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On the Legacy of Lutheranism in Finland

Societal Perspectives

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‘A Storm Might Be Brewing:’ The Lutheran Church and Secular Authority in Finland, 1944–1948

Abstract

Although Finland, a Nazi-ally, was among the defeated, the country was not invaded after the war, and the governmental system did not change from parliamentary democracy to people’s democracy. This does not, however, mean that the war-to-peace transition in Finland was lacking drama. The years from 1944 to 1948 were marked by a series of ‘crises of peace’ so turbulent that the term ‘the war-after-the-war’ is warranted. Also for the Lutheran church in Finland the period was in many ways traumatic. The rise to power of the left, backed by the Soviet Union, and the general change in the cultural atmosphere challenged the traditionally symbiotic relation between the church and the state. This chapter examines how Lutheran priests constructed publicly the church’s relationship to the state, evolving from mild optimism towards criticism and even martyrdom.

Souls bruised and coats worn inside out: Finland after WWII

The post-1945 period is no longer treated primarily as the incubation period of a new Cold War order; instead, the persistent and lasting after-effects on the history of European societies of the Second World War are now seen as central. That is to say, instead of analysing European societies for what they became, the history of the post-war period tends to focus on the psychological, emotional, and literal rubble from which they emerged, as Frank Biess has succinctly stated.¹

Ian Kershaw has emphasized that it was extremely difficult to imagine at all in the ruins of 1945. At that time, barely anybody could foresee the extraordinary changes that would come about in Europe within such a short time. The immediate years after the war gave little inkling of the transformation to come; these were years of political uncertainty, economic disorder, social misery, personal tragedy and generally terrible inhumanity. In other words, the future seemed dark – or it did not exist at all. According

1 Biess (2010: 1). See also Ahonen (2003); Judt (2006). All translations from Finnish originals in this chapter have been done by the author.

to Kershaw, only by 1949 would the contours of a new Europe, by this time a continent divided politically, ideologically and economically, have taken shape.²

On directing one's attention to Finland one finds an exception to the post-war European 'rubble.' Although Finland had fought in alliance with Nazi Germany and was among the defeated, the country was not invaded, and the governmental system did not change from parliamentary democracy to people's democracy. The basic structures and institutions of the state remained as they had been before the war. In this sense, as Petri Karonen has pointed out, the end of WWII in Finland was not a 'zero hour.'³

This does not, however, mean that the war-to-peace transition in Finland was lacking drama. The years from 1944 to 1948 were marked by a series of 'crises of peace.'⁴ Although the regime itself did not change, a Soviet-led Control Commission was set up in Helsinki from 1944 to 1947 to observe that Finland would comply with the Moscow armistice, signed in September 1944. Communists were rehabilitated immediately after the war; over 1 000 organizations deemed 'fascist' had to be banned and the leaders held responsible for the war had to be convicted. In the general election of 1945 the Social Democrats got 50 MPs while the People's Democrats⁵ got 49. The latter even became the largest party in 1946 after two Social Democrat MPs switched parties. Indeed, at least for the political right, the era was 'the years of danger:' the possibility of a Soviet occupation was considered to be more than real.⁶

At the same time, the economic situation was serious. There was a desperate shortage of housing, commodities and jobs. The situation was made more challenging by the fact that Finland had to pay war reparations to the Soviet Union and at the same time find homes for over 400 000 evacuees from those parts of Karelia that were ceded to the former enemy. In social terms the situation was not significantly better. Families had been torn apart, and for many people there was no return to any former life or 'peace.' Nervous stress manifested itself in a huge increase in alcohol consumption, divorces, and venereal disease.⁷ While the extreme left was taking its political revenge,⁸ many ordinary Finns had to find a balance between their hopelessness, their disappointment, and enforced self-control.

The years immediately after the Second World War in Finland were therefore so turbulent that they warrant the term 'the war-after-the-war.' A contemporary author, Matti Kurjensaari, wrote in 1948 that although the political transformation happened almost overnight, the mental

2 Kershaw (2016: 448–449).

3 Karonen (2015: 207).

4 See Holmila & Mikkonen (2015); Kivimäki & Hytönen (2015).

5 Established in 1944 after the anti-communist laws were repealed, the Finnish People's Democratic League's aim was to unite political forces left of the Social Democratic Party. Its main member organ was the Communist Party of Finland.

6 Hyvämäki (1954).

7 See for example Malinen (2015).

8 The 'revenge' was, however, rather moderate compared to the kind of purging that went on especially in Eastern Europe.

transformation was much slower. Those who had prepared themselves for victory were disappointed: in the ruins of Germany were buried public and private hopes as well as societal harmony. Especially the self-esteem of those in leading positions in society was severely bruised.⁹ Finland was moving toward the future, but this took place 'wearing an old coat inside out and back to front.'¹⁰

For the Lutheran church, the transformation was in many ways traumatic. Experiences of the war, the subsequent moral crisis, and the collapse of the nationalistic world-view embraced by the church led to a clerical debate in which the relationship between the individual and society was re-examined.¹¹ The most salient feature of the situation was the rift between the social conceptions of the church inspired by Lundian theology¹² and experiences of the war, and traditional pietism.¹³ The rise to power of the left and the general change in the cultural atmosphere also put external pressures on the church, although in the end it did not lose its institutional position.¹⁴

One of the most crucial issues was how the church should position itself in relation to the state when a significant degree of political power was held by Communists, backed by the Soviet Union. At the same time, the church was needed in order to stabilize the state and give it legitimacy and authority.¹⁵ This chapter examines how Lutheran priests constructed the church's relationship to the state, alternating as they did so between obedience and criticism.

My sources are largely public texts that discussed the relationship between church and state most comprehensively, namely, those published in the unofficial weekly of the Lutheran church, *Kotimaa*¹⁶, and pastoral letters written by Finnish bishops. In addition, the material includes the sermons given at the opening and closing ceremonies of the Finnish parliament

9 Kurjensaari (1948: 203).

10 Haavikko (1977: 194–195); Holmila & Mikkonen (2015: 19–21); Murtorinne (1995: 290).

11 Murtorinne (1995: 294).

12 Drawing on an interpretation of Martin Luther's 'ground motives,' Lundian theology emphasized the social responsibility of the church and the need to take a stand on common problems and issues faced by human communities large and small (Seppo 1997: 531–534).

13 Seppo (1997).

14 Although the constitution of 1919 defined the state as non-confessional, the Lutheran church (with the Finnish Orthodox church) retained its juridical position with the right to, for example, levy church tax. Also religious education in schools remained strictly Lutheran. As of today, the General Synod (est. in 1869) is the church's own decision-making body, it has the sole right to initiate legislation in matters of Church Law.

15 Kivimäki, Hytönen & Karonen (2015: 27); Huotari (1976: 185–193). See Holmila (2008) on the religious dimension of rhetoric of self-control in Finland.

16 The initial aim of *Kotimaa*, established in 1905, was to bring forth a churchly perspective to societal matters. In the 1930s *Kotimaa* was overtly rightist – a fact that it has subsequently apologized. Many prominent Finnish priests and bishops have served in its editorial board.

between 1945 and 1948. My purpose is by no means to present a complete analysis of the Lutheran church during the ‘years of danger.’ Rather, I aim to examine closely some of the key texts of a period in which the future not only of the church but of the whole nation seemed very uncertain. Before the analysis I will briefly discuss the Lutheran perspective on secular authority and highlight some of its Finnish applications. I will conclude the chapter by discussing the reasons why the church acted as it did.

Between two kingdoms: Lutheranism and secular authority

Walking a tightrope is an inherent characteristic of Lutheranism. In Martin Luther’s theology, the Christian is *simul iustus et peccator*, at the same time justified and sinner. By birth every human belongs to the kingdom of sin and unrighteousness, but by faith in Christ one is justified before God.¹⁷ Luther’s anthropological dualism extends to the societal level. God governs the world through law and spirit. In the secular sphere, consisting of *politia*, *oconomia*, and *ecclesia* (the institutional side of the church), law and authority govern. Here the state can legitimately use even coercive measures to keep the peace. In the spiritual realm, on the other hand, God – and only He – rules through the Word and the Spirit. The two realms must be kept separate while acknowledging that they are both instituted by God. They exist, however, for different purposes: one to guarantee external peace, and the other to produce piety through knowledge of sin and grace. Both are needed because of man’s sinful nature. The crucial issue, then, is to distinguish what belongs to the secular sphere from spiritual matters.¹⁸ Disobedience, for instance, is tied strictly to spiritual matters; only commands that definitely contradict God’s will can be defied. The citizens must obey their secular rulers even to the point of taking up arms and killing – as long as it is done to protect the community.¹⁹ In a nutshell, the spiritual sphere is governed by freedom, while in earthly matters authority and submission are of foremost importance.

The issue is further complicated by the demand that the different spheres of worldly life must be organized harmoniously under God’s will. This means that one’s actions in political, economic (including the family and household) and ecclesiastical life should all be conducted in a way that ‘realizes Christian love.’ This is particularly challenging for the church – a nexus for the secular and the spiritual. As a secular institution, it should serve the authorities and keep the peace by preaching and taking care of the worldly tasks assigned to it. On the other hand, if need be, the church as a community of Christians is obligated to protest against any ungodly actions by the political authorities.²⁰ Consequently, Lutheranism involves a continuous balancing

17 Barth (2012: 179–181).

18 Luther (1962: 366–373); Barth (2012: 313–348).

19 Cargill Thompson (1984: 97–111); Sowle Cahill (1994: 105, 108); Rupp & Drewery (1970: 122).

20 Barth (2012: 56, 280, 328–334).

between spiritual and secular requirements.²¹ Historically, this has indeed taken many forms.

In Finland, the church has traditionally emphasized obedience. For example, during the Russification periods of the late 19th century the church leadership, Archbishop Gustaf Johansson in particular, continued to stress obedience, although the Tsar would have acted contrary to the constitutional rights endowed to Finland as the autonomous grand-duchy. Thus, contrary to many secular political actors of the time, for the church illegality was not a factor that would have given grounds to disobey. During the Civil War of 1918, which followed the acquisition of independence in (late) 1917, the prevailing interpretation in the church was that the reds had rebelled against secular authorities – and thus also against God. For this reason they had to be punished.²²

As another example, obedience was stressed by the Finnish clergy during the Continuation War (1941–1944), an offensive in cooperation with Germany's Operation Barbarossa.²³ The war was defined as a crusade by Field Marshal C. G. E. Mannerheim. Also, the church considered the war a holy one²⁴ and focused on the Christian duty to obey and Luther's interpretation of the Fifth commandment, according to which God and secular authorities are exempt from the prohibition to kill. The weight put on obedience and spiritual understanding of the nature of the war resulted in neglecting Martin Luther's criticism that religious justification of war would mean mixing the secular and spiritual spheres. On the other hand, it was stressed that animosity was to be expressed first and foremost against the enemy's ideology and the state in which it was realized; as individual human beings, Soviet soldiers were entitled to Christian love as anyone else.²⁵ Interestingly, for the Finnish Lutheran church walking of the tightrope truly began after the war, as we shall observe next.

21 As many commentators have pointed out, Martin Luther in fact did not have a doctrine but a set of diverse positions that has been subsequently synthesized as doctrine (see for example Witte 2004: 85–118).

22 Huttunen (2008: 206–211); see also Huhta (1999).

23 The 15 months between the Winter War and the Continuation War are known in Finland as the interim peace; it was widely believed that the peace treaty (12 March 1940) would be revised – one way or another. From the late summer of 1940 onwards, while Finnish politicians were doing their best to avoid arousing Soviet suspicions, high-ranking military officers were visiting Germany regularly and exchanging plans with their German colleagues about *Aufbau Ost*, which Hitler had started to plan in July 1940. Although none of this was officially announced until the spring of 1941, in practice it meant that Finland was now an important part of Nazi Germany's planned invasion of the Soviet Union.

24 Holy war with apocalyptic tones was a particularly popular theme in clerical rhetoric in early phases of the war when the Finnish army advanced swiftly. However, by 1943 it became evident that the war was not a Biblical battle between good and evil. At that time crusading against Bolshevism was replaced by, for instance, a crusade against 'national sins.' See Tilli (2017).

25 Tilli (2014).

'A storm might be brewing:' Oscillation between hope and pessimism

Before the 1945 elections, *Kotimaa* declared that voting was a Christian obligation because that was how the secular authority was instituted in a democratic system.²⁶ Voter turnout percentage was nearly 75, whereas in 1939 it had been 66. Although in the elections the centre and right parties still held the majority of seats, the left had 99 MPs out of the total 200. The result was something of a shock to many people. *Kotimaa* considered the result from the perspective of foreign policy: it was a sign to the world that Finland was governed by 'peaceful and democratic trends.' The newspaper also stressed that unlike, for example, Germany, Finland had never had fascist tendencies and that even during the war both the labour movement and the church had emphasized the importance of democracy.²⁷ Thus, initially the situation was seen in rather positive terms: all sides were peaceful, democratic, and willing to nurture good relations with each other and with all neighbouring countries.

The success of the People's Democrats in the elections led to their entering the government with seven ministerial positions, the most important being the Minister of Internal Affairs, the Minister of Education, and the Minister of Defence. The Minister of Education, Johan Helo, proposed to municipalize the nation's cemeteries (responsibility for which also fell within his portfolio) and, even more dramatically, to investigate the possibility of the separation of state and church. As regards schools, the aim was to move to studying the history of religions and ethics instead of the traditional (Lutheran) religious instruction. The program received a huge amount of publicity – and, not surprisingly, fierce criticism from *Kotimaa* and the church.²⁸

Lutheran priests, especially bishops, made numerous public statements and used their private contacts to lobby key politicians, especially the committee revising the national school curriculum in line with Helo's program. Prime Minister Mauno Pekkala²⁹ had promised that the church would have a say in the reforms. Luckily for the church, in the end the proposal was not finished in time for a decision to be made by the Pekkala government.³⁰ This political context was nevertheless vividly present in many clerical writings and speeches, as we shall see.

The newly-elected³¹ Archbishop, Aleksii Lehtonen, published his first pastoral letter at the beginning of 1945. Lehtonen was an active advocate of Anglican relations, and the above-mentioned pastoral letter included an explication of his theological stance that purported to attain a synthesis of

26 *Kotimaa*, March 16, 1945.

27 *Kotimaa*, March 20, 1945.

28 Helin (1996: 29–33, 42, 63).

29 President C. G. E. Mannerheim resigned in March 1946, and Prime Minister J. K. Paasikivi was appointed as his successor by the parliament. Following this, the People's Democrat Mauno Pekkala became the new prime minister.

30 Helin (1996: 66–67).

31 His predecessor Erkki Kaila had died in December 1944.

Nordic Lutheranism and Anglicanism.³² Also, reacting to the new political atmosphere, Lehtonen stressed the church's societal role and the connection between the church and the people. He pointed out that the church's role, given by Christ himself, was to maintain 'moral principles and obligations' in national and political life. By maintaining faith in God the church also strengthened the state and democracy: it gave the people power and courage that would endure longer than any 'fleeting enthusiasm aroused by mass meetings.'³³ Because of its democratic influence, the church could not allow itself to be pushed to the margins of society. Any attempt to sever the church from the state would be a drastic measure in a country where a huge majority, 96 per cent of the population, belonged to the Lutheran church. Such action, if it were taken, would not be the result of actual need but of an 'ideology hostile to the Christian way of life.'³⁴

At the same time, Lehtonen downplayed the judicial and economic connections between the state and the church. According to him, the church's external ties to the state were already relatively loose; because of the General Synod, the church was autonomous. In addition, any funding received from the state was small, considering that the church fulfilled nationwide responsibilities, and it would be very expensive for the state if the church's responsibility for registering and recording information about the population was transferred to the state.³⁵

The archbishop, on the other hand, said cautiously that if the people of Finland had truly distanced themselves from the Christian faith, the separation would happen of itself. But this certainly did not seem to be the case, Lehtonen underlined. His personal hope was that the church and the state would cooperate positively to the benefit of them both, at a time when 'all the constructive powers must work together.' To this end, the church should be open-minded toward different political ideologies while keeping out of party struggles. The archbishop concluded with a hopeful yet realistic remark: 'Let our people choose. We do not know what the immediate future of our church will be. A storm might be brewing.'³⁶

The Bishop of Oulu and a former MP of the National Coalition Party, Väinö Malmivaara, was even more hopeful in his pastoral letter. The new era that was beginning after the war journeyed 'under the stars of social progress' and aimed at 'lifting the poor to the level of others and putting in power those thus far kept in the shadows.' The reason for the change of guard in the upper echelons of our society, as the bishop put it, was that the Finnish elite had been distancing themselves from Christianity since the 1880s.³⁷ Because of their apostasy, power had been taken away from the elite and

32 Pajunen (2008).

33 Lehtonen (1945: 67–68).

34 Lehtonen (1945: 74–75).

35 Lehtonen (1945: 75).

36 Lehtonen (1945, 75–78).

37 The 1880s was a decade characterized by clashes between traditional religious values and secular liberalism (Juva 1956; Pikkusaari 1998).

given to someone else – for God cannot be mocked, a man reaps what he sows, Malmivaara proclaimed with a biblical reference to Galatians (6:7).³⁸

As far as legislation on social issues was concerned, the bishop said, the times heralded a pivotal and long-awaited change for the better. He therefore urged all Christians to pray for the secular authorities, so that the predicted transformation would take place peacefully. Praying for the worldly authorities, a holy task and a part of Lutheran priesthood of all believers³⁹, would guarantee that ‘the new time that is now entering will carry in its bosom God’s blessing to our people.’ Unrest was probable and understandable at a time ‘when the new takes over and the old becomes the controlled,’ and it might even be that there would be nothing left of the old, the bishop suggested almost revolutionarily.⁴⁰

Kotimaa agreed with Bishop Väinö Malmivaara that the obligation to pray for the secular authorities had been forgotten too easily. The following quotation from an editorial illustrates the ambiguous attitude of the Lutheran Church:

Although our present government is allegedly putting its coarse hands on things that are of the utmost importance to Christian people, Lutheran Christianity sees secular authority as essentially positive because it fulfills God’s government and purposes – even if all the private individuals wielding it are anything but true Christians.⁴¹

Although suspicion and fear got in the way of ‘the spirit of intercessory prayer,’ it was worth bearing in mind that the original ecclesia had also prayed for the authorities that had persecuted them. Because the situation in Finland was analogous with the biblical example, it was necessary to remember that the obligation demanded ‘the greater internal struggle, the more one felt the government in power was not of one’s own political and religious ideals.’⁴² In another editorial published in response to demands to ‘purge’ the church, *Kotimaa* pointed out, in line with the archbishop, that the Finnish Lutheran church was ‘pronouncedly democratic,’ and thus its faults could be addressed without separating it from the state.⁴³

Professor Yrjö J. E. Alanen⁴⁴ (1890–1960), who was co-editor-in-chief of *Kotimaa* in 1944–1947, was among those who found a positive side to the situation from an institutional perspective. According to Alanen, history

38 Malmivaara (1945: 51–52).

39 According to this doctrine, the baptized are all equally responsible for (and obligated to) the community. That is, all are ‘priests’ to one another.

40 Malmivaara (1945: 53–54).

41 *Kotimaa*, July 20, 1945.

42 *Kotimaa*, July 20, 1945.

43 *Kotimaa*, July 10, 1945.

44 Alanen was a mixture of theological conservatism and societal progressiveness. Although he had a traditional pietistic conception of church and faith, he wrote extensively on Christian socialism and was a Christian social democrat. Alanen is a rare exception to the norm that especially before WWII politically active priests were to be found among rightist or centrist parties.

seemed to be developing toward socialism, and it was the duty of the church to do all it could to facilitate the great societal change. Secular institutions played an important role because they could ease the transformation away from the 'medieval ethics of alms.' That is to say, the state was the crucial instrument for realizing human solidarity and increasing well-being. As a result, the church would be able to focus on its key task, namely, preaching the Gospel, the personal emphasis of which was sorely needed in 'a socialized society.'⁴⁵ Thus Alanen optimistically reconciled the state and the church: both worked together for the same purpose, even under socialism.

In this discourse, then, the church's relationship to the state was seen as positive, even if power was wielded by people whose ideological stance toward the church was doubting, even hostile. Two arguments were put forward to support this view. First, there were mutual benefits to be gained by both institutions. Particular emphasis was given here to the connection between the church and the people – the roots of the church were in the people.⁴⁶ The second reason was theological: because the secular authority was a part of God's rule, Christians should pray for those involved even if they did not personally find the government's particular policies acceptable. This discourse was a part of a national post-war culture that emphasized self-discipline and trust in the political leadership as a way to cope with the turbulence and upheaval of the immediate post-war months.⁴⁷ However, the hopeful tone receded and a more pessimistic discourse took over as the situation developed and when the People's Democrats became the leading party in the government in early 1946.

Secular authority that does not deserve to be obeyed

In addition to other crises during this time, the years between 1945 and 1948 were marked by countless strikes and demonstrations. Most of the strikes were related to the struggle between Communists and Social Democrats for power over the Central Organization of Finnish Trade Unions (SAK). Some of the strikes were spontaneous, local conflicts that had not been organized by the rival parties. For many workers, protesting was a way of venting their frustration over the slow improvements in wages and living conditions. However, the impetus behind the wave of strikes was above all the Communists' aim of demonstrating their power to mobilize people and in this way of supporting their position in the government.⁴⁸

This was the case especially after spring 1946, when the Soviet Union urged Finnish communists to organize strikes and political meetings, and to use other extra-parliamentary means. The goal was not only to raise wages and benefits; the even weightier reasons were to demand political purges in state institutions and nationalization of the economy. Although the extreme

45 Alanen (1946: 24, 63, 75–81).

46 For similar arguments in post-war Norway, see Tønnessen (2014).

47 Auvinen, Holmila & Lehtimäki (2015: 232–234).

48 Holmila & Mikkonen (2015: 165–166).

left was certainly very loud and active, it is important to note that the silent majority supported the social democratic approach, which sought to reform the system via parliament. Eventually the Social Democrats won the battle for the workers' souls, which meant that the Communists lacked organized support from trade unions. However, particularly in 1946 and in 1947 the situation was turbulent and unpredictable.⁴⁹

Although the church itself was not a target, demonstrations and rallies were seen as a dangerous phenomenon. More information from continental Europe, where (personal, social, and political) reckoning with those responsible for the horrors of the immediate past was taking place, had traversed also to Finland.⁵⁰ Accordingly, *Kotimaa* wrote it seemed from the present economic and political struggles that the war had become an internal war. The newspaper stressed that 'affairs of state' were not decided by demonstrators but by the members of parliament; justice would not be done by taking it into one's own hands.⁵¹ In addition to being theologically against Luther's teachings, such behaviour simply jeopardized the legitimacy of the secular authorities.

In fall 1946 *Kotimaa* condemned the use of extra-parliamentary measures even more strongly: 'And if one wanted to apply the greatly misused term 'fascism' to recent political phenomena, one would be obliged to define as fascist actions aiming at influencing the government by extra-parliamentary routes.' It was undemocratic for a party with one fourth of the seats to attempt to 'dictate' how the republic should be governed.⁵² In another editorial, Communism was identified with National Socialism, and it was pointed out that supporters of the former were now doing exactly the same as the latter had done. They were striving toward despotism through a reliance on coercion and their intolerance of other ideologies or critical voices.⁵³

Kotimaa continued the theme in several articles, pointing out that the exceptional circumstances brought about by the long war were why ideas about the respectability of law and justice had declined in Finland. To counter this effect, people needed a feeling of security, and that could be given by justice. However, to *Kotimaa* it seemed as if a small part of the people had taken 'the role of harbinger of the destruction of democracy.' The newspaper stressed the often neglected dimension of Lutheran teaching on secular authority:

Secular authority derives from God. No government can take power on its own. Those setting themselves against secular authority set themselves against God. But the secular authority must be benevolent towards its subjects. [...] Creating and maintaining a feeling of security among the people is a task given to the secular authorities by God. Governments have neglected this many times in the course of history, always bringing about their own downfall.⁵⁴

49 Holmila & Mikkonen (2015: 167–180); Jussila (1990: 253–260).

50 Kershaw (2015: 449–462).

51 *Kotimaa*, August 8, 1945.

52 *Kotimaa*, September 17, 1946.

53 *Kotimaa*, October 25, 1946.

54 *Kotimaa*, June 6, 1947.

The most serious obstacle to achieving this kind of security was now claimed to be the fact that the basis of the present government was the exceptional circumstances rather than the actual support of the people and parliament.⁵⁵ In other words, the reason for the failure of secular authority was that it had not been instituted democratically – although it was based on democratic election results! This was a way to condemn the influence the Soviet Union was having on Finland's domestic politics. This issue of representation revealed yet another dilemma faced by the clergy in its relations with the state, this one related to freedom of speech. The people, they argued, were represented publicly by the president and the parliament, not by demonstrations or rallies. Demonstrating and the free expression of opinions in this way was denounced as destructive; instead, what was needed was 'responsible' criticism of the government and of 'those with despotic aspirations.'⁵⁶ Thus, by identifying demonstrations with the Communist-led government, *Kotimaa* balanced between stressing the importance of democracy and deploring a government established by a democratically elected parliament.

In addition to the condemnation of political demonstrations and mass meetings, particular attention was paid to the new 'red' state police (the domestic secret service). Purges in the state police had started as early as 1945, as agreed by the Allied Control Commission and the Minister of Internal Affairs, Communist Yrjö Leino. For example, all the department heads were changed, and over 40 percent of vacant positions were filled by Communists or People's Democrats. One third of the new high command had actually been found guilty of treason before or during WWII and sent to prison. The overall amount of personnel was increased significantly. The communist-led state police was arbitrary and often incompetent, which eventually, in October 1948, led to the parliament deciding to decommission it. At the same time there were similar attempts to 'democratize,' that is, purge the army and other official state organs. However, owing to Finland's constitution and political opposition they were eventually unsuccessful, unlike for example in Hungary or Romania.⁵⁷

Concluding a series of editorials lamenting the situation, *Kotimaa* pointed out that the fact that the misconduct of the state police had been discussed in parliament would guarantee that in the future its officials would act more 'in line with the spirit of the law.' This was deemed particularly important because the way the state police was arbitrarily interrupting 'certain political organizations' severely compromised the authority of the state: it seemed as if 'the most immoral and uncivilized elements of society' had been hired and given positions that were supposed to represent the secular authorities.⁵⁸

This attitude was shared by, for example, Tauno Rämesalo, who claimed in a piece published in *Kotimaa* that opportunism typical of the aftermath of any war was widespread in Finland, as evidenced by the contradiction

55 *Kotimaa*, April 15, 1947.

56 *Kotimaa*, January 17, 1947.

57 Jussila (1990: 125–152).

58 *Kotimaa*, November 8, 1946.

between values and actions. According to the priest, despite proclamations about brotherhood, actions were dominated by hatred and revenge; justice had become a caricature of itself, because what was admitted by one to be a right was denounced by another as a crime. In addition, 'people demand important positions without having done anything for the fatherland, they fawn in a cowardly way on visitors and they denounce their neighbours,' Rämésalo lamented.⁵⁹

To summarize, in this discourse, criticism of the government, and particularly of the state police, was articulated in terms of the Lutheran doctrine on the responsibilities of the secular authorities. The argument had two elements. First, the way the state was using its power undermined its authority, because it was not carrying out its divinely instituted duty to maintain order and a feeling of security. In other words, the Communists were not wielding secular authority the way it was supposed to be done. The second argument had a more personal slant: it implied that Communists simply were not fit to hold positions of authority. As a result, secular authorities did not deserve obedience. Here we can thus detect a clerical application of the argument that secular authority may also be illegal, which in Finland had been used to protest policies of the Russian Empire aimed at limiting the status of the autonomous Grand Duchy of Finland. Significantly, thus far the argument had been mainly used by other political actors than priests or the church.⁶⁰ However, more profound criticism was yet to come.

Church, state and martyrdom?

Martti Simojoki (1908–1999), a chaplain during the Continuation War, a prominent reformer of the Lutheran Church, and subsequently the Archbishop of Finland from 1964 to 1978, discussed the idea of a 'people's church' in the Finnish context and pointed out that one of its weaknesses was precisely its relation to the state.⁶¹ Using Nazi Germany as an example, Simojoki argued that when anti-Christian powers seized the state, the fundamental question of the existence of the church had to be reassessed. In this way, Simojoki prepared his readers for the possibility that the church of the future would not be the kind of people's church that Finns had been used to: if the state made it impossible for the church to function according to its Christian faith, the Lutheran church in Finland would 'change into a new form of church.'⁶²

While Martti Simojoki was only slightly more suspicious of the leftist government than many of his colleagues, the Bishop of Kuopio, Eino Sormunen, (1893–1972) was openly pessimistic and quite outspoken in his political critique. Theologically and politically conservative,⁶³ Sormunen, the

59 Rämésalo (1946: 4); also *Kotimaa*, May 23, 1947.

60 Huttunen (2008: 214).

61 See Seppo (2013).

62 Simojoki (1946: 51–52).

63 Sormunen was an outspoken critic of so-called social Christianity. The extreme left labelled him as 'the Nazi Bishop.' See Helin (1996: 74).

author of nearly 100 books on topics varying from the liturgy to the socio-political and cultural role of religion and the church, considered that the new constellation of power and the expanding role of the state constituted a clear and present danger for the church.

Bishop Sormunen examined the situation from a theoretical perspective. In contrast to earlier theories of representative democracy, according to which 'the state was for the people,' nowadays it was the other way around: the citizen now existed for the state, which subjected every aspect of life, including the church, to serve its own purposes. Total wars such as the previous one were the apex of such development. According to Sormunen, the present exceptional situation was the beginning of a new, abysmal normality, in which 'the principle of a majority and the principle of tolerance' were 'sacrificed for the sake of totality' and free individuals were turned into 'involuntary, thoughtless termites.'⁶⁴

This idea was repeated by the bishop in many public speeches and writings:

No one has responsibility for anything, no one pays for anything, because the state pays for everything. The state will be centralized and militarized, and this will mean a police state, protective laws, surveillance, inquisitions, whistle-blowing, prisoners and concentration camps. [...] The signs of a total state are massification, collectivism, and a controlled economy (that is, either nationalization or a planned economy).⁶⁵

In other words, for Bishop Sormunen the expanding role of the state in economic life was a dangerous step towards socialism. Paradoxically, the reason for the growing tendencies toward totalitarianism was found in democracy. Drawing on traditional aristocratic critiques of democracy, Sormunen lamented that although the post-WWII period had also made Finland a more perfect democracy, the democratic system itself was at the same time being consumed by hidden doubts about itself, and undermined by the favouring of mediocrity and 'incompetence.' Consequently, it seemed that democracies were sliding toward dictatorship, and capitalism was being replaced by socialism or a planned economy – 'what guarantees that free humanity is furthered in this way?' the bishop asked rhetorically.⁶⁶

For the bishop, the relationship between the state and the church had political and theological dimensions. The Lutheran church was the bulwark of democracy amidst 'evident attempts toward dictatorship,' because it represented 'popular and democratic freedom'⁶⁷. As a result, as he more or less explicitly claimed, the church could not be connected to a state that was not democratic – and reducing the influence of the church on ideological grounds was, like nationalization of the economy, a sign that this was already the state of affairs. When the state neglected the Lutheran dictum that both church and state were part of God's ordinances and started to attack freedom

64 Sormunen (1948: 17–18, also 110, 122).

65 Sormunen (1948: 18).

66 Sormunen (1948: 100).

67 Sormunen (1948: 110).

of conscience, the time had come for the church to separate itself from the state. This could lead even to the path of martyrdom, Sormunen warned.⁶⁸ The bishop's pessimism was shared by many other priests as well.⁶⁹

At this point, in 1947, also the unofficial messenger of the Lutheran church, *Kotimaa*, moved to a more critical position – it indeed seemed likely that Finland would end up as part of the Soviet bloc. Taking a different line from those who had claimed that the church should have nothing to do with political or societal issues, *Kotimaa* reminded readers of the church's role as a critic of those in power. If the secular authorities passed laws or acted in ways that were contrary to God's commandments, the church was obligated to speak out against the state. Although it had occurred many times in history, the church must neither become a 'propaganda department' of the state nor withdraw from public life. The church must not automatically give its blessing to everything the secular authorities did; if need be, as was the case when 'the state was aiming at totalitarian control,' the church had to be the conscience of the state. It was possible that this would lead to martyrdom, but this possibility should not hinder the church from carrying out its mission, *Kotimaa* proclaimed.⁷⁰

The church's role toward the state was also stressed by the Bishop of Tampere, Eelis Gulin⁷¹, in a sermon he gave in the parliament's closing ceremony in 1948. According to Gulin, if the church was relegated to the position of a servant of the state, it was no longer a Christian church. The church must be the conscience of the state; it must make sure that the state and those in power followed the principles upon which authority was built. 'The state has to uphold justice for God. If this purpose has been forgotten, the time has come for the church to take up its role as a witness,' the bishop preached to his audience, which included the nation's ecclesiastical and political elite.⁷²

Gulin's sermon is exceptional among those delivered at parliamentary ceremonies because he was the only bishop who put emphasis in this way on the church's role toward the state. This is rather surprising, given that Gulin was known for his conciliatory attitude toward the left. We should remember that the position taken by, for example, Gulin and *Kotimaa* above is theologically sound: Martin Luther himself accepted the kind of political preaching that protested against inappropriate behaviour by the authorities. It is well-known that Luther considered those in power to be, more often than not, 'clodhoppers' in dire need of spiritual guidance.⁷³

Consequently, in this discourse theological and economic considerations coincided. As regards theology, the state was considered more than a potential

68 Sormunen (1948: 123–124).

69 Leino (1946: 1).

70 *Kotimaa*, July 8, 1947.

71 Eelis Gulin (1893–1975) was Professor of New Testament Exegetics and Bishop of Tampere from 1945 to 1966. In addition to ecumenical issues, Gulin focused on improving the relation between the Lutheran Church of Finland and working people. See Krapu (2009).

72 Gulin (1948: 4528–4529).

73 Barth (2012: 334).

threat because of its possible transgression of the boundaries between the spiritual and secular spheres. If the state acted against God's will, the church should not only distance itself from the state but be prepared for martyrdom, which in this discourse referred to ideologically-based persecution. Allegedly, the first step toward such a condition was nationalization of the economy, which would lead to the loss of personal responsibility. Thus the economy, which in Lutheranism is seen as one of the secular orders through which one serves God⁷⁴, was understood in individualistic terms. Hence a collectivistic economy was also theologically problematic.

Conclusion

During the tumultuous period from the fall of 1944 to the middle of 1948, before the Allied Control Commission had left Finland (in fall 1947) and the Communists suffered a major loss in the elections (in summer 1948), clerical attitudes toward the state moved from cautious optimism to a readiness for separation and even martyrdom. This is rather surprising, given that the Lutheran church has traditionally been conceived as being steadfast in its loyalty to the state – come hell or high water. Together, the church and the state have been an irreplaceable component of Finnish national identity. It can be said, though, that unconditional obedience to the state has by no means always been the sole political message of the Lutheran church in Finland. As a part of this reassessment, parliamentary democracy was not seen as automatically positive. At the same time, on the other hand, the church's connection with 'the people' was stressed consistently. The constellation did, however, change: the initial harmonious triangle of church, state and people was broken down and the church's relation to 'the people' used as a leverage against the state.

From a European perspective, until Nazism struck into the heartland of Protestantism, there were no significant moral difficulties in accepting that Christians must obey their rulers, not only because they feared the state's sanctions but also because they supported its function of repressing evil and encouraging good. Although there certainly were some demarcation problems in relation to waging an unjust war, any such problems that did arise were more often than not weighty enough to demand that they be discussed and resolved.⁷⁵ In this sense, for the majority of Protestant churches, WWII constituted a critical moment in determining how strong the bond with the state actually was.

Interestingly, as my analysis illustrates, for the Lutheran church in Finland, this was not the case. Waging a war in alliance with Nazi Germany did not constitute such an issue in relation to obedience to the secular authority. It was when the Communists came to power after the war that this liminal moment arrived and the church's relationship to the state had to be critically assessed. Although the decision to support the war is certainly

74 Barth (2012: 326–328).

75 Yoder (1994[1972]: 193–194).

open to criticism on theological or ethical grounds, historical and contextual factors make it understandable and remove any justification for taking the moral high ground now; besides, during the war the very existence of the nation was at stake.

In the first place, clerical anti-communism was not new. The Lutheran church in Finland had been a staunch opponent of communism since the civil war of 1918. The church considered that improving workers' conditions was important, but the workers' taking up arms for their cause was utterly unacceptable to the overwhelming majority of Finnish Lutheran priests.⁷⁶ This ideological opposition to communism, together with the theological condemnation of rebellion, were combined in such a way that the church was stigmatized as the 'white church,' and this was further strengthened by its overt nationalism in the 1920s and 1930s. Also, the awful fate of churches in the Soviet Union was well-known. After the war, many priests were consistent in their anti-communism, concluding that if the extreme left was in power that must mean that the church must distance itself from the state. In other words, if there was a conflict between the two, anti-communism was a weightier factor than obedience.

Second, the policies of the rehabilitated left made the position of the 'people's church' uncertain. The new power player, the People's Democrats, included many who supported the complete separation of church and state. With the Soviet-led Allied Control Commission behind them, the People's Democrats would have a crucial role in any decision concerning the church's future. At the same time, however, over 90 per cent of Finns still belonged to the Lutheran church: it was not until the early 1950s that there was a small wave of resignations from the church. The argument that separating the state and the church would be against the will of the people was therefore indeed well-founded. In a democracy this was a factor that had to be taken into consideration.

The third important factor explaining the church's position is connected to the international situation. The 'unfortunate fate' of the German Protestant churches during Nazi rule was often used as an example to warn people of what would happen if the state's power grew too strong.⁷⁷ In addition, the problematic situation of the Lutheran churches in Soviet-occupied countries after the war was examined carefully and used to assess the likely actions of Finnish communists. The struggle of the Hungarian Lutheran Church against religious persecution, for example, was keenly followed in *Kotimaa*.⁷⁸

The situation of the Lutheran church in Finland is a fascinating illustration of the dualism inherent in Lutheranism as well as the overall uncertainty in the immediate aftermath of the war. In a situation that

76 Huhta (2009); Huttunen (2010).

77 In fact, during the Nazi regime some Protestant church bodies fared better than others: the Nazi-minded German Christians were accepted by the regime, whereas the Confessing Church was persecuted. For propagandistic purposes, however, at this point it was suitable for Finnish priests to treat the German Protestant Church as a homogenous entity.

78 See Baer (2006).

had been utterly inconceivable during the war, the church had to balance between theologically-required obedience, of which it had a long tradition, and disobedience to a secular authority that did not consider the church to be a divinely instituted ally.

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