

seits hätte gemahnen müssen. Wir haben es unterlassen, die Sache der Armen und Entrechteten gemäß dem Evangelium von Gottes kommendem Reich zur Sache der Christenheit zu machen.

6. Indem wir das erkennen und bekennen, wissen wir uns als Gemeinde Jesu Christi freigesprochen zu einem neuen, besseren Dienst zur Ehre Gottes und zum ewigen und zeitlichen Heil der Menschen. Nicht die Parole: Christentum und abendländische Kultur, sondern Umkehr zu Gott und Hinkehr zum Nächsten in der Kraft des Todes und der Auferstehung Jesu Christi ist das, was unserem Volk und inmitten unseres Volkes vor allem uns Christen selbst not tut.

7. Wir haben es bezeugt und bezeugen es heute aufs neue: „Durch Jesus Christus widerfährt uns frohe Befreiung aus den gottlosen Bindungen dieser Welt zu freiem, dankbarem Dienst an seinen Geschöpfen.“ Darum bitten wir inständig: Laßt die Verzweiflung nicht über euch Herr werden, denn Christus ist der Herr. Gebt aller glaubenslosen Gleichgültigkeit den Abschied, laßt euch nicht verführen durch Träume von einer besseren Vergangenheit oder durch Spekulationen um einen kommenden Krieg, sondern werdet euch in dieser Freiheit und in großer Nüchternheit der Verantwortung bewußt, die alle und jeder einzelne von uns für den Aufbau eines besseren deutschen Staatswesens tragen, das dem Recht, der Wohlfahrt und dem inneren Frieden und der Versöhnung der Völker dient.

Das Darmstädter Wort wurde in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland weitgehend verdrängt, während es in der DDR – zunächst von außerkirchlicher Seite – immer wieder als Berufungsgrundlage für „progressive“ theologische Positionen in Anspruch genommen wurde. Im Zusammenhang mit der Bildung des Bundes der evangelischen Kirchen in der DDR (BEK) sollte es dann allerdings auch innerkirchlich wieder stärkere Aufmerksamkeit finden, aber das war dann eine Phase der DDR-Kirchengeschichte, die schon vom Niedergang der SED-Diktatur bestimmt wurde.

“The Testimony of Bishop Lajos Ordass During Communism in Hungary”, in: *Zwischen den Mühlsteinen. Protestantische Kirchen in den der Errichtung der kommunistischen Herrschaft im östlichen Europa*, Hg. Peter Maser und Jean Holger Schjorring, Erlangen, Martin Luther Verlag, 2002, pp. 303–320.

## The Testimony of Bishop Lajos Ordass During Communism in Hungary

Tibor Fabiny | Budapest, Ungarn

Motto: “*That person deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God through suffering and the cross.*”

Luther: Heidelberg Disputations, Thesis 20

In the round sanctuary of the Vinje Lutheran Church of Willmar/Minnesota there is an oak frieze encircling the sanctuary containing a verse from chapter 12 of the Epistle of Hebrews: “we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses ...” We can read in gold-leaf letters 78 names of these witnesses from Bible history and from the history of the church including patriarchs, prophets, kings, apostles, church fathers, reformers, missionaries and other leaders. The list begins with the name of Enoch and ends with that of Ordass, the only person who was still alive when the carving was made in the 1960s.<sup>1</sup>

The Hungarian Lutheran Bishop Lajos Ordass (1901–1978) was the Bishop of the Hungarian Lutheran Church from 1945 until his death in 1978, i. e. for thirty three years. However, he could exercise his office for altogether less than five years. This period was even divided into two: first between 1945–1948, and for the second time between 1956–1958.

Above all, Ordass was indeed, a witness. His life and ministry, his deeds and words all witnessed to the cross of Christ. He was a 20<sup>th</sup> century disciple of Luther, a theologian of the cross. I would like to emphasize that Ordass was a witnessing *theologian* because during the last decade in the Lutheran Church of Hungary there has been a false tendency suggesting that Ordass’ church-defence was not ultimately motivated by theological considerations.<sup>2</sup> Scandinavian theology as we shall see, has undoubtedly influenced Ordass, nevertheless it is true that Ordass has not bequeathed to

<sup>1</sup> The Centennial Jubilee 1867–1967, Vinje Lutheran Church Willmar, Minnsota.

<sup>2</sup> I. Veöreös, *A harmadik egyházi út 1948–1950 [the third way for the church]*, Budapest 1990, p. 130.

us thick volumes of theological treaties as during his ministry he was a man of action and during the time 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. It is remarkable, however, that in his library we can find a hardback copy of the first edition of Walter von Loewenich's *Luthers Theologia Crucis*<sup>3</sup> with his own marginal remarks which shows that he thoroughly studied this work.

Within the frame of this lecture I wish to reflect upon a twofold aspect of Ordass's testimony: 1) The form of testimony: Ordass as the witness of dramatic truth, 2) The content of testimony: Ordass as the witness of the cross of Christ.

## I. The Form of Testimony: Ordass as the Witness of Dramatic Truth

### 1. The Hermeneutics of Testimony

When the people of the church fall off the proper way due to external demand or internal spiritual decline or 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 (1520–1575), 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<sup>4</sup> that testimony designates the action of testifying, that is relating what one has seen or heard. Testimony is in the service of judgement, therefore the characteristic discourse of the witness is that of confession. The witness identifies him/herself with the true cause and thus he is hated by the mob and the power. The witness (in Greek: *martyrs*) who is willing to sacrifice his life for his cause is called to be 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. In the Bible Jesus's trial also falls into this category.

3 W. von Loewenich, *Luthers Theologia crucis*, München 1929 (The bookmark in library: 31.569.).

4 P. Ricoeur, "The Hermeneutics of Testimony", in: *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, London 1980, pp. 119–154.

According to Scripture, however, there is another trial of cosmic-eschatological size in which man 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 the cosmic trial he is going to stand in the place of the defendant: He is the judge, the paraclete, the defendant at the same time. In Ordass' testimony "confession", "trial" (both in the legal and eschatological sense!) will have a crucial role. In order to understand this first we are going to scrutinise the role of "truth" and "drama" in Ordass' testimony.

### 2. Truth

The words "truth" and "drama" have a peculiar role in Ordass' testimony. With no explicit plan for publishing, Ordass wrote his autobiography (of which the first part was compiled in 1954–55 and the second part in 1963) with the title *A Small Mirror for Great Times*. By choosing such a title for telling the story of his life shows that Ordass was consciously witnessing to the age he lived in. The most important purpose of his memoirs was telling the truth. Towards the end of his life, having been removed for more than a decade from his office in December 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 was taken out of the country. Then Ordass said to them the following:

"In my Autobiography not by a jot have I deviated from truth. I am most responsible for every sentence in it."<sup>5</sup>

I can justify this claim with my own response on first reading Ordass' Autobiography:

"Ordass' voice comes from a deep distance, it is slow and articulate, we feel this purity refreshing having listened to only a shrieking cacophony for so long. Just because this is a true, authentic human voice. Why? Because there is no cunning in it, no tactics, tricks or politics. But it lacks even rhetorics. He is most detached from any kind of sentimentality, he does not want to convince anybody about his truth, it is not him 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

5 Ordass, *Önéletrajzi írások, folytatás*, 1987 (ÖÉ, 1987), p. 907 and: *Önéletrajzi írások*, 1985 (ÖÉ, 1985), p. 439.

such an 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 records each significant negotiation for himself in the form of *pro memoria* preserving everything as a living tape-recorder."<sup>6</sup>

### 3. The Dramatic Quality of His Life

Ordass must have been himself aware of the dramatic quality of his life as the structure of his four-part autobiography *A Small Mirror for Great Times* seems to consciously follow the dramatic heights and depths of his life. A dramatic work has usually a rising and a falling action, the exposition is followed by conflicts, then there is the climax, which is, in the falling action followed by denouncement and catastrophe. In a longer study, written in English,<sup>7</sup> I once presented Ordass' life and career as a five-act double drama in which two climaxes are followed by two spectacular falls. 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 as Vice President. Soon after his return to Hungary there is the spectacular fall: in September 1948 he is arrested on false charges because he opposed the nationalization of church schools and resisted to 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 and 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 as Vice President. At the opening worship of the assembly Ordass addressed about thirty thousand people in his sermon. After his return to Hungary the more and more dictatorial state of János Kádár wanted to intervene aggressively with the affairs of the church and their initiative failed because of Ordass' church defence. As a result, in the summer of 1958 Ordass was, with the power of the state and with the assistance of some church-people, once and now forever removed from his office. He lived in total isolation until his death in 1978.

6 T. Fabiny, Jr., "A megállás szimbóluma. (Olvasónapló: Ordass: Önéletrajzi frások)" ["The Symbol of Steadfastness. The Reader's Diary: s Autobiography"], in: *Keresztyén Igazság, Új folyam* [New Series] 1, 1989, p. 17.

7 T. Fabiny, Jr., "Bishop Lajos Ordass and the Hungarian Lutheran Church", in: *Hungarian Studies*, 1995, pp. 65-98.

### 4. Drama as a theological category in Swedish theology

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 alluded to, we have to reflect on the theological significance of drama. It has been mentioned that 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 as the basis of a "dramatic theology". Aulén's book<sup>8</sup> was a 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 it became a psychological notion in modern humanism. The classical idea is represented by the New Testament, by the patristic authors and by 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 man 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, though acknowledges the initiative of God, its essence nevertheless is that Christ as man brings sacrifice on behalf of man. But the classical view is also opposed with the subjective modern theory which claims that the essence is the change within man. It is significant, therefore, to free the classical doctrine of the New Testament, patristic literature and Luther from the 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 Great Catechism start with the notion of the divine deliverance from the power of the Devil. This is echoed in Luther's hymns, especially in "Mighty Fortress" which manifests the notion of divine victory with images of the triumphing trumpets. It is usually the ability of great dramas to represent the conflict between appearance and reality. In the

8 G. Aulén, *Christus Victor. An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Atonement*, London 1931.

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. We shall more elaborate on this point when we come to discuss further aspects of the *theologia crucis*.

To sum it up we may say that for Ordass, who was brought up on Scripture, on the theology of Luther and Aulén the dramatic concept of Christian life must not have been alien. We are further supported by our insight if we realize how much Ordass was 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<sup>9</sup> in 1980, two years after the death of Ordass.

##### 5. *Temptation as the manifestation of dramatic quality.*

###### *The temptation of Christ as the archetype of the Christian witness*

The dramatic quality of the life of a Christian witness can be best grasped in his responses to his temptation. The archetype of the temptation of any Christian is the temptation of Christ in the desert. This is also the topic of Milton's minor epic *Paradise Regained*. Satan first tries to deceive the hungry Christ attracting delicious meals to show him the realms of Parthia, Rome and Athens. Christ well knows that what they represent is fake richness, 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 him to get rid of the Roman yoke. But Christ conquers himself and resists the second temptation too. Thirdly he 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 tempted by Satan without disguise or even by the images of power, wealth etc. But Satan tempts even

through the other believer just as Christ was tempted also by Peter who, after his great recognition: "Thou art the Christ the son of the living God" protested on 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*. I am quoting it because Beckett's own drama: loyalty to God before the loyalty to king is strikingly similar to that of Ordass.

##### 6. *Ordass' temptation in 1949*

Let me evoke a moment of temptation from the life of Bishop Ordass. This is probably the most dramatic episode from Hungarian church history from the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The day is January 9<sup>th</sup>, 1949. Based on false charges Bishop Ordass is in the "Star Prison" of Szeged, Southern Hungary. Soon after his arrest Bishop Zoltán Túróczy 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 and received amnesty in 1948. As a man coming from the revival movement Bishop Túróczy was one of the most effective preacher in the 20<sup>th</sup> century history of Hungarian Lutheranism. On the cold January morning Bishop Túróczy and László Scholz, President of the Pastors' Association come to visit Bishop Ordass in the prison. They come with the message of the Head of the Communist party, Mátyás Rákosi (1892–1971): if Ordass resigns 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 him that though no church court would condemn him, most pastors of 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 life conditions of the church and adds that Ordass perceives the situation only by his selfish reasons and motivated only by making glory for himself. Then Ordass is given time for reflection for an hour and a half. For this period he was given a separate cell and a Bible that was taken by Bishop Túróczy. Ordass

<sup>9</sup> K. Munk, Három dráma. Az ige, Kohóban, A bíró urak, Frederica 1980.

began to pray and read the Bible. He re-read the most famous passages concerning the believer and worldly authority in Romans 13, 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 keeper of the prison told this saying to Paul, The magistrates have sent to let you go? Now therefore depart, and go in peace. But Paul said unto them, They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison, and now do they thrust us out privily? Nay verily, but let them come themselves and fetch us out" (Acts 16,36-37).

Now when Túróczy and the other pastor return Ordass can even more emphatically declare that he would stay in prison. And when he returns to the cell he was together with Catholic priests he learns that his Catholic fellow-priests were praying for him for two and a half hours so that he would stand firm and that he would not harm his soul.<sup>10</sup>

Ordass recognized the tempter even in his fellow-bishop and he could remain steadfast. No wonder that his favourite verse from the Bible was Matthew 24,13: "But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved."

By evoking this episode it was my least intention to diminish the outstanding significance of Bishop Túróczy for the church. My only aim was to illustrate that the Prince of the World can deter, even if only for a moment, the best of the church: whether the confessor Peter or the confessor Túróczy. An incredibly fixed faith is needed so that the witness can recognise the tempter and could resist him and remain firm in faith.

It is again not by accident that when in the summer of 1956 while Ordass still prohibited from ministry, President Hanns Lilje and other delegates from the Lutheran World Federation on visiting Ordass in his home said: "Your steadfastness in faith has become a symbol of Christian steadfastness in the Western world."<sup>11</sup>

### 7. Ordass' temptation in 1958

In April 1950, two months before he was released from prison Ordass was stripped off his office by a Special Disciplinary Tribunal, his successor became László Dezséry (1914-1977) a member of the Communist party

10 ÖÉ, 1985, pp. 359-361.

11 ÖÉ, 1987, p. 518.

under whose leadership in 1952 the original four dioceses were decreased into two: the Northern diocese lead by the conformist Bishop Lajos Vető (1904-1989) and the Southern one with Dezséry.

For the second time Ordass could fulfil the duties of his episcopal office 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. Ordass could return to his office in the days of the revolution as Bishop László Dezséry (1914-1977) who had been subservient to the Communist state, resigned. Even after the failure of the 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 boat of the church is now smaller: there are no schools and Ordass acknowledges that the 1948 Agreement is the basis of the state-church relations. There is a special paradox here: the Russian tanks oppress the Hungarian revolution but the life of the church flourishes. 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. 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 etc. Due to these quick measures the congregations became alive, the theological work became of high standard and the church press flourished. The church delegation headed by Ordass participated in the 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 to an attempt which was made to prohibit church service on Good Friday as it coincided with April 4, the day of the Russian' "liberation" of Hungary. Ordass was unwilling to recognise the now restored atheist lay-leaders of the church, he was protesting that in the church media articles should be published that e. g. describe mission as imperialistic activity. Ordass was ready for negotiations but the negotiations were not successful, the state wanted to dictate in everything even concerning the members of the church-delegation.

For Ordass the task is now to defend the liberty of the church as it was fixed in the Constitution. However, the state is again skilful in manipulating the pastors of Ordass's diocese against their Bishop: they promise to provide further state subsidy to the pastors provided their Bishop improves their

relationship with the state. A pro-Communist theological professor openly attacks Ordass in the church media. The state wants the Deputy of Ordass to resign but Ordass again resists. The conflicts accelerate: a state commissar is nominated to control everything in the church and Ordass's response is passive resistance. Eventually Ordass was removed by the state in June 1958.

What was Ordass's temptation in 1958? The temptation was that he easily could have remained Bishop because for a long while the state envisaged the future of the church with him. Some of his close colleagues wanted Ordass to remain Bishop even at the cost 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" as they found that it was the interest of the church that Ordass should give up his inflexibility. The arguments of his close associates could have sounded again rational, constructive, love-oriented. But Ordass had to refuse their arguments just as he refused Túróczy's points a decade before in the Star-Prison of Szeged. Five years later when he was accomplishing *A Small Mirror for Great Times* he wrote about it as follows:

"During the past years some of my friends 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 not it be better if I improve my relationship with the state? I am convinced that this way the flow of events could perhaps be slowed down but it would have been impossible to stop them. And I would not assist in getting the church into bondage!"<sup>12</sup>

In the following 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 he had to carry the burden of not being understood. When his autobiography was taken out to the west the church-leaders created a hysterical atmosphere on a Pastors' Conference in 1970. Bishop Ernő Ottlyk even charged him with the betraying of his country and then 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!"<sup>13</sup>

12 ÖI 1987, p. 888.

13 ÖI 1987, p. 915.

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.

## II. The Content of the Testimony: Ordass as the Witness of the Cross of Christ

### 1. *The Theologian of the Cross*

So far we have seen that in his life and with his life Ordass was a theologian of the cross. It has also been mentioned that he thoroughly studied Walter von Loewenich's *Luther's theologia crucis*. In the second half of my lecture I wish to investigate how Ordass witnessed to the cross of Christ in his words i.e. in his speeches, writings and last but not least his sermons. We may notice that while in the first half of his pastoral service Ordass felt detached from contemporary practices of evangelisation, now, having gone through sufferings in the short second period of his episcopal service Ordass very frequently completed his sermons by 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*.<sup>14</sup>

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 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 the glory and the theology of the cross but the theologian of the glory and the theologian of the cross. The theologian of the cross is in constant polemics with the theologian of the 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.

14 G. O. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross. Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputations*, Grand Rapids/Michigan/Cambridge 1997.

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” as on the cross God makes visible what he made for man, the cross is more like a mirror than a transparent glass. As theologians of glory we see the world turned upside down: the good to be evil and the 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 puts 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 say 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.”<sup>15</sup> 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 into his unusual “strange” work (Isaiah 28,21), the *opus proprium* into the *opus alienum*. God hides himself under the form of opposites. Only faith can recognise his saving grace in his judgement or the merciful anger (*ira misericordiae*) in his judgement 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.*

15 Ibid. p. 78.

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 make all of us a theologian of the cross from the theologian of glory. 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 becomes now good what was foolishness becomes now 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.”<sup>16</sup> 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.

## 2. Ordass’ condemnation in 1948 as the “veil of God”

That God is a hidden God, inscrutable, 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.”<sup>17</sup>

16 Ibid. p. 90.

17 Quoted in English in L. G. Terray, *He Could Not Do Otherwise*. Bishop Lajos Ordass. 1901–1978, Grand Rapids/Michigan/Cambridge 1997, p. 84.

3. *The first sign of life from Ordass to reach the West in 1951 and At the Foot of the Cross (1955)*

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 with 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"<sup>18</sup>

By Lent 1955 he completed a devotional book *At the Foot of the Cross* in which he meditates the story of the passion in the form of prayer. He conflates the texts of the four gospels and begins each meditation as a dialogue between himself and the Lord. The Bishop, who has experienced what suffering, prison and being deserted meant, is now kneeling, preaching, praying under the cross. The volume was published anonymously in English translation in the United States in 1958 and 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."<sup>19</sup>

18 A photocopy of the original can be seen in Terray, op. cit. between pp. 96–97.

19 *At the Foot of the Cross. Meditations by an Imprisoned Pastor Behind the Iron Curtain* (= Augsburg Publishing House Minneapolis 15), Minnesota 1958.

Ordass well knows that carrying our own cross is nothing to the weight of Christ's cross. When in his meditations he comes to Simon of Cyrene he says:

"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!"<sup>20</sup>

4. *Budahegyvidék, October 14, 1956*

After his rehabilitation by the state and the church Ordass was allowed to preach 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 of 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."<sup>21</sup>

5. *Ordination of Kálmán Havasi, November 18, 1956*

Three weeks after he was restored to his episcopal office in 1956 Bishop Ordass ordained a young pastor in the Deák tér Congregation of Budapest. The text of his sermon is the verse that was so dear to him: "But he that

20 Ibid., p. 166–167.

21 L. Ordass, *Jó hír a szenvedőknek* [Good News for those who suffer], Budapest 1992; in English in Terray, op. cit., p. 118.



shall endure unto the end, the same shall 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."<sup>22</sup>

#### 6. Cegléd, March 24, 1957

In March 1957 Ordass is visiting the congregation of Cegléd where he was 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 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."<sup>23</sup>

#### 7. Copenhagen, June 2, 1957

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

<sup>22</sup> Ordass, Jó hír a szenvedőknek, p. 248.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 138.

"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."<sup>24</sup>

#### 8. Minneapolis, August 15, 1957

At the opening worship of the Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation Ordass was honoured 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 his modest testimony: at the end of his sermon he witnessed in third person singular to the love of Christ he 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."<sup>25</sup>

#### 9. Monor, March 30, 1958

By spring the conflicts between the Communist state and Ordass are getting stronger and stronger. The second removal from his episcopal office is already looming over his head. Within this tense period he does not cease

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 202.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 312, Terray, op. cit., pp. 127-128.

visiting his congregations and he keeps on witnessing to the cross of Christ. On Palm Sunday he preaches 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".

"Sufferings is a question for all of us. And let us add immediately that it is 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."<sup>26</sup>

### Conclusion

We have begun and now ended with the allusion to the "cloud of witnesses" in Hebrews 12. This is proclaimed by the 78 names of the circular oak-frieze in Vinje Lutheran Church, Minnesota. In the first half of our lecture we spoke about the form of Ordass' testimony: his witnessing to a dramatic truth in his life. Consciously, or unconsciously he might 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 has given birth to his verbal testimonies. Speaking about the content of his testimony in the second half of our lecture we wanted to listen to Ordass' own voice in which he was witnessing to the love of Christ in suffering.

I hope it has become now 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 unmoveable, firm insistence to truth. As Luther once recognised he also realised that the hiding God revealed 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, a few days before his birth's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

26 Ibid., p. 121.

## Maßstäbe für das Verstehen der Geschichte der Kirche: Versuch einer Bilanz

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1. Die Referate der Arbeitstagung über „Protestantische Kirchen in Zentral- und Osteuropa unter kommunistischer Herrschaft“ hatten ein sehr weites Feld abzudecken. Im Zentrum stand die Epoche des Ausgreifens der Sowjetunion seit 1940 und 1945 weit nach Westen, bis an die Elbe. Für diesen Zeitabschnitt hat Hartmut Lehmann einen instruktiven und hilfreichen, problemorientierten Überblick gegeben. Aber nun schloß das Tagungsthema aus wohlwogenden Gründen auch die Religionspolitik der frühen Sowjetunion nach der Oktoberrevolution 1917 ein. Denn mit dem Griff nach den baltischen Staaten wie Karelien 1940 und der Ausweitung des Machtbereiches der Sowjetunion nach Westen nach dem Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges wurden doch bestimmte Elemente der sowjetischen Ideologie, Politik und Erfahrung im Umgang mit Religion in diese nun gewaltsam dem „Sozialismus“ unterstellten Länder übertragen.

Für diese Zeitspanne von 1917 bis zur Konsolidierung sowjetischer Herrschaft zwischen Wladiwostok und Magdeburg ein gemeinsames Raster zu finden, war schwierig. Die Diskussion um Totalitarismus konnte hier wenig helfen, zumal dadurch die Erstreckung in Raum und Zeit ja nun noch mehr ausgeweitet würde. Aber auch in Zentral- und Westeuropa bewährte Kategorien wie die Unterscheidung von etablierten Kirchen und Sekten oder Freikirchen erweisen sich für den Weg des Teils der Christenheit, der zum Protestantismus gerechnet wird, in der Sowjetunion als wenig ergiebig. Erst in sowjetischer Zeit sind hier die Baptisten zur stärksten christlichen Gemeinschaft nach den Orthodoxen geworden; auch die Pfingstler haben erst jetzt wirkliche Bedeutung gewonnen. Die lutherische Kirche, ehemals Staatskirche minderen Rechtes, überlebte, wo sie überlebte, in Brüdergemeinden, die nach soziologischen Kategorien eher den Freikirchen angemessen zu sein schienen. Aber sie hatten weithin doch die Erinnerung daran bewahrt, daß sie „Kirche“ sind – das Wort jetzt nicht theologisch, sondern soziologisch gebraucht. Noch ich habe es in der Zeit der Perestrojka erlebt, daß bei einem Gottesdienst, in dem ich den üblichen schwarzen Talar trug, alte Brüder ihre Enkelkinder vorschoben und sie aufforderten, diesen Talar zu küssen: „So sieht ein lutherischer Pastor aus.“