 1978.

It would be misleading, however, to suppose that drama is only an aesthetic category. With the idea of the cosmic-eschatological trial that has been mentioned, we should also reflect on the theological significance of drama. At the end of the 1920s Ordass was a student of Gustaf Aulén in Lund. Later, in 1942, Ordass translated a long report of Aulén (then Bishop in Sweden) about the resistance of the Norwegian church against the Nazis. It was also Aulén who published in 1930 a famous book, *Christus Victor*, which can be considered the basis of a "dramatic theology."⁸ Aulén's book was an historical study of the three main types of atonement: the classical, the Latin and the humanist. In Aulén's view the originally dramatic idea of atonement was distorted into legalism in the Latin theology of Anselm and became a psychological notion in modern humanism. The classical idea is represented by the New Testament, by the patristic authors and by Martin Luther. Luther's recognition of the dramatic nature of God's continuous work was distorted by Protestant orthodoxy whose representatives returned to the Latin theory. No wonder, therefore, that its counter-effect was modern subjectivism. This classical theory is called "dramatic" because its basic idea is the conflict between God and Satan with humanity in the captivity of evil powers, the struggle and victory of Christ, and last but not least the recognition that it is God who reconciles the world to himself by the victory of Christ. This classical view is opposed with the "objective" Latin theory of Anselm which, although it acknowledges the initiative of God, nevertheless maintains that Christ as human brings sacrifice on behalf of humanity. But the classical view is also opposed

to the subjective modern theory which claims that the essence of atonement is the change within humanity. It is significant, therefore, to free the classical doctrine from its interpretative layers. For Luther, the divinity of Christ, the divine continuity and the close link between incarnation and atonement were of particular importance. Both the Small and the Large Catechism start with the notion of the divine deliverance from the power of the devil. This is echoed in Luther's hymns, especially in "A Mighty Fortress," which manifests the notion of divine victory with images of the triumphing trumpets. It is usually the ability of great drama to represent the conflict between appearance and reality. In the depth of Luther's theology there is also the recognition that the revealed God appears in this world as a hidden God: God is concealed and rejected in Christ the man, it is in his sufferings and death that the power of evil is defeated.

Thus, for Ordass, who was brought up on Scripture and on the theology of Luther and Aulén, the concept of the Christian life as a drama was natural. Further, Ordass was clearly influenced by the Danish pastor, playwright, and martyr Kaj Munk (1898-1942), whose plays he began to translate into Hungarian during the siege of Budapest in 1944-45. Three plays by Kaj Munk in Ordass' translation and with his long preface were eventually published in Hungarian in 1980, two years after the death of Ordass.⁹

The Dramatic Temptations of Ordass

The dramatic quality of the life of a Christian witness can be best grasped in his responses to temptation. The archetype of the temptation of any Christian is the temptation of Christ in the wilderness. This is also the topic of Milton's minor epic *Paradise Regained*. Satan first tries to deceive the hungry Christ via delicious meals, and also shows him the realms of Parthia, Rome and Athens. Christ knows well that what they represent is fake riches, fake justice and fake wisdom. Satan is aware how important the liberty of his own people was for Christ and thus he offers power and assistance to get rid of the Roman yoke. But Christ conquers himself and resists the second temptation too. Thirdly Satan takes Christ up to the pinnacle of the temple and bids him to cast himself down "to know what more he

is than man." But Christ does not cast himself down, does not mingle with this world. Christ remains unmoved. There is no compromise, no moving but only standing still, remaining steadfast. And this is the moment when Satan recognizes his heavenly enemy and it is he who is going to fall into the abyss.

However, rarely is the believing witness openly tempted by Satan without disguise or even by the explicit images of power or wealth. Satan tempts more subtly, even through other believers just as Christ was tempted also by Peter who, after his great recognition ("Thou art the Christ the son of the living God"), protested Christ's announcing his sufferings and death on the cross. Christ's words to Peter echo his words to Satan: "Get behind me!" A more recent literary example of a Christian temptation is the dramatic story of Thomas Beckett, Archbishop of Canterbury, in the drama of T. S. Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral*. Beckett's own drama, loyalty to God before the loyalty to king, is strikingly similar to that of Ordass.

One moment of temptation in the life of Bishop Ordass is probably the most dramatic episode in modern Hungarian church history. The day is January 9, 1949. Based on false charges, Bishop Ordass is held in the "Star Prison" of Szeged, Southern Hungary. Soon after Ordass' arrest Bishop Zoltán Túróczy had signed an Agreement with the Communist state on behalf of the Lutheran Church in Hungary. Bishop Túróczy (1893-1971) was sentenced to ten years in prison in 1945 but received amnesty in 1948. As a man coming from the revival movement Bishop Túróczy was one of the most effective preachers in the modern history of Hungarian Lutheranism. On this cold January morning Bishop Túróczy and László Scholz, President of the Pastors' Association, come to visit Bishop Ordass in prison. They come with the message of the Head of the Communist party, Mátyás Rákosi (1892-1971): if Ordass will resign he will immediately be set free. Moreover, he would receive a pension from the state so that he could support his family. He would spend the rest of his life in peaceful retirement and if there is no conflict between him and the state he could even become the pastor of a congregation in due course. Túróczy is supportive of this proposal and tells Ordass that although no church court would condemn him, most of the pastors in his diocese have deserted him and even his wife said that hardly anybody remained his follower. In the interest of the church, argues Túróczy, it

would be helpful if he resigned. Ordass cannot accept Túróczy's argument, saying that he needs justice and not amnesty. Túróczy continues his rational argument appealing to the situation of the church and adds that Ordass perceives the situation selfishly and is motivated only by making glory for himself. Then Ordass is given an hour and a half for reflection. For this period he was given a separate cell and a Bible brought in (and out) by Bishop Túróczy. Ordass began to pray and read the Bible. He re-read the most famous passages concerning the believer and worldly authority in Romans 13, and the famous verse of Acts 5: 29: "We ought to obey God rather than men." Then he came to chapter 16 of Acts about the unjust imprisonment:

And the jailer reported the message to Paul, saying, "The magistrates sent word to let you go; therefore come out now and go in peace." But Paul replied, "They have beaten us in public, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and now are they going to discharge us in secret? Certainly not! Let them come and take us out themselves" (Acts 16: 36-37, NRSV).

When Túróczy and the other pastor returned, Ordass even more emphatically declared that he would stay in prison. When he returned to the cell he shared with Roman Catholic priests he learned that his fellow-priests had been praying for him for two and a half hours so that he would stand firm and not harm his soul.¹⁰ Ordass recognized the tempter even in his fellow-bishop and he remained steadfast. No wonder that his favorite verse from the Bible was Matthew 24:13: "But the one who endures to the end will be saved."

By highlighting this episode it was not my intention to diminish the outstanding significance of Bishop Túróczy for the church. My only aim is to illustrate that the Prince of this World can even use, if only for a moment, the best of the church: whether the confessor Simon Peter or the confessor Túróczy. An incredibly fixed faith is needed so that the witness can recognise the tempter, resist him, and remain firm in the faith. In the summer of 1956 while Ordass still prohibited from ministry, President Hanns Lilje and other delegates from the Lutheran World Federation visited Ordass in his home and said: "Your steadfastness in faith has become a symbol of Christian steadfastness in the Western world."¹¹

Another temptation came later, in 1958. In April of 1950, two months before he was released from prison, Ordass was stripped of

his office by a Special Disciplinary Tribunal. His successor became László Dezséry (1914–1977) a member of the Communist party under whose leadership in 1952 the original four dioceses were combined into two: the Northern diocese led by the conformist Bishop Lajos Vető (1904–1989) and the Southern one under Bishop Dezséry. When Dezséry resigned, Ordass could fulfil the duties of his episcopal office for the second time, between October 31, 1956, and June 19, 1958. These eighteen months were a short period of special grace in the history of the Lutheran church in Hungary. Even after the failure of the Hungarian revolution, the Lutheran church in Hungary under the leadership of Ordass could preserve her inner freedom and autonomy. Ordass recognised that the historical situation was basically different in 1957 than in 1948. The church was now smaller; there are no schools, and Ordass acknowledged that the 1948 Agreement was the basis of state–church relations. There is a special paradox here: the Russian tanks suppressed the Hungarian revolution but the life of the church flourished. This can be explained by the fact that Ordass was extremely skilful in restructuring the church by appointing new persons to key positions in the first days of November 1956. Bishop Vető also resigned and Bishop Túróczy was requested to administer the Northern Diocese. New persons were appointed to the editorship of the Lutheran weekly, distribution of ship relief, and so on. Due to these quick measures, congregations came alive, theological work rose to high standards and the church press flourished. The church delegation headed by Ordass participated in the 1957 Minneapolis Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation. For a while it seemed that Ordass had the confidence of the state, and it was also Ordass's intention to have a correct relationship with the state.

However, after the delegation's return from Minneapolis it became more and more evident that the state wanted once again to intervene into the affairs of the church. Ordass resisted an attempt to prohibit church services on Good Friday as it coincided with April 4, the day of the Russian "liberation" of Hungary. Ordass was unwilling to recognise the atheists restored to lay leadership and protested that church publications described mission as an imperialistic activity. Ordass was ready for negotiations but the negotiations were not successful; the state wanted to dictate everything even the membership of the church–delegation.

For Ordass the task became to defend the liberty of the church as it was fixed in the Hungarian Constitution. However, the state was again skilful in manipulating the pastors of Ordass's diocese against their bishop: they promised to provide further state subsidies to the pastors, provided their bishop improved their relationship with the state. A pro-Communist theological professor openly attacked Ordass in the church media. The state wanted the Deputy of Ordass to resign but Ordass again resisted. The conflicts accelerated: a state commissar was nominated to control everything in the church and Ordass's response was one of passive resistance. Eventually Ordass was removed from office by the state in June 1958.

Ordass's temptation in 1958 was that he could have easily remained bishop because for a long while the state envisaged the future of the church with him rather than without him. Some of his close colleagues wanted Ordass to remain bishop even at the cost of yielding to the state. Had he complied with the demands of the state he would have been allowed to continue his leadership in the church. His friends drafted a "Solution Plan" since they thought it best for the church that Ordass should give up his inflexibility. The arguments of his close associates could have again sounded rational, constructive, and oriented toward love. But Ordass had to refuse their arguments just as he had refused Túróczy's points a decade before in the "Star Prison" of Szeged. Five years later, when finishing *A Small Mirror for Great Times*, he wrote about this temptation.

During the past years some of my friends have said that in the autumn of 1957 the state seemed to have been keen on keeping me as Bishop if I were to conform. This is probably true. Well, would it not be better if I improve my relationship with the state? I am convinced that in this way the flow of events could perhaps have been slowed down but it would have been impossible to stop them. And I would not assist in getting the church into bondage!¹²

For the next twenty years, in the country of János Kádár and in the church of Zoltán Káldy (1919–1987), he had to live in total isolation and carry the burden of not being understood. When his autobiography was taken out to the West, some church leaders created a hysterical atmosphere at a Pastors' Conference in 1970. Bishop Ernő Ottlyk even charged him with betraying his country, and added:

Once again here is this "martyr-theology." Again the theology of suffering! That is what he recommends. He wants conflict and sufferings. For him the prophetic service can only be negative in socialism! His critique is nothing but negative!¹³

After his death a whole decade had to pass until the first authentic words were said about him in public or rather semi-public circles until his long-buried dramatic truth could eventually come to light.

The Content of the Testimony: Ordass as a Witness of the Cross of Christ

In and with his own life's story, Ordass was a theologian of the cross. Based on Scripture, Luther, and Walter von Loewenich's *Luthers theologia crucis*, Ordass also witnessed to the cross of Christ in his words, that is, in his speeches, writings and especially his sermons. In the first half of his pastoral service Ordass felt detached from contemporary practices of evangelisation; yet later, having gone through the sufferings of his short second period of episcopal service, Ordass very frequently completed his sermons with a personal testimony.

In order to understand who the theologian of the cross is, now we turn to Luther's *Heidelberg Disputations* and to its most recent commentary by the American theologian Gerhard O. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputations*.¹⁴ The theology of the cross is an offensive theology as it attacks not only sin but also the theology of sinful man. The theology of the cross is of a polemical nature: it wishes to reveal and point out how man covers himself with his theology, how he conceals his own infidelity behind a pious façade. The theology of the cross is in constant struggle with the theology of glory. What Luther contrasted in the *Heidelberg Disputations* was not the theology of glory and the theology of the cross but the theologian of glory and the theologian of the cross. The theologian of the cross is in constant polemics with the theologian of glory, or, we may perhaps say, in each proper theologian there is a struggle between the theologian of glory and the theologian of the cross.

For Luther the great divide between the two theologians is stated in theses 19–20 of the *Heidelberg Disputation*.

That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who claims to see into the invisible things of God by seeing through earthly things.

But that person deserves to be a theologian who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God through suffering and the cross.

Who is the theologian who does not deserve to be called a theologian, and who is the theologian of the cross who deserves to be called a theologian? The theologian of glory claims to know God by means of analogy as he thinks he is able to see into the invisible things of God through the things that are made. He claims he can see what is behind the secrets; thus he can contemplate the glorious acts of God. The cross emotionally moves him but he claims he can see "through" the cross. For Luther this is a basically mistaken view: the cross is never transparent, one can never see "through," for on the cross God makes visible what he made for man. The cross is more like a mirror than transparent glass. As theologians of glory we see the world turned upside down: good to be evil and evil to be good, wisdom to be foolishness or foolishness to be wisdom. But the cross twists our wrong way of seeing. The theologian of the cross sees only the visible and the manifest things of God, the *posteriora*, as Luther put it, which means the "back" or "hinder part." In Exodus 33: 18–23, Moses wanted to see God's glory which means he had an aspiration to be a theologian of glory. But God covered Moses' eyes and allowed him to see his back, the *posteriora*, as he passed by. God was both gracious to Moses (as no one can see God face to face) but it was also a supreme "put-down" for the theologian of glory. "In Luther's mind here it is the suffering, despised, and crucified Jesus that takes the place of God's backside."¹⁵ Luther uses a rather offensive image to shock the theologian of glory in us. We can only contemplate the backside of God: the dirt, the sin and suffering. But God hides his real self (that is, his love) in his unusual "strange" work (Isaiah 28: 21), the *opus proprium* hidden in the *opus alienum*. God hides himself under the form of opposites. Only faith can recognise his saving grace in his judgment or the merciful anger (*ira misericordiae*) in his judgment and terrible anger (*ira severitatis*). This leads us to the explanation of thesis 21:

A theology of glory calls evil good and good evil. The theologian of the cross calls the thing what it actually is.

We must be careful not to let the theology of the cross be a “negative theology of glory”! We should not praise suffering in itself, as suffering in itself is bad. But the cross wants to change us from being theologians of glory to being theologians of the cross. As faulty seeing leads to false speaking, the cross finds us out; *crux probat omnia*, as Luther said. The cross gives us back our proper way of seeing: what was evil now becomes good, what was foolishness now becomes wisdom. “The cross does not merely inform us of something, something that may be ‘above’ or ‘behind’ it. It attacks and afflicts us. The knowledge of God comes when God happens to us, when God does himself to us.”¹⁶ Meanwhile we are constantly tempted by God (*Anfechtungen*); we are attacked and humiliated by the cross. This is our passion. But by the intervention of the cross our old ego becomes crucified with Christ so that it should be made new.

That God is a hidden God, inscrutable, and unknowable, was first experienced by Ordass at his trial in September 1948. Ordass was allowed to speak before the court withdrew for verdict. Voluntary stenographers recorded what he said. This silent and slow-moving speech is a unique and shocking example of his personal testimony of the hidden and loving God.

You will now withdraw in order to decide the verdict. It is your task to weigh and examine everything that has been said about me according to your conscience. I do not know what kind of verdict will be returned. If your conscience compels you to an acquittal then the wounds I carry away for my battle for society will not be so bloody and painful, so that I will be able to do my work with complete dedication and the same fervour as before. It is my intention to continue my service. God will help me to forget these five weeks. I am prepared to continue my service for my homeland and for my church.

It is also possible that you will find me guilty after your consideration and impose a punishment on me. In that case I will accept it peacefully and with humility in my heart. If I am convicted, then the conviction will become a veil that hides God’s will from me and renders it incomprehensible to me. But I will accept it from the hand of God without grumbling. One thing I know—namely, that whatever happens to me is God’s beneficial will.¹⁷

When Ordass got out of prison in 1950 he spent six years in total isolation. His pastors avoided him. He made a living by knitting scarves and gloves with his wife. In 1951 a theologically deep and

even poetically beautiful testimony reached the West from Bishop Ordass in his own handwriting:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort. He comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any kind of affliction by the comfort which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we have more than our share of suffering for Christ, so also through Christ we have more than our share of comfort. But if we endure affliction, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we receive comfort—the feeling you acquire when patiently you endure the same sufferings as we also endure. And our hope for you is firm; for we know that as you are sharers in the sufferings, so you are also sharers in the comfort. II Corinthians 1:3–7.¹⁸

By Lent of 1955 he completed a devotional book, *At the Foot of the Cross*, in which he meditated on the story of the passion in the form of prayer. He conflated the texts of the four gospels and began each meditation as a dialogue between himself and the Lord. The bishop, who had experienced what suffering, prison and being deserted meant, was now kneeling, preaching, and praying under the cross. The volume was published anonymously in English translation in the United States in 1958 but in Hungarian only in 1989. It is the deepest personal confession and testimony by somebody who has experienced the love of God in human suffering.

My gratitude longs for expression because you blessed and illuminated the most important mystery of my life. You have permitted me to discover the meaning of my life in suffering...

The meaning of my life has become that I might suffer for you and with you. People may regard perhaps what has happened to me as bankruptcy and shame of my life. As for me, I bless you, my Lord, that you have placed me at the foot of your cross. Now I know that this is why I had to live.

And this is very good.

This is why, even now, I long to talk with you at the foot of your cross.”¹⁹

Ordass well knew that carrying our own cross is nothing compared to the weight of Christ’s cross. When in his meditations he came to Simon of Cyrene, he said:

I, of course, know since my childhood, my Lord, that you can be followed only with a cross. All through my life I have endeavoured to follow you in this way. With my cross I have walked in your footsteps. But I carried my own cross. Then

the time came when your cross again became very heavy. Then I—your weak servant—lifted your cross a little, just a little.

I am happy that you know well—perhaps you alone know—that, like Simon of Cyrene, I lifted your cross a little without complaining.

I bless you for it, my Lord!²⁰

After his rehabilitation by the state and the church, Ordass was allowed to preach again and some of these sermons allow us to hear his personal testimony. In the congregation of Budahegyvidék on October 14, 1956, the text was Matthew 22: 1–14, the parable of the royal wedding feast. We can see that Ordass was consciously bearing witness to the cross:

I have the feeling that God forces me not only to explicate the substance of the biblical messages but also to bear witness to the joy of Christian life as I have experienced it. When two people want to get married they often say to each other: "You are my one and all! I love you until death and forever." I have heard the same words in my life with my Lord and Saviour. He said to me, to his unworthy servant: "You are my one and all." I know that he said that to me in the moment when I wanted to give up. He said it as if I were the only human being on earth. I have heard it from him: "I love you until death, eternally!" When there was no human hand I could hold, he firmly held mine.

To him the cross, to me his peace. To him death, to me his fruit: life.²¹

Three weeks after he was restored to his episcopal office in 1956, Bishop Ordass ordained a young pastor, Kálmán Havasi, in the Deák tér Congregation of Budapest on November 18. The text of his sermon was the verse that was so dear to him: "But the one who endures to the end will be saved" (Mt. 24: 13). There is again solemnity in Ordass' personal testimony:

Now I am telling you a secret...

The secret is this: Jesus endured, uniquely endured, not only while he was on this earth but he remains true to his promise forever.

And I wish to open this secret not only by pointing to the testimony of others. In this most solemn hour of your life I am, perhaps, permitted to address you with my most personal experience. Our Lord Jesus Christ gave me this biblical verse when I lived the hardest days of my life, when my personal fate turned most hopeless. And now I wish to tell you with utmost joy that my Lord Jesus Christ has always kept his promise until now. He has never let me down. And there is nothing in my soul but the firm certainty that Jesus keeps his promise until giving us the crown of salvation.²²

In March of 1957 Ordass visited the congregation of Cegléd where he had been a minister for ten years. The subject of his personal testimony: "The test of the soul is the cross."

Never have I felt the blessing mercy of Jesus so deeply as when he forced me under his cross and most clearly let me know: he wants me to carry this cross...

For Jesus Christ reveals his soul only on the cross. One can get close to this soul if one knows that Jesus sealed all his words and deeds when he was willing to bear all the consequences of the love he proclaimed. Even the very consequence that he should be crucified in the congregation by those whom he so deeply loved.²³

On the sixth Sunday after Easter (June 2, 1957 Ordass delivered a sermon in Swedish in the cathedral of Copenhagen. The text was John 15:26 to 16:4 and his subject was testimony:

The task our Lord gave is that we should be witnesses in our life on earth. That the world should get to know God by the testimonies of our lives. Please allow me to bear a personal witness about it. When I had again the opportunity to proclaim the word of God after eight years of silence I felt committed not only to teach the truth of our faith in the Gospel in the congregations where I address the people but also to bear a personal witness. Today let me do this for you with great joy... I am telling this not that you should be sorry for me but to bear witness. Christ keeps his promise. In the deepest crisis when the cross presses you never so hard he comes to his people with the victorious power of the Holy Spirit. He does not make your cross less heavy but he helps us to bear this cross. It happens to those who belong to him. It is the most wonderful experience to be the witness of the Saviour. Moreover: this is the only meaning of life.²⁴

At the opening worship of the Minneapolis Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation, Ordass was honored to deliver the sermon. The topic of the Assembly was "Christ Liberates and Unites." The text of his sermon was taken from John 12 about the grain of wheat that must fall into the earth and die so that it could bring forth life. The large congregation was especially touched by this modest testimony on August 15, 1957; at the end of his sermon he witnessed in the third person to the love of Christ experienced while he was in prison:

An elderly disciple of Jesus now speaks to you. He wants to conclude this official sermon with a personal testimony about his Lord and Saviour. He would like to say how often he has experienced already in his life the forgiving grace of Christ.

When he had to experience being imprisoned, he was still able to be with Christ in royal freedom in the truest sense of the word. What happiness to have been allowed such freedom. How wonderful was the fruit of the death of Christ then, when the world offered only bitterness.²⁵

By the spring of 1958 the conflicts between the Communist state and Ordass were getting sharper. The second removal from his episcopal office was already looming over his head. Within this tense period he did not cease visiting his congregations and he kept on witnessing to the cross of Christ. On Palm Sunday (March 30, 1958) he preached about suffering on the famous passage, "a cloud of witnesses" of Hebrews 12: 1-6 with the title: "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth."

Suffering is a question for all of us. And let us add immediately that it is a painful, unsolved question for us. . .

This was the way that I got to know God's love in my life in the service of the kingdom of God. I do know what suffering is. But it did not remain an unsolved mystery for me. Its key has become so simple when I understood: He chastens because he loves us.²⁶

Conclusion

We began and have now ended with the allusion to the "cloud of witnesses" in Hebrews 12. This is proclaimed by the names of the circular oak-frieze in Vinje Lutheran Church in Willmar, Minnesota. [See also the Ordass letter to the Vinje pastor of May 1976, as appended]. The form of Ordass' testimony was his witnessing to a dramatic truth in his life. Consciously or unconsciously, he seems to have been touched by the dramatic theology of his Swedish Professor Gustaf Aulén. The drama of his life, his standing firm and remaining steadfast to truth, gave birth to his verbal testimonies. Speaking about the content of his testimony, we have heard Ordass's own voice witnessing to the love of Christ in suffering.

I hope it has now become clear how and why Ordass was a theologian of the cross in the sense of Luther or Loewenich. He had to suffer and carry the cross because of his firm insistence to the truth. As Luther once recognised, he also realised that the hiding God re-

vealed himself "in the form of the opposite." Ordass experienced the warmth of God's flaming love in rejection and suffering under the cross. This was the testimony he passed on during the short period of his second episcopal and pastoral ministry. And this is the testimony he passes on to us today.

The present renewal movement (EBBE) within the Lutheran Church in Hungary owes much to the heritage to the steadfast faith of the confessing Bishop Lajos Ordass who was silenced after 1958 until his death in 1978. His name remained taboo within his church and only since the political changes in 1989 has he been known to members of the church, mainly due to the activity of the "Ordass Lajos Friendly Circle" founded in 1988. This group has been very critical of the church leadership (1987-2001) but succeeded in pressing for Ordass's official rehabilitation by the church which took place only in the second half of the 1990s. Ordass's courage and faithfulness to the gospel has been a source of inspiration for the present author who has been lecturing and publishing articles about him both in Hungary and abroad since 1988.²⁷

Appendix

A Letter from Lajos Ordass to Lowell Larson, Pastor of Vinje Lutheran Church, Willmar, Minnesota

1101 S.W. Willmar Avenue	Márvány u 23,
WILLMAR.	H-1126,
Minnesota 56201,	BUDAPEST XII,
USA.	Hungary.

10th of May 1976

My very dear Pastor Larson,
my dear brother in the Lord Jesus Christ,

Returning from his long American trip, my friend and brother in the Lord, lawyer dr. Boleratzky handed me the booklet of the Vinje Lutheran Church, Willmar, Minnesota entitled "The Centennial Jubilee 1867-1967", as well as the kind letter you were good enough to write to dr. Boleratzky.

I read the magnificent booklet about the Centennial Jubilee with great interest. I got to know from it the hundred years old history of the Vinje Church, its life which has been so richly blessed by God after the initial very trying and difficult years. I found it uplifting to read how the congregation erected a churchbuilding on four occasions during its 100 years of existence to the glory of the name of God and to serve as spiritual home to the members of the congregation. These are shining examples of love to the Church and to her Lord. I would like to believe that God's blessing will continually rest on your congregation. To this end I also pray to my God from the bottom of my heart.

Something that concerns my person in particular is the fact that you chose verses 1-2 of the 12th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews to be the motto-verses of your new church, and as an illustration you wrote round the inside of the church the names of many human witnesses of God and of Jesus Christ. And my name was also included as last in this list of Witnesses. I could even verify this fact with my own eyes looking at one of the many beautiful photos in the Centennial Album.

I must humbly confess the honour you conferred upon me in this way seemed to me almost like a dream, one of those acts of God which are past understanding. The main reason why I feel it is beyond understanding is, because the names listed—I presume—retain in remembrance witnesses of Christ who died either centuries ago or in more recent times, and I consider it probable that my name represents the only Christian witness who is still living on this side of Life and only carries in himself the desire for eternity.

I wish to make one further comment. On the list of witnesses my name stands immediately next to that of Bishop Berggrav. I continue to remember him with a feeling of gratitude. When Bishop Berggrav was fighting his hard and by no means dangerless battle for the cause of Christ, I did not know him yet personally. I could only bear him up in prayer and make his struggle known in our church in Hungary. It was after the World War that I had the privilege of meeting him personally. Being young, I was at that time in the initial years of my ministry as a bishop, my trials still lay in the future. Bishop Berggrav provided me with advice and wise directions with the experience of a man

who stood fast victoriously amid fierce strife and with his fatherly benevolence. I am very grateful to him for this. Thus you will understand why my heart is filled with joy over having my name next to his.

I must emphasize once again my own unworthiness for getting unto the list. This I feel with trembling. For I still belong to those witnesses of our Lord Jesus Christ who have not yet resisted unto blood /Hebrews 12:4/. I am only endeavouring to order my life in the light of the Scripture I received from God in one of the most decisive hours of my life: "He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved" /Mt. 24:13/.

Further I long to tell the members of Vinje Lutheran Church that since the day I heard of your faithfulness towards Christ and of your distinguishing love to me, I remember the church, her ministers, every worker and member in my daily prayers. With this I would like to draw my letter to a conclusion in the name of God.

May the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Ghost rest upon you and remain with you all!

Courtesy of Steven Knudson, current pastor of Vinje Lutheran Church (Willmar, Minnesota).

NOTES

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Living Out of Justification

By WILFRIED HÄRLE

[This is the conclusion of a much longer German essay; its first sections are here summarized by Mark C. Mattes.]

Current misunderstandings about the doctrine of justification, including the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, can be traced to the failure of the 1963 General Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation in Helsinki. The Helsinki assembly assumed that for contemporaries, atheistic doubts were far more pervasive than anxious consciences. The Helsinki assembly failed in its task to articulate the doctrine's relevance, particularly given the fact that the doctrine of justification is grounded in the New Testament and thus retains its authoritative status for us.

Even after an apparent formal ecumenical consensus (the Joint Declaration), the Roman Catholic Church does not acknowledge justification as the criterion by which to measure all other doctrines; nor does it affirm the sola fide, works as the fruit of faith, and the simul iustus et peccator, which are all so central for Protestants. Roman Catholic theologians tend to see justification as one of many metaphors for salvation and hold that the Lutheran view gives an unwarranted centrality, singularity, and focus to the metaphor of justification.

Justification is usually taken to be a forensic concept whose primary metaphorical structure is from the court of law and the language of guilt and punishment, with God then viewed as a legislator and judge. This perspective leads to problems. First, the view of God implied in this doctrine seems unacceptable: it burdens and darkens the image of God for many people. Second, its view of humans as all equally guilty is too radical—the concept of guilt is applied far too loosely. Does the doctrine of justification, insofar as it sees Christ as our substitute, judge an innocent man (Jesus) to be guilty, and guilty people to be innocent? Is God then a liar? Third, it raises questions about faith and works. If faith is reckoned to the human, is not faith then a work—in contrast to the Protestant view of faith? However, if it is reckoned to God, then why would faith be called for from the human? In this regard, does not the Protestant view of justification lend itself to a quietism, in which we tend to settle with evil, rather than change the world for the better?