

**CHURCHES IN AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES**  
A PRELIMINARY REVIEW OF CHURCH DEVELOPMENT IN  
THREE COUNTRIES:  
SOUTH AFRICA DURING THE APARTHEID REGIME,  
ETHIOPIA DURING THE COMMUNIST REGIME  
AND PRESENT DAY EGYPT

Sigurd Haus  
Reidar Aamodt

SIK-rapport 2009:2



**Senter for interkulturell kommunikasjon**  
Centre for Intercultural Communication  
Centre pour la Communication Interculturelle



## Senter for Interkulturell Kommunikasjon

Misjonsmarka 12, 4024 Stavanger, Norway

P.O.Box 226, 4001 Stavanger, Norway

Phone (+47) 51 51 62 74

Homepage: <http://www.sik.no>

<b>ISBN:</b> 82-7721-113-9 978-82-7721-113-8	<b>Title:</b> <b>Churches in Authoritarian Regimes.</b> A preliminary review of church development in three countries: South Africa during the apartheid regime, Ethiopia during the communist regime and present day Egypt.
<b>ISSN:</b> 1500-1474	<b>Authors :</b> Sigurd Haus and Reidar Aamodt
<b>Project number:</b> 285101	<b>Editor :</b> Center for Intercultural Communication (SIK)
<b>Completion date:</b> June 2009	<b>Publisher:</b> Misjonshøgskolens forlag

### **Abstract:**

The aim of this study is to gain knowledge about oppression and persecution of Christians and churches. Three different countries and time periods are chosen: South Africa during the apartheid regime, Ethiopia during the communist regime and present day Egypt. The main questions discussed in the report are:

1. What form does oppression and persecution take, and what is the reason for oppression?
2. How do the churches cope with oppression and persecution, and what reason do they give for reacting as they do?
3. What role do international cooperating partners play and what reason do they give for their actions?

**Key words:** Persecution, discrimination, oppression, churches, Christians, Ethiopia, South-Africa, Egypt

## ***Churches in Authoritarian Regimes***

A preliminary review of church development in three countries:  
South Africa during the apartheid regime,  
Ethiopia during the communist regime  
and present day Egypt.

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## *Preface*

In 2005, the NMS started a project on Church Development in Authoritarian Regimes. The aim was to gain knowledge about oppression and persecution through literature studies and the exchange of experiences. This was to create a fellowship between different churches and their partners, thereby giving inspiration and knowledge for further action. As a preview, SIK (Centre for Intercultural Communication) was asked to make a survey of relevant the literature and try to put into a system important issues, questions and experiences, and to point out areas for further work. This report is a review of this literature survey.

The literature contains many examples of severe violence and sufferings, and, of course, what is described in books and articles is only a very small part of the sufferings. This report is analytical in its aim, but we hope that it also gives at least a small glimpse into the reality of those who are exposed to discrimination and persecution. If not, we apologize for that.

In the work we have received many valuable advices from many colleagues both inside and outside SIK. We are very thankful for that. But the authors are, of course, solely responsible for the report.

During the work Reidar Aamodt has written most of the chapter about Egypt and the Coptic church, while Sigurd Haus has written most of the rest of the report. But both authors are responsible for the end product.

Desember 2007

Sigurd Haus

Reidar Aamodt



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# ***1. Part I Introduction and Issues***

## **1.1 Introduction**

More than one billion Christians live under conditions without religious freedom, meaning the freedom to choose, practice and teach their beliefs. More than 200 million Christians live under conditions of serious oppression which also includes imprisonment and violence (Boyd-MacMillan 2006, 142). The context or background of the oppression may be different, from Islamic extremism and religious nationalism to secular ideologies found in former Communist states and in the West. The different forms of oppression will also vary, from discrimination at work to press censorship and imprisonment, torture and murder.

Oppression and persecution have been well known in several of the churches that the NMS (Norwegian Missionary Society) cooperates with, especially in Africa and Asia. This means that they have to face difficult questions about how the partners and cooperating churches should act. To what extent is it right to protest against violations? Would protests improve the conditions for the church and the population or could they make things worse? Is it right to refrain from protesting against violations as long as working conditions remain unimpaired?

In 2005, the NMS started a project on Church Development in Authoritarian Regimes. The aim was to gain knowledge about oppression and persecution through literature studies and the exchange of experience. This was to create a fellowship between different churches and their partners, thereby giving inspiration and knowledge for further action. As a preview, the SIK (Centre for Intercultural Communication) was asked to make a survey of relevant literature and try to put into a system important issues, questions and experiences, and to point out areas for further work. This report is a review of this literature survey.

Oppression and persecution are complex phenomena which may only be understood through thorough social studies. In the preface to the book “Faith That Endures – the Essential Guide to the Persecuted Church” written by Boyd-MacMillan (2006), Brother Andrew writes that if you want to do something about persecution you need at least three things: the facts, the right strategy, and strength. Regarding facts: “We *all* ought to know: Who are the persecuted?

Where are they? How many are suffering? What are the causes?” (Boyd-MacMillan 2006, 5). The second is to choose the right strategy: “Serving the persecuted should not be a trial and error business” (Boyd-MacMillan 2006, 5), and the third is to feel the strength of the persecuted church: “Far too many books about persecution focus on the glory sufferings of the persecuted, but never mention what they have learned” (Boyd-MacMillan 2006, 6).

It goes without saying that it was impossible within the limits of this preview to try to give a summary of the situation of persecuted churches around the world. It was therefore chosen to delve deeper into the situation in certain areas during certain periods of time. Hence, the following three countries were chosen: South Africa during the apartheid regime, Ethiopia during the communist regime, and present day Egypt. These were chosen partly because they represent different aspects and reasons for oppression, and partly because the NMS has had (and still has) relations in these countries. By looking closer at a few selected areas, it is hoped to find some important circumstances in the situations in these countries and how the churches have related to them. This study will therefore not try to give a complete presentation of the situation in these countries, but rather draw out some important aspects which may improve on the understanding of how oppression works.

As a preview, this evaluation has a distinctly explorative character. The main point is to emphasize experiences that can give a better understanding of what persecution is, how it works, and how people can relate to it. This survey is meant to be the start of a process, and not an end. A wide range of questions have therefore been raised without giving them a very thorough consideration at this phase. By presenting different kinds of perspectives and questions, it may be easier to find out how to continue.

This report has emphasized concrete experience and ways of thinking among people who have experienced persecution. This, together with a presentation of some features of the political situation in the chosen countries, makes this report rather extensive. This is done, so that the report not only points out possible future work, but also gives an independent contribution, which hopefully may be of use for persecuted churches and their cooperating partners. In the next chapter, the chosen approach in the study will be presented.

## 1.2 Main issues

The main aim of this report is to describe the context of discrimination and persecution that many churches live in and how the churches and their partners relate to this situation. This report will give many examples of how churches and Christians are discriminated against and persecuted by the state, anything from being denied bureaucratic service to infiltration, surveillance and torture. However, it is just as important to understand the reasons behind such instances of discrimination and persecution. This will always be an important condition when deciding on how to react. This naturally also applies when someone other than the state is the oppressor. This will be addressed later.

The report will also deal with the question of how the churches react to the different forms and reasons for oppression. An attempt will be made to give examples of different strategies and relate them to different circumstances. The reasons for the choice of action will also be considered. Questions raised are: What are the ideological and theological reflections that the actions are based on? What role does theology play and what opportunities does the church have for theological reflection?

Persecuted churches often have international partners. The report will also present which roles these partners play and the reasons they give for their part. Summed up, these are the main issues:

1. What form does oppression and persecution take, and what is the reason for oppression?
2. How do the churches cope with oppression and persecution, and what reason do they give for reacting as they do?
3. What role do international cooperating partners play and what reason do they give for their actions?

Each country will be presented separately. The presentations will overlap concerning issues that are covered, but the issues that are elaborated more thoroughly will depend on the specific situation in each country. In fact, the situation in the three countries in question varies greatly and so does the availability of relevant literature.

### **1.3 Approach and definition of concepts**

Church development is all about how the churches are affected by, react to and also influence the conditions which are given by an authoritarian regime. Contraventions of human rights as stated in United Nations' Declaration of Human Rights will often be the base for criticism of authoritarian regimes. Internationally several organisations are trying to document violations and encourage human rights, such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. Church-related organisations, such as World Council of Churches and The Lutheran World Federation, are also working actively in this area. Human rights seem to be the basis for these organisations as well.<sup>1</sup>

However, in church-related connections, there is also another basis. In 2.Tim 3,12 oppression and persecution are given a function which is not found in the human rights line of thought: "In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted".<sup>2</sup> This will also have consequences when defining concepts such as persecution, violation, oppression and discrimination. Boyd-MacMillan discusses this use of definitions (2006, 90) and maintains that the concept of persecution is used in two different ways: one general, which includes all types of violation to religious freedom, however "mild", and one more specific, which only concerns serious violations to religious freedom, such as torture, imprisonment and murder (martyrdom). This use of language may be important, because "persecution" used regarding discrimination or "milder" forms of persecution may easily comply with a common (theological) reference frame for phenomena which otherwise would not have been seen in connection with one another. This report will also use concepts such as oppression and discrimination, but (hopefully) without making them mutually exclusive to persecution.

The phrases 'totalitarian states' or 'totalitarian regimes' and 'authoritarian regimes or states' are often used to describe states where the authorities are characterised by coercion and

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<sup>1</sup> See for example the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) declaration in connection with the 50-year celebration of the Declaration of Human Rights at:  
[http://www.lutheranworld.org/What\\_We\\_Do/OIAHR/Documentation/OIAHRStatement\\_by\\_Noko\\_on\\_50\\_Year\\_s\\_UDHR.pdf](http://www.lutheranworld.org/What_We_Do/OIAHR/Documentation/OIAHRStatement_by_Noko_on_50_Year_s_UDHR.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> See for example World Evangelical Alliance for a combination of these two lines of thought at:  
<http://www.worldevangelicalalliance.com/commissions/flc/aboutus.htm>

restraint<sup>3</sup>. “Authoritarian regimes” is a somewhat broader term than “totalitarian regimes” and is often defined as regimes which are not democratically elected. They are characterized by unlawful and coincidental government. Often, the interests of the ruler come before the common interests of the population, and government is often based on enforcement and fear. Totalitarian regimes are characterized by total enforcement of thought through meticulous ideological control of all the institutions in the community, such as press, schools and labour unions. In these states, the power of authority is extremely controlling, and the methods used to oppress often prove to be extensive and brutal.

For the churches and the cooperating partners, it is therefore very important to understand how the governments act in each separate country. This will improve the possibilities of finding the best strategy. In this context, the fundamental difference between “authoritarian” and “totalitarian” is of lesser consequence and these phrases will to some extent overlap in this report.

There are also other reasons why the definition of terms seems important. Almost all states will, for example, try to describe their “reactions” against religious groups as not being founded in the religion and the religious practice, but in other aspects, such as being a threat to social peace and quiet, opposition against the state, affiliation with enemy powers etc. This theme is therefore characterized by a discussion tied to concepts and ways of understanding. This would also apply to a more scientific approach. While some will understand oppression and persecution in terms of, for example, class distinctions or ethnic differences or opposition tied to majority/minority, others will see the more specifically religious aspects as the main feature. In this evaluation, different ways of understanding will more or less be tied to the review of each country, without resulting in a separate discussion of this issue.

This presentation will also include persecution and oppression not directly imposed by the state apparatus. Sometimes, the link to the state apparatus may be indirect, at other times the state apparatus chooses to ignore violations against Christians. At times, however, the state will try to protect the Christians. These situations are included here to try to give a complete understanding of the churches’ situation, even though some of these conditions might not be covered by the title, “Churches in Authoritarian Regimes”.

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<sup>3</sup> See for example Linz, Juan J. *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes*, 2000, for a thorough outline of the subject.

Discrimination and infringement not directly related to the governmental politics may have different foundations.<sup>4</sup> Many are persecuted by their own family and threatened in different ways to leave their religious conviction. Christians may also be blamed for accidents and catastrophes striking local communities and the result is persecution. In some countries, corrupt leaders in the bureaucracy or the police force will exploit their position by, for example, coincidentally arresting Christians and demanding pay for their release. In several countries, churches are persecuted by other Christian churches. In other cases, individuals or groups within the church will employ abuse to promote their own interests or career.

The focus in this report is church development. Church development is, as mentioned above, all about how the churches are affected by and react to and also influence the conditions created by authoritarian regimes. The church is here defined as an *organisation*, i.e. it consists of a group of people defining themselves as members of the organisation, with a (more or less) common aim and a differentiated line of power and assignment. Church development therefore depends on how these factors change: the number of members, change in ideology and aims or change in working areas or leadership.

This way of thinking gives way to understanding the processes where the churches are actively affected by the authorities through registration, surveillance and restrictions. The question of who represents the true church and who is a real member of the church can come into focus. This may result in the registration of churches approved by the authorities and unregistered churches which are not (to the same degree) accepted by the authorities. There have also been several cases of close cooperation between church leaders and repressing regimes. In some cases it is difficult to describe churches and states as separate institutions which relate to each other. In many instances they are so interwoven that an analysis of them as two separate institutions will become oversimplified and thereby wrong.

The report is limited to three countries and three periods in time to give a more thorough evaluation of both church development and the social circumstances they work under. Still, only some important features in these countries have been highlighted. The same applies for

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<sup>4</sup> See for example Boyd-MacMillan, 2006, 75

the situation and development of the churches and their relations to their partners. Since this study was initiated by the NMS, its role in some of the countries is included.

The literature relevant for this study is varied. Wide documentation of infringement can be found in reports from various international humanitarian organisations, such as the United Nations, church organisations, governments etc. In this context, this literature is a help to begin to understand what is going on and how extensive the repression is. A different set of literature includes all the personal accounts from individuals who have been exposed to persecution (Tøkes 1990; Kivengere 1978; Schlossberg 1990) or from others who have tried to help people and churches that have been repressed (Brother Andrew<sup>5</sup>). These books may give the reader an insight into specific situations and even closeness to the atrocities many people have been subjected to and the consequent suffering. This may also be a good way to understand the dilemmas many people experience in an authoritarian and repressive regime. Theological literature appears as a third source. Theological reflections tied to, for example, foundations for resistance or lack of resistance against the regimes, or persecution or the meaning of suffering. A fourth type of literature refers to the situation in one or more churches in an area at a certain period of time (Eide 2000; Aikman 2003). In light of this report, this fourth type of literature tied to the three countries in question is naturally very relevant. This also applies to literature concerning the role of the partners. A final type of literature tries to give a general and full presentation of the whole field: discrimination and persecution of Christians and Christian churches. In this genre, two books are especially worth noting: “A Fragrance of Oppression” by H. Schlossberg, and “Faith That Endures – the Essential Guide to the Persecuted Church” by R. Boyd-MacMillan. These books have an inside perspective and they give a thorough presentation of both practical and theological challenges attached to persecution, both for churches in authoritarian regimes and churches in the so-called free world. The book “Faith that Endures” is the most analytical of the two, and this book will be heavily drawn upon in the discussion in Part III. The following chapters present the situation in the three chosen countries: South Africa, Ethiopia and Egypt.

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<sup>5</sup> Broder Andreas (1990) *Troens helter* (original version Brother Andrew (1988). *A Time for Heroes.*) and Broder Andreas (2002) *Med Guds ord gjennom jernteppet*. (first Norwegian edition in 1969. Original version Brother Andrew. *God's Smuggler*).

## ***2. Part II Churches in Three Countries***

This section presents the situation in three different countries during three specific time periods: South Africa during the apartheid regime 1948-1990, Ethiopia during the communist regime 1974-1991, and present day Egypt. In Egypt, the Coptic Church is focused on, in Ethiopia the Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus in Ethiopia is concentrated on, while in South Africa the coping of different churches will be described. For South Africa and Ethiopia, only a relatively short time period will be described, but for the Coptic Church in Egypt, the history will be traced back to the founding of the church in the first or second century.

### **2.1 South Africa**

This chapter starts with a short historical outline regarding the apartheid regime. The system of apartheid is then very briefly described, before the presentation of the development in some of the main churches is given. Finally, the role of the NMS is discussed.

#### ***2.1.1 Short historical outline***

The roots to apartheid were already laid when the Union of South Africa was established in 1910. Non-whites were not allowed to sit in parliament or province parliaments. In 1913, the Native and European Homelands were founded. Only 7.3 percent of the land was given to the blacks, although they numbered 5 million compared to the 1.5 million whites (Borer 1998, 26). To live in a “white” area, the blacks needed special permission. In the 1920’s and 30’s, the privileges of the whites increased by, for example, refusing the blacks to obtain property outside the “homelands”. During the first years, the African National Congress (ANC) protested through resolutions and complaints both locally in South Africa and internationally. After World War 2, many blacks returned having participated actively, as equals to the whites, in freeing Europe from the rule of the Nazis. During the war, opposition towards the discrimination of non-whites also increased locally.

In 1948, the Nationalist party came into power under the slogan “apartheid” (Borer 1998, 31). During the following years, the representation of blacks in the national assembly was eradicated. At the same time, ten “homelands” were founded with the aim of gradually



making them independent. From 1970, all blacks had to belong to one of these, even though they had lived within “white” areas their whole lives. One of the most extensive and brutal violations happened when 3.5 million “superfluous” people, that is, unemployed, old, handicapped or otherwise not useful to the white population, were forced to move from areas where they had lived for generations to homelands they had never seen before. Everybody was separated according to colour: white, Indian, coloured and black, which determined where they should live, who they should marry, their education possibilities, and business etc. Laws were also enforced concerning freedom of speech, freedom to congregate, press freedom and freedom of movement. Laws were also passed which allowed imprisonment without law or justice.

The ANC and other organisations encouraged demonstrations and civil disobedience, and the government answered with increased violence and repression. Non-violence did not carry fruit and when the ANC became prohibited in 1960, it changed character and became a revolutionary movement. This was sparked by the “Sharpsville Massacre” where police shot into a crowd of peaceful demonstrators and killed 67 of them. In the 1970’s, the movement “Black Consciousness” came into force. The aim and philosophy of the movement “was to recondition the minds of the oppressed people to prepare them to forcefully demand what was rightfully theirs” (Borer 1988, 39).

In 1976, the police opened fire towards a demonstration in Soweto against the use of Afrikaans in the schools (Borer 1998, 39-40) Two demonstrators were killed. This led up to what has later been called the “Soweto uprising” where as many as 176 students were killed. This again led to a wave of protests which were ruthlessly suppressed and approximately 700 people were killed, with many thousands hurt and tens of thousands interned. Following the “Soweto uprising”, more organisations were banned and this becomes an important crossroad in the resistance work.

In the 1980’s, the opposition against the regime increased and this was answered by even more brutal methods of repression. As organised opposition to the regime became prohibited, many churches and church leaders became politically active against the regime. This led to a sharp conflict between the state and many churches, with oppression of the church as a result. The mass mobilisation which many churches contributed to, made the government gradually

realise that the days of apartheid are over and it finally released Nelson Mandela in 1990 (Borer,1998,78) .

During this period, the South African state was challenged internationally, and this international pressure and support played an important role in the breakdown of the regime. Many exiled South Africans also played a vital role in this connection.

The apartheid regime influenced people in almost every respect. The next chapter can only give a glimpse of how the apartheid regime affected people.

### ***2.1.2 Oppression***

The apartheid regime did not (of course) discriminate and persecute Christian churches or Christians as a group. On principle, the division was, as is known, not along religious lines, but of colour and race. Discrimination, especially aimed at the blacks, was extensive and effective.

One example of oppression was the pass laws with the following consequences:

Thousands of blacks were arrested daily under the iniquitous pass law system which severely curtailed their freedom of movement. As a black person from age sixteen you had to carry a pass. It was an offence not to have it on your person when a police officer accosted you and demanded to see your pass. It just would not do to say you left it in your jacket pocket when you went out to buy a packet of cigarettes. The system conspired to undermine your sense of worth. Blacks did not have the right to be in urban areas..... Decent men were driven to prison mixing with hardened criminals.....This was part of the violation of human rights that nearly every black person experienced at one time or another (Tutu 1999, 95).

An account of the extensive discrimination which was carried out will not be attempted, but an example of how the day to day degradation was experienced is shown as follows:

It was not usually the big things, the awful atrocities, that got you. No, it was the daily pinpricks, the little discourtesies, the minute humiliations, having one's dignity trodden underfoot, not always with jackboots - though that happened too. It was, for instance, on occasions like going into a shop with your father, this dignified, educated man who headed up a school, and a slip of a girl behind the counter, just because she was white, would address your father, "Ja, boy." And you died many deaths for your father..... This kind of treatment gnawed away at your very vitals (Tutu 1999, 97).

Oppression of those who tried to protest could also be very brutal. In the Truth and Reconciliation Commission which was established in 1994 with Bishop Desmond Tutu as the leader, the true brutality of the regime was revealed. The proceedings of the most serious crimes were held open, often with TV broadcasts. By detailed descriptions of torture and bestial murders, the victims, the Commission and the general public was informed of how extensive and systematic the apartheid regime had been in their persecution.

One example is how executions were staged to look as if someone other than the regime was responsible. It was also revealed that some ANC activists “that were captured under threat of imprisonment or even death, sometimes agreed to work for the police” (Tutu 1999, 131). Tutu gives an example of one such person: “By his own evidence, he was involved in dozens of killings of political activists, often infiltrating groups of youths and pretending to recruit them for military training before leading them to their deaths in police traps” (Tutu 1999, 131).

### ***2.1.3 Response from the church***

This section provides some main features of how different church communities in South Africa related to the National Party’s introduction of apartheid, not only in a more practical sense, but also on the ideological or theological side. The churches referred to are some of the most central actors, that is the so-called English churches, the reformed (Dutch) churches, the Catholic Church and the South African Church Council (SACC), which was an umbrella organisation for most of the churches in South Africa.

Balia sums up the situation before 1960:

This brief survey of the ecumenical scene before 1960 shows that the English churches had adopted a complaining, but essentially passive mode of reacting to the established culture of white power, economic privilege, and black suffering. The Afrikaans churches were displaying an uninterested attitude to the fundamental issues of social justice and were intent more on “converting” Blacks to become tools in their political aspirations. Together, this sum of “white paternalistic Christianity” was estranging Blacks from the Christian faith. The hypocrisy, double standards, and the “identification of white skins with Christianity” had the same effect. Still, Blacks knew that Christianity was not a white preserve and that they were therefore not inferior exponents of the faith (Balia 1989, 14).

Among the Afrikaans churches, the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) was the most important. In contrast to most of the other churches, this church supported the regime ideologically. The development in this church is therefore treated separately. How the other churches and church

organisations related to and gradually intensified their struggle against the regime is outlined in the following chapter in the section entitled “White consciousness or black power”.

### **2.1.3.1 The Dutch Reformed Church and the Belhar Confession**

The DRC defended apartheid and thereby justified the apartheid regime for many years. The DRC was not part of, and was often in direct opposition, to the initiatives taken by the other churches during the apartheid regime. The church also gave the following theological reason for the segregation:

When the pseudo religious ideology of apartheid was implemented as an economic and political policy during the forties, theologians and ministers from the ranks of DRC developed and popularized a theological, scriptural, and moral justification. Through the years no serious challenge to the ideology of apartheid, its pseudo religious character, or its theological and moral defence came from the so-called “daughter churches” in the Dutch Reformed “family”, although some of its “practical implications” or “the concrete way in which it was implemented” was criticised from time to time (Cloete and Smit 1984, vii).

However, an acknowledgement that this “teaching” was wrong grew in the DRC as well. The so called “Belhar Confession” came after the DRC position was declared heretical in 1982 during the World Congress of Reformed Churches in Ottawa. This came as a result of intense effort from the black churches, among others. “The fact is that the Ottawa decisions were to a large extent the result of a carefully planned strategy in which groups from the black churches in the Dutch Reformed family churches played a leading role” (Durand 1984, 117).

After this congress, a Status Confessiones was released from the DRC in 1982. It rejected the ideology of apartheid as stated below:

Therefore, we reject any doctrine which, in such a situation, sanctions in the name of the gospel or of the will of God the forced separation of people on the grounds of race and colour and thereby in advance obstructs and weakens the ministry and experience of reconciliation in Christ (Cloete and Smit 1984, 3) .

This form of declaration, a Status Confessiones that resembles the Barmen Declaration from the German Church during the Nazi regime and the Declaration of the Foundation of the Church from the Norwegian church in 1942 (Kirkens grunn), must be considered a very powerful influence.

Strictly speaking, one could say that the expression status confessiones means that a Christian, a group of Christians, a church, or a group of churches are of the

opinion that a situation has developed, a moment of truth has dawned, in which nothing less than the gospel itself, their most fundamental confession concerning the Christian gospel itself, is at stake, so they feel compelled to witness and act over against this threat (Smit 1984, 16).

This matter will be dealt with later with a few points taken from “Kirkens grunn”, since it discusses the Lutheran background for the dissociation from the (Nazi) regime.

### **2.1.3.2 White consciousness or black power**

In 1963, the initiative was taken to establish an ecumenical forum where people of different races could discuss how to relate to the serious situation the country had come to. The forum was called the Christian Institute. “From the foundation of Bible study and prayer, there were to be discussions, analysis and then service” (Balía 1989, 21). From the very start, the DRC was sceptical and tried to oppose the institute, and tried to discredit both the organisation and its individual members. Although the institute to some degree invited blacks to take part, it remained mainly white with the aim to reach out to the whites. It did, however, become very important:

It is clear, then, that the Sharpsville crisis had challenged the churches in South Africa to a new commitment to the abolition of apartheid and to the creation of a new non-racial society. The English churches were not slow in subsequently declaring publicly, their abhorrence of the evils of apartheid. The following practice, however, among white Christians even within church circles, left much to be desired. Positively, the Christian Institute was born at a crucial time, and though a white organization, was able to offer a disturbing prophetic voice amidst injustice and racism. It assailed complacency, challenged Christians to a more authentic future in South Africa, struggled to offer a new vision for society and functioned as a “confessing movement” in a state of increasing repression (Balía 1989, 25).

The Institute was also able to bridge the gaps between the historical and the independent churches and in that way was instrumental to the formation of the African Independent Church Association (Balía 1989, 25-26).

Still, this did not lead to any important practical changes, neither for the English churches nor the Catholic Church, as the following informs:

The Sharpsville crisis and the Cottesloe Consultation awakened the English churches to a new realization of the gospel’s call to create widening forms of human fellowship. The Anglicans committed themselves to openly and fearlessly condemning all that they believed to be evil and false in the social, political or economic life of any nation. If this led to confrontation with the state, it was to God that obedience had to be given.

Despite these changes, the English churches were still dominated by white hierarchy and remained a paternalistic organization where the black voice was rarely heard (Balía 1989, 22).

The Catholic Church strongly attacked apartheid as evil and blasphemous, but “despite this stand against apartheid by the Catholic hierarchy, Catholic parishes and even seminaries themselves, remained segregated” (Balía 1989, 23).

Following the National Consultation in 1968, an ecumenical committee was founded with the aim of formulating an irrefutable criticism of apartheid. The Christian Institute cooperated with the Theological Commission of the South African Council of Churches. The result was “A Message to the People of South Africa”. This message was thought to be the basis for both practical action and further studies. However, the article was criticised by different political positions and also within the churches:

Over and against the ideology of apartheid, the message categorically offered a theological antithesis and it must be seen as its major weakness. No alternative “historical mediation” to contextualize the gospel message in the political economy of South Africa was mentioned. The formulators of the Message were undoubtedly operating from a false theological premise. They were offering religious answers to strictly political questions, hence the subsequent misunderstanding and confusion in ecclesiastical circles. The challenge of the Message was directed mainly at white Christians, not to “every Christian in the country”. The Message offered a denunciation of apartheid and it failed to offer any ideological announcement or direction. It was therefore of little relevance to the black community (Balía 1989, 37).

Therefore, the work had to be continued in other ways:

If Christianity was to be taken seriously, some other union of South Africa was necessary to advance from the abstract Message. The Study Project on Christianity in Apartheid Society (SPROCAS) was then launched in 1969 to offer some practical suggestions in this direction, but here again, it was determined but yet white-orchestrated effort (Balía 1989, 38).

This changed in SPROCAS II which was launched in 1972. Here a decisive change is found in the hierarchy insofar as strong support is given to the Black Consciousness Movement and the idea that the necessary radical changes must come from the black people themselves:

SPROGAS II began by wisely accepting that fundamental change in South Africa in the sense of a radical redistribution of power, land and wealth, would ultimately be initiated and actualized by Blacks (Balía 1989, 41).

Two new programs were therefore established: the Black Community Programmes and the Programme for Social Change. The latter was developed for the whites to make them

conscious of their privileged position. This program did not work and was terminated. On the other hand, the Black Community Programme was a bigger success. The ideas from the Black Consciousness Movement slowly got rooted within the institute, so that it could become an institution that represented the black Christians (Balía 1989, 43).

In the 1980's, a change came about (Borer 1998, 51). The resistance against the regime increased heavily and it is also organised better than before. The explosion of grass-roots organisations and their embrace of "alliance politics" laid the foundation for a nationwide liberation movement of such strength that the government was never able to fully control or extinguish it. Due to the increased resistance, the governmental oppression became stronger than before. This escalating of oppression almost forced for example the South African Church Council (SACC) and the South African Catholic Bishops Conference (SACBC) to reconsider their contribution to reach an end to all this brutality. Their conclusion was that they should act politically. This also made the conflict between church and state clearer. The state responded by harassing, imprisoning, deporting and sometimes also torturing church workers. The leaders in other civil communities were removed little by little or silenced so that the churches became the only place where legal opposition against the regime could be expressed.

In the beginning of the 1980's, Bishop Tutu was the general secretary of the SACC. He challenged the international society to use economical methods to pressure South Africa to terminate the apartheid policy. The South African regime tried to threaten him to silence and carried out raids against the organisation. In 1985, the present general secretary, Beyer Naudè, challenged everybody to take part in civil disobedience actions against the South African regime.

In May 1985, the document "A Theological Rationale and Call to Prayer for an End to Unjust Rule" was sent out from a study group outside the SACC. The document was very controversial and it had serious implications for church/state relations, because it requested Christians to cease praying for the Government and instead to pray against it, that is, for its removal (Borer 1998, 107-108).

The Kairos Document, which was published in September 1985 (Borer 1998, 61) put the question of the legitimacy of the state on the program, and the challenge in the document led

to large protest marches (which were forbidden at the time) headed by church leaders from many different places in the country.

Even the Catholic Church joined in the resistance against the regime. “At one point in 1986, the Catholic church was represented among political detainees by twelve priests, three deacons, four religious sisters, twenty seminarians, and seven lay persons active in church work” (Borer 1998, 64). Coinciding with this, the Catholic bishop wrote a pastoral letter where he emphasized that the church supported the majority’s fight for justice. The fact that the church itself was affected resulted in political action from the church. “As one worker stated, one priest in prison did more to conscientize Catholics than thousands sermons or statements” (Borer 1998, 65). In 1987, the SACBC agreed to open the churches to the resistance organisations.

During the World Council of Churches’ conference in Lusaka in 1987, the legitimacy of the regime was once again discussed, and the regime was for the first time pronounced illegitimate:

It is our belief that civil authority is instituted of God to do good, and that under the biblical imperative all people are obliged to do justice and show special care for the oppressed and the poor. It is this understanding that leaves us with no alternative but to conclude that the South African regime and its colonial domination of Namibia is illegitimate (Borer 1998, 67).

The conflict between state and church intensified and in 1988 the headquarters of the SACC was bombed and the headquarters of the SACBC burned down, both with large damages as a result. Resistance increased further. Raids were conducted in the homes and offices of many church leaders, and one church leader was even poisoned. In the autumn of 1989, the police tried to prevent a protest service in a Methodist church, but did not get support in court. Police violence increased dramatically as a result. A few days later, on 13 September 1988, the church leaders led a huge peace procession in Cape Town. During the next few weeks, similar marches were held in several places throughout the country. The people themselves had annulled the prohibition against protest activities. Less than a month later, eight top leaders in the ANC were released and three months later Nelson Mandela was released on 11 February 1990.



### 2.1.3.3 Theological changes

Many churches went through profound theological changes during this period. Two quotes from Balia illustrate this:

The only theology, therefore, of meaning to a black person was one that spoke of liberation (Balia 1988, 71).

The quest for a new black theology involved rejecting “Master” images of God. Blacks now affirmed a suffering God who identified with the oppressed and struggled with them to lift the burden of oppression (Balia 1988, 73).

This is also one of the main points in Tristan Anne Borer’s book “Challenging the state - Churches as political actors in South Africa 1980-1994” (1998). This book focuses on how two church organisations, the South African Church Council (SACC) and the South African Catholic Bishops Conference (SACBC), related to the apartheid regime and reflects among other things on the theological development in the 1970’s and 80’s. The author quotes Charles Villa-Vincencio when trying to explain the new orientation going on in the South African churches. He writes that there are two parallel theological traditions. The dominating tradition goes back to the year 300 when Christianity became an important ideological framework for the ruling classes. Since then, Christianity has often functioned as a conservative legitimising of the ruling elites. However, there is also another tradition based on biblical egalitarian values. This theology “works in favour of the poor and the oppressed.....Debating issues such as civil disobedience, violence, and the illegitimacy of the government would not have been possible in these organizations , had they not recovered and embraced the memory of the alternative tradition” (Borer 1998, 7).<sup>6</sup>

Borer (1998) says that an example could be seen in the “Message to the People of South Africa” in 1968. This message represented a turning point for the SACC. However, it was still paternalistic and should be seen as an expression of the dominant theology. There was no sign of the need to empower the oppressed, nor was it a call for the poor to liberate themselves. This was changed in “The Kairos Document: Challenge to the Church”. In this document, the state was no longer seen as reformable, and Christians were called to act decisively to overthrow the apartheid structures of society. Borer concludes that the theological reflection changed in this period (1970-1990). While the main focus was on race in the seventies, it changed to a focus on class:

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<sup>6</sup> Se Villa-Vicencio (1988) for a thorough outline of his position (esp. p. 173-220)

The evolution towards a primary emphasis on class in the 1980s permeates most theological writings from that period. Theologians became aware, partly through dialogue with Latin American liberation theologians, that theology could not be separated from social analysis. Issues became defined less in terms of race and more in terms of class; hence the struggle was seen less in terms of whites versus blacks, and more in terms of rich versus poor. Some theologians pointed out that racism could not be separated from economic exploitation and incorporated both in their analysis (Borer 1998, 98).

This theological changes also necessitated a new view on the state.

#### **2.1.3.4 The legitimacy of the state**

In a conference held by the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Lusaka in May 1987, a resolution was drawn up, which the SACC later acceded to:

It is our belief that civil authority is instituted of God to do good, and that under the biblical imperative all people are obliged to do justice and show special care for the oppressed and the poor. It is this understanding that leaves us with no alternative but to conclude that the South African regime and its colonial domination of Namibia is illegitimate (cited in Borer 1998, 67).

These statements led to massive civil disobedience. For the SACBC, however, the situation was different. The church was not convinced that it was their right or duty to present these opinions (Borer 1998, 2 and 68).

Following this conference, several large and smaller conferences were held to agree on criteria to judge whether a state was legitimate or not. This debate led to three perspectives of the legitimacy of a state: political, legal and theological (Borer 1998, 3) The political aspect declared that sovereignty is tied up with the question of obedience. If the level of disobedience is high, the question of sovereignty should be asked. From a legal point of view, the principal of “rule by law” was emphasized: “The less rule by law and the more rule by force, the less legitimate the government is”. The theologians were most concerned with defining moral legitimacy and “governing for the common good”. A government does not serve the common good if it serves one group and not all. Moreover, discrimination occurs if it systematically undermines human rights, and if citizenship is unequal. The state cannot allow one class of superior citizens to rule over and above a second class of citizens.

In close connection to the legitimacy of the state, the need to consider the basis for the use of violence became very important. In 1970, the WCC established a fund that should give grants

to those contributing to “raising the level of awareness and on strengthening the organisational capability of radically oppressed people” (Balía 1988, 48). The opponents to the funds and the grants claimed that the money was being used for terrorism and the churches were asked to discontinue their membership in the WCC.

In 1974, the third assembly of the All African Conference of Churches (AACC) was held. Balía (1988) says, referring to this conference, that:

The churches of Africa acknowledged the guerrillas’ cause and decided to support them in all fields. Their rationale for refusing to condemn violence was spelt out by AACC general secretary, Burgess Carr, who claimed that was a means of self-defence for the oppressed and that the freedom fighters had “helped the Church to discover a new and radical appreciation of the cross” (56).

The discussion about using violence was a continuous and important one where concepts like *self-defence* and *just war* were central. In this presentation, its importance can (unfortunately) only be mentioned without going into any detail.<sup>7</sup>

### **2.1.3.5 Levels of involvement**

This quote from Borer (1998) defines the choices that church leaders have when it comes to different ways to act:

Church leaders constantly make choices in assessing the proper relationship between religion and politics. This is especially true when some segments of the population call upon the churches to act as forces for social change, as was the case with Latin American churches under military dictatorships or South African churches under apartheid. In such instances, church leaders must strike a balance between a range of concerns. Strictly sacramental or liturgical issues must be balanced against pressure to become actively involved in the socioeconomic and political questions of the day. Even when church leaders have decided that fulfilling the gospel imperative requires them to address political issues, they are still faced with choices about types of action, from simply denouncing injustice, to provide shelter for those suffering from human rights abuses, to adopting the highest level of commitment – engaging in acts of civil disobedience in their challenge to a particular regime (xiv).

The involvement of the church can be described as involvement on three levels. The first, which all except the DRC took part in, could be called the sympathetic. This implies condemnation of apartheid on a general basis and expressing support for the victims of apartheid. The second level may be called “human rights involvement”, support for trade

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<sup>7</sup> See for example Villa-Vicencio (1990) for a discussion on the use of violence and Balía (1988), Chapter 4: *Freedom Fighters or “Terrorists”?* for an outline of how this discussion was run during the years of apartheid.

unions, protests against imprisonment without trial, hiding and protecting the persecuted etc. The third level entails open political activities, open protests, civil disobedience and cooperation with other organisations. The SACC choose to protest on the highest level, while the SACBC became very active on level two.

### **2.1.3.6 When do the churches become active?**

Borer mentions three factors when she sums up the conditions that activate the churches:

- a changing political context characterized by simultaneously increasing repression and increasingly militant opposition;
- a changing religious context whereby the rise of a new universe of religious discourse forms the basis of new agendas for organisations, allowing issues that were formerly not considered legitimate for theological debate to now become so;
- and the character of the institutional contexts of politic debates (Borer 1998, xvii).

As can be seen, both changes in the organisation's ideology or theology and the more purely organisational relations play an important role in understanding when the churches act. The new theology gave a clear legitimacy to the fight for liberation. At the same time, organisational conditions were also important. Borer (1998) is occupied by this: how organisational conditions and characteristics affect the strategies and actions of the church. She compares the SACC and the SACBC and shows how they had different organisational structures and decision-making systems. They also had different international connections. This is the reason why the SACC could be open to new ideas and courses of action to a larger degree than the SACBC. Since the SACC were relatively independent of their member churches, decision-making routines were less complicated; they had a clear cooperative relation to international partners, and were not constrained by structures of authority (hierarchy) internationally as was the case with the Catholic Church. Borer informs:

By the 1980s, organizational characteristics of the SACC allowed it to carry out a particular type of ministry – that of responding rapidly and directly to the needs of the victims of apartheid (Borer 1998, 164).

SACC attracted activists from organisations that had been banned and “the SACC became the voice of the alternative church” (Borer 1998, 165). Conversely:

The SACBC was more constrained: by the necessity to achieve consensus; because it was a denomination with direct ties to its church constituency; and because of constant awareness within its hierarchy of the need to cooperate with the Vatican and to follow established doctrine. Because of these institutional factors, radical voices in the Catholic Church were not easily heard (Borer 1998, 165).

Borer's conclusion about their roles is highly relevant for the purposes of this report:

The point is that there was a need for both types of actions: quick, radical statements which would grab international attention and support the high emotions circulating at the grass roots, and slower, nuanced responses that were more likely to be implemented (Borer 1998, 165).

Borer also observes that to understand the role of the SACC, it needs to be separated from the member churches for which it was an umbrella organisation, because most of the leaders of the institutional churches "were at times less than courageous in their willingness to challenge the apartheid state" (Borer 1998, 165).

These organisational conditions will be addressed in the following section in relation to the Norwegian partners and their role in the resistance against the apartheid regime.

#### ***2.1.4 Cooperating partners' response and ideology***

The situation in South Africa occupied many people throughout the world. The resistance against apartheid gained support from many directions: from states, trade unions, churches and many others. In connection with the churches, it has been pointed out that international organisations played an important role. This report does not give a summary of the churches or other cooperating partners, but takes a look at the Norwegian church organisations, especially the Norwegian Missionary Society (NMS) and the role it played in relation to the apartheid politics.<sup>8</sup>

The book "Norway and National Liberation in Southern Africa"<sup>9</sup> gives an overview of the role Norway and Norwegian organisations played in the struggle against the apartheid regime.

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<sup>8</sup> For a more general discussion about the role of the Christian Mission in South Africa, see for example Sayman 1990.

<sup>9</sup> Eriksen, Tore Linné ed. (2000) Norway and National Liberation in Southern Africa.

One of the articles in this book written by Berit Hagen Agøy gives a general view of church support in the fight against apartheid.<sup>10</sup>

#### **2.1.4.1 The Norwegian Missionary Society (NMS)**

It seems to be well documented that the NMS and the Norwegian missionaries played a relatively small role in the struggle against apartheid.<sup>11</sup> The NMS started working in South Africa in Zululand in 1844. The NMS policy of church building was, as in Europe, to create national churches. The nation was then defined on the grounds of ethnicity. Thus, the Zulu church was an independent church until the 1950's. At the end of the 1950's, European missionaries took the initiative to have closer cooperation between various black and white Lutheran churches (Agøy 2000, 269). This resulted in the Zulu church becoming a synod in a regional church (Evangelical Lutheran Church in South Africa – South East Region). In 1975, several of these regional Lutheran churches were joined in a national Lutheran church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of South Africa (ELCSA). But none of the white churches joined these churches. The result was segregated white and black Lutheran churches. This had never been the intention when the initiative of uniting the churches had been taken, but the result was, however, racially segregated Lutheran churches.

The Zulu church, which was the NMS's partner church, became the south-easterly diocese in the ELCSA and followed its own policy in relation to the apartheid regime. This is shown in Hege Grung's paper (1989) on the "Zulu church"<sup>12</sup> where she writes about how the south-eastern diocese of the ELCSA, which was and is the partner church of the NMS, acted in relation to the "homeland" authorities in Kwa-Zu. Grung proves that there is a strong connection between the ELCSA and Inkatha, the homeland authorities in Zululand. The diocese did not see it as their responsibility to not cooperate with these authorities. Butelezi wanted to create a Zulu identity. Grung shows that the diocese did not focus on what was going on in the political arena and that it did not support initiatives from other church societies.

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<sup>10</sup> The Freedom Struggle in Southern Africa: The role of the Norwegian Churches 1948-1998, p 266-325. See also Agøy, Berit Hagen, (1987) *Den tvetydige protesten – Norske misjonærer, kirker og apartheid i Sør-Afrika, 1948 – ca 1970*. Hovedoppgave i historie. Universitetet i Oslo.

<sup>11</sup> See for example Agøy 1987, Grung 1989, Bakkevik 1995, Kvaal Pedersen 1964.

<sup>12</sup> Grung, Hege (1989) *ELCSAS sørøstlige bispedømme – en Inkathakirke? Om forholdet mellom den "svarte" lutherske kirken og "hjemlandsmyndighetene" i Kwa-Zulu*. Hovedoppgave i kirkehistorie, Universitetet i Oslo – teologisk fakultet.

The NMS missionaries were guests in the country and had a long standing relationship with this church. From the 1960's, the NMS missionaries were formally employed in the ELCSA-SER (south-east region), and in the ELCSA from 1975. Agøy (2000, 269) writes that "in loyalty to their church they did not want to speak out in political matters on their own".

Through the 1950's, the consequences of the apartheid policy became clearer and clearer and apartheid was on the agenda at the mission conference at the beginning of 1960. In an introductory lecture, Andreas Løken asked: "When shall we speak and when shall we remain silent, when shall we speak carefully, when shall we speak openly, protest or make demonstrations or do something else to influence, if possible, a development which many of us view with grave concern?" (cited in Agøy 2000, 281). The lecture concluded with: "we Norwegian missionaries to South Africa all look with sorrow and concern upon the apartheid legislation and practice we have witnessed lately. And we recognise that the apartheid ideal is non-Christian and that its roots lie in the prejudices and fears of the whites" (cited in Agøy 2000, 281). This lecture was later published in *Misjonstidende* and became the first public protest from the NMS against the apartheid policy.<sup>13</sup>

Agøy also writes that Scandinavian missionaries in the 1960's were stimulated to internal debate about the church's role in the society and challenged the church centrally to officially criticise the apartheid policy. They also openly demonstrated against the apartheid rules by living together with people with different skin colour on the missionary compounds (Agøy 1987, 258). They also wrote against apartheid in the newspapers (Kvaal Pedersen 1964, 145). However, the missionaries never become the driving force behind the work against apartheid.

A second reason for this was the missionary codex. The NMS did not want its missionaries to support one leader more than another in a country. The original formulation was: "The missionaries must, if they can, not take part in the wars and negotiations of the heathen tribes"<sup>14</sup>(Agøy 1993, 157 ). This was reformulated several times. In 1963, the wording was as follows: "The missionaries must not take part in political activities in the country where they are working"<sup>15</sup> (Agøy 1993, 157). Agøy thinks this demand for political neutrality has its background in the Lutheran Two Regiments Doctrine, that politics should be left to the legal

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<sup>13</sup> For a contemporary description in Norwegian of the situation in South-Africa see Ofstad, 1963, and Kvaal Pedersen, 1964.

<sup>14</sup> Author's transl.

<sup>15</sup> Author's transl.

authorities and that churches, and thereby the mission as well, should not engage in politics. Hege Grung (1989, 19-20) discusses the relevant question in her Master's thesis about the "Zulu church" and confirms Agøy's results.

A third reason was the common attitude that as long as they get to work in peace as a church, they should not do anything to jeopardise this peace (Agøy 200, 278-279). The fear was that open criticism would lead to retribution from the government for both the church and the mission and (further) limit the freedom in the church and mission.<sup>16</sup>

#### **2.1.4.2 Church of Norway Council of Ecumenical and International Relations**

Around the 1970's, a set of initiatives were taken by the WCC in relation to the question of human rights. The same was done in the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Norwegian church. The Norwegian church, however, did not have an organisation to take care of this work. The Church of Norway Council of Ecumenical and International Relations (CEIR; Mellomkirkelig Råd) was therefore established in 1970. The council played, from the start, an important role in the Norwegian support to the opposition against the apartheid regime in South Africa.

The first financial initiative taken by the council was to support the Christian Institute. This support came following consultations with the NMS missionaries, who could also inform that NMS "quietly" had supported the institute financially for several years (Agøy 2000, 288). An extensive cooperation was gradually developed between the Council and the Christian Institute. In 1975, the institute was denied the acceptance of financial support from abroad and in 1977 it was banned along with 17 other anti-apartheid organisations. The Church of Norway Council of Ecumenical and International Relations (CEIR) therefore had to find other partners to cooperate with. The most important of these was the SACC, which had received financial support from 1978, the same year that Desmond Tutu became general secretary. Among the other organisations receiving support were the Black Consciousness Movement and the Black Parents Association in Soweto.

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<sup>16</sup> During the work on this report, the authors obtained some information that missionaries worked against the regime in different ways, both legally and illegally. To examine and systematise this information was unfortunately beyond the scope of this report.



One notable aspect of the support work against the apartheid regime was the close contact between the CEIR and the Norwegian authorities, to be more specific, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). Most of the support channelled through the Council was financed through the MFA, even when the transfer was hidden and in some cases should not have been registered in the reports of neither the ministry nor the CEIR.

A complete report is not provided here of the extensive cooperation which was established between the Norwegian church, mainly through the CEIR, and various different cooperating partners in South Africa, where the SACC without doubt was the most important. Neither will the cooperating relations established by other church societies or various ecumenical initiatives be described. Rather, following this short presentation, the organisational conditions of the NMS and the CEIR will be discussed.

#### **2.1.4.3 The role of the NMS and the CEIR**

Looking back to Borer's (1988) reasoning above, it seems right to compare the differences between the SACC and the SACBC with the differences between the NMS and the CEIR. The CEIR had a freer position than the NMS, both in Norway and in South-Africa. In Norway, the NMS was always dependent on support from their members, and in South Africa they were tied by a long-term relationship with the church. The CEIR was a new organisational unity not directly dependent on members in the Norwegian church, neither morally nor financially.

As seen in both Norway and South Africa, the prominent activists in the resistance were the relatively free-standing organisational unities, which at the same time represented the church societies through which they had been established. This enabled them to operate with a moral legitimacy based on the churches, but at the same time were free to react faster and bolder than those organisations which were tied closer to a tight-knit and extensive hierarchy. Due to these conditions, the ideological changes would also take longer in a member organisation like the NMS compared to the CEIR. CEIR was established with a given ideology, very much tied to human rights work. In the NMS, incorporating this type of ideology and the activities generated from it would probably mean that the prevailing ideology and practice tied to the missionary codex would be challenged. This would demand extensive internal processes.

According to Borer (1988), both types of organisations had a place and were important in the struggle against apartheid. The SACC was more on the barricades, while the SACBC's work progressed slowly, and it had a bigger chance of implementing its initiatives. The material here is in no way complete enough to give the same conclusion about the NMS and the CEIR; however, the issues are open for the possibility that different organisations can play different roles of equal importance. Only further research can confirm or disconfirm if this was the case concerning the role of the NMS.

One missionary organisation that has already concluded regarding these questions is the Berliner Missionswerk. In 2000, they released a document called the "Statement on the History of the Berlin Mission in South-Africa" (Berlin Mission, 2000). Over ten pages the organisation presents their role in the fight against apartheid and they confess that they failed in many respects and did not resist the apartheid policy and their many practical consequences forcefully enough.<sup>17</sup>

What kind of role the partners should play was certainly also a challenge in Ethiopia, the next country to be dealt with. During revolutionary times, many Christians and others faced serious persecution. In the next chapter, the main focus will be on the situation for the Mekane Yesus Church.

## **2.2 Ethiopia**

### ***2.2.1 Introduction***

During the revolutionary times of 1974-1991, the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) in Ethiopia faced serious oppression and persecution. This included a massive closing of churches (between 1978 and 1991, 2500 evangelical churches were closed); the imprisonment and torture of workers and elders; severe restrictions on young people; and the confiscation of property such as houses and cars. This description of persecution during the revolution in Ethiopia relies mainly on Øyvind Eide's (2000) book:

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<sup>17</sup> Berlin Mission (2000) *Statement on the History of the Berlin Mission in South Africa*. Berlin, Berliner Missionsverk.

“Revolution and Religion in Ethiopia – The growth and Persecution of the Mekane Yesus Church 1974-85”.

The reasons for the persecution can be found in the dynamic that was released in the revolution itself. This short historical sketch gives a framework for understanding this dynamic:

Until the revolution of 1974 two basic institutions of Ethiopian society constituted this core group or centre. They were the ruling Amhara elite, embodied in the office of the emperor, and the EOC embodied in the office of the patriarch. The emperor depended on the patriarch as the patriarch depended upon the emperor both politically and ideologically (Eide 2000, 15-16).<sup>18</sup>

But the two did not have exactly the same interests:

Within the seemingly uniform centre, however, powerful political dynamics were at work, clearly seen in the conflict between the emperor and the patriarch on the question of the place and role of western mission organizations, as well as in the formal recognition of the EECMY as a non-Orthodox church (Eide 2000, 17).

Evangelical missionaries working in Ethiopia at end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had the clear idea that mission work might mean a revival within the Orthodox Church and it was not to establish independent evangelical congregations. However, this is what happened for different reasons:

“Seen as a whole none of the foreign Missions working in Ethiopia before the Italian occupation of the country intended to create a national Evangelical Church in Ethiopia. Although many Evangelical congregations – big or small – were founded in various places in the country” (Andersen 1980, 20).

The missionary organisations were accused of proselytism, that is, to evangelise the evangelised, and this created tension towards the EOC. On the other hand, the emperor saw the missionaries as a means to modernisation. In 1944, a decree was released that said that missionary activities should be directed only towards non-Christians. The result was that some areas were declared “open areas” and some were declared “Ethiopian church areas”. This meant that the evangelical churches to a large extent worked on the periphery, not among the Amhara elite. However, the EOC still continued an interdependent line of action, and “various Evangelical churches experienced opposition in many forms and even persecution” (Eide 2000, 36).

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<sup>18</sup> EOC - Ethiopian Orthodox Church

Consequently, the evangelical congregations and the missionary societies realised the need for the different congregations to form a church. During and after the Second World War, initiatives were taken to establish a united evangelical church, but it failed. Then the idea of a Lutheran Church got support and The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus was established in 1959 (Andersen 1980, 36). The Church worked to get legal status in the country so that it could be recognised as an Ethiopian church with the rights to own land and properties. This was important, both because the missionary organisations wanted to hand over land and properties to the church and because the church needed the formal status as a sign of its Ethiopian identification.

EECMY was officially registered in 1969. This also meant that it was possible to bring local problems of oppression and persecution to the top level. The EECMY continued to grow after 1969. The number of members increased, for example, from 20,000 in 1969 to 209,000 in 1974 and to over 1 million in 1991 (Norlander 1996, 13) The EECMY contributed to a large extent to educate the people, and in this way people also from the periphery received higher education.

A description of the actors and the different phases of the revolution in Ethiopia is not included in this report<sup>19</sup>. Eide (2000) informs that Mengistu Haile Mariam's rise to power was complex and extremely violent. For example, thousands of youths were killed during the so-called red terror in 1977-78. This report is confined to what is believed to be most important for understanding the repression towards the Evangelical churches in this period.

Among the objectives of the revolution were to “do away with the contradictions of traditional Ethiopian society and envisioning a united country without ‘ethnic, religious, linguistic or cultural differences’” (Eide 2000, 95-96). Economic reforms followed. These reforms brought about a deep and irreversible movement, creating support and raising expectations among the peasants (Eide 2000, 96). In these initial stages, the revolution had substantial support in the EECMY.

Eide concludes that the revolution eliminated the traditional centre:

Deposing the emperor and separating church from state, the revolution brought an end to an era and to the myths so important for legitimizing the emperor as well as

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<sup>19</sup> See Eide 2000,97ff.

the Amhara claim to power. The nationalization of land, surplus housing and private commercial companies eradicated the ruling elite, in other words, the structure of dominance (Eide 2000, 144).

But Mengistu Haile Mariam faced serious problems; the eradication of the old structure and its ideology threatened the empire with disintegration. One challenge was to legitimise his government's claim to power. To do that, he was forced to base his power partly on the traditional Amhara legacy. Thus, he took control over the EOC by removing and later killing the patriarch and installing a loyal patriarch. In that way, traditional Amhara/Ethiopian nationalism prevailed.

The question of national self-determination for the ethnic groups was a matter of open political debate until the autumn of 1978. From then on, any kind of engagement in the question was a matter of criminal offence: "As a result nationalist aspirations developed into a nationalist struggle and the liberation movements of the north and west were strengthened" (Eide 2000, 145).

With this short background, this report will delve into how and why the repression and the persecution took place.

### ***2.2.2 Persecution***

**In his book, Eide (2000) documents many incidents of persecution.** In the Central Synod:

In March and April 1979, 32 churches were closed and a number of services were interrupted or halted because the Evangelists were imprisoned or because of frequent threats and serious incitements by the cadres, youth or farmers' associations. The work of the Central Synod was thus almost brought to a standstill (Eide 2000, 185).

Two incidents may serve as illustrations of the pattern of repression.

On 26 May 1979, more than 60 residents of the Mekane Yesus Church hostel and members of the church were imprisoned for two weeks accused of being Pentecostal and Jehovah's Witnesses. The accuser was not known and no evidence of any crime was produced. In June members in their hundreds, employees of different sections and choir members spent two weeks in prison. They were released after a serious warning not to go to church (Eide 2000, 185).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> POMOA, the Provincial Office for Mass Organizational Affairs, was established in 1976, and established offices at provincial, district and sub district levels. From 1977, it was under direct control of Mengistu. "By May 1977, 3 500 students had attended an intensive one-month course in Marxism at the Yekatit 1966 Political School. The cadres were armed with guns and were to be found everywhere, most notably in the mass media, the

In the Western Synod:

Two incidents at the beginning of 1980 increased tensions between the Western Synod and the government as the accusations started to turn on a possible connection with the OLF. The assistant development secretary of the synod, Daayee Baayiisaa, was the first arrested and severely tortured. As Ato Daayee was said to have been an active member of ECHAAT<sup>21</sup> and later on assisted members of the OLF, his arrest became an embarrassment for the Synod. Government propaganda exploited this to the full. In February 15 employees of the synod were imprisoned and accused of political activity. Harassment of the synod increased and made working conditions even more difficult. Still the government administration waited a year before any major action was taken against the Western Synod in May 1981” (Eide 2000, 186).<sup>22</sup>

One important reason for the delay mentioned above, says Eide, was the substantial size and influence of the western Synod, and its international relations. The authorities therefore had to be sure that they could control the situation before they started the assaults.

One incident Eide (2000) reports is from Begi, where until May year 1981 there has been a good working relationship between the Synod and the local government administration:

Two days later, however, police and soldiers moved into the town church and arrested the whole congregation while they were gathered for Sunday service. The congregation was brought to the police station where the people were exposed to heavy rains for two hours before they were brought back to church and given a long political lecture. Among other things, the congregation was warned against the missionaries. The administrator who gave the lecture declared that the government no longer acknowledged the Mekane Yesus Church, only the Orthodox and the Muslims. ‘For the future we have to be tough with you and we have to use guns... Two weeks later, on 31 May, the pattern of Begii was repeated in Boojii, where the administrator and the cadre together with armed soldiers entered the church during service and arrested the young people. Similar action was taken in seven other districts (Eide 2000, 187).

In the beginning, the incidents were scattered, but the pressure gradually increased, and Eide concludes that “due to the harassment the life and work of the Western Synod gradually disintegrated” (Eide 2000:188).

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administration at all levels and in the countryside where they profoundly influenced the committees of the peasant associations (Eide 2000, 110).

<sup>21</sup> Ethiopian Oppressed People’s Revolutionary Struggle (author’s footnote).

<sup>22</sup> OLF – Oromo Liberation Front

Closing the churches was the most viable action. By February 1984, 355 or 94% of all the churches were closed (Eide 2000, 188). Harassment of young people was widespread. Individuals and groups were imprisoned, usually for a short period. In prison, they were given warnings against religious activity and often beaten. Many church workers were imprisoned for months. Travel permits were difficult to obtain. Pastors and Evangelists were forbidden to teach confirmation or other kinds of congregational work, except for visiting individuals. To preach in a closed church was regarded as a severe offence and could lead to imprisonment.

There were also examples of torture:

Among those arrested were the president, Olaanaa Lamuu, the executive secretary, Magarsaa Guuta, and three others. After staying in Gimbii for a week they were transferred to Naqamte and kept in the investigation prison known as 'Daniel's den'. Here they were severely tortured: 'I was hung over a pole with my feet up for three hours at a time. They beat me under my feet until I couldn't walk. They tried to force me to admit things I never had anything to do with' (Eide 2000, 191).

Eide (2000) compares the situation in the different synods and concludes that "the pattern of harassment of the Evangelical churches was almost the same all over Ethiopia, consisting of closing of churches, imprisonment of workers and elders, severe restrictions imposed on young people and the confiscation of property such as houses and cars" (Eide 2000, 199). However, the situation in the western synods was more serious: "The reason why the repression of the two synods in western Wallagga seemed to be more serious than other places was the suspicion of the government, from 1980 onwards, that they were actively supporting the emerging Oromo nationalist movement" (Eide 2000, 199).

On the national level, the church leadership also faced serious persecution. Gudina Tumsaa, General Secretary of the EECMY, was arrested three times in 1978 and 1979 (Eide 2000, 177-178). The last time, in July 1979, he was executed. The night before, Patriarch Tewoflos and 38 others had been killed. In 1981, the head office of the EECMY was confiscated. About 60 persons worked in this head office. Before that, the government confiscated many institutions, like schools and a radio broadcasting institution.

### ***2.2.3 Reasons for the repression***

As stated above, Mengistu had to rely on traditional Amharic nationalism to legitimise his regime. In addition, for military and political reasons, he sought an alliance with the Soviet Union and the result was that Marxism-Leninism was introduced into Ethiopia. The reasons for the repression could be found in what was seen as opposition to those ideologies or, on a more fundamental level, what was seen as a threat to a unified Ethiopia.

Eide (2000) analyses the reasons *given by the government* for the repression of the Evangelical churches as follows: “Roughly these reasons fall into two categories. Throughout the whole period of repression, Ethiopian prejudices against faiths alien to Ethiopian tradition were exploited. From 1981, however, the propaganda in more or less official statements by authorities at the political centre was related to possible political connections between the church and opposition groups of the western periphery” (Eide 2000, 200).

In the first stage, the conflict had clearly ideological aspects. Evangelical Christianity was accused of being an imported religion alien to Ethiopian culture. Later on, the religion was linked to “anti-revolutionary action” and especially in the west, allegations were made to link the synods to the OLF. Eide concludes this issue by stating that: “The most common reason given for arrests of leading church people was their alleged complicity in counter-revolutionary activity. But no evidence was ever advanced” (Eide 2000, 206).

The political aim of the regime’s policy towards the religious communities was to control the religious leaders and through that to control the people. This aim was achieved with the EOC and to some extent with the Muslim community. But the Evangelical Churches and the Roman Catholic Church was reluctant to being exploited for political purposes. Eide concludes that:

The government’s use of the ideology of scientific socialism as a basis and justification for the persecution was held in check for some time, until it became apparent that the Evangelical churches would resist control by the centre. When the pressure increased at the end of 1978, it was motivated by a need for a cultural revolution. The evidence gives us reason to believe that the government exploited the traditional prejudices against the Evangelical churches in order to weaken them (Eide 2000, 174).



The next chapter deals with how the church and the church members reacted towards the repression.

### ***3.2.4 Response from the church***

#### **3.2.4.1 Initial support and holistic theology**

Church leaders and members initially supported the revolution and joined in promoting its goal of equity and development:

For the EECMY, with its base in the periphery, the initial stage of the revolution was seen as a time of great reforms and a search for social justice. The church responded to the challenges of the time in a remarkable way, EECMY general assembly in April 1976 was its clear-cut expression. It stands out as a rare and fascinating attempt by a Lutheran church to reflect theologically on a revolutionary situation and at the same time to make a serious effort to change its perspective from reflecting a feudal society towards expressing the objectives of a socialist regime (Eide 2000, 96).

Two leaders were central in the EECMY at that time, President Emmanuel Abraham and General Secretary Gudina Tumsa. The two leaders had very different backgrounds. Emmanuel Abraham was elected president of EECMY in 1963, a position he held for the next 22 years (Eide 2000, 58). From 1963 to 1974, he worked as a cabinet minister. Before that, he also worked in diplomacy. His position as a member of the cabinet and at the same time president of the EECMY is important in understanding the position of the church in the Ethiopian society. “Working close to centre of political power in Ethiopia, on several occasions he was able to counter allegations against the EECMY by the patriarch and other men of influence. When Evangelical Christians were persecuted he made his influence felt and stopped it” (Eide 2000, 59).

On the other hand, Gudina Tumsa was the most profiled. He identified strongly with the oppressed and persecuted. From his childhood, he had seen how evangelists were persecuted and how the Amhara administration misused ordinary people; consequently, he developed a very strong commitment against injustice and exploitation. While studying in the USA, he developed a critical view on foreign missionary patronage and worked towards independence for the EECMY, both theologically and in practice. EECMY responses to the revolutionary changes were to welcome a secular state with religious freedom. This demand for religious autonomy could be seen not only as a reflection of the resistance the EECMY members experienced from the EOC, but also as a criticism of the Amhara/EOC dominance itself.

The church arranged seminars throughout the country to explore the relationship between Socialism and Christendom (Andersen 1980, 61), and the members worked to find a platform that could guide the church actions. An important statement from Gudina Tumsa about choosing a holistic approach reflects this theological programme:

Holistic theology is an effort in rediscovering total human life. Apolitical life is not worthy of existence. Uninvolvement is a denial of the goodness of creation and of the reality of incarnation... In our continent what is prevalent is the basis to define economic policy, agricultural development, foreign relations – politics decides who should die and who should live. African theology should develop a political theology relevant to African political life (Eide 2000, 119).

### **3.2.4.2 Resistance and persecution**

During the first years of the revolution, the atmosphere changed from support to an increasing worry. The reason was the development towards Marxism and the red terror, and the worry was not unfounded. Gudina Tumsa was regarded as a very influential person by the regime and he was asked to work for them (Eide 2000, 176). In June/July 1979 Tumsa wrote a letter which can be called his “last will and testament” (Tumsa 2003, 1). It was titled “The Role of a Christian in a given Society”. Here he describes how Christians are responsible to both God and man. In his conclusion he says that:

It has been stated that a Christian is a citizen of a given country and as such under the laws and policies of that country. Because he is under the laws of the country of which he is a citizen, it is his duty to pray for the peace of that country and cooperate with his fellow-citizens for its well-being. The only limitation to his cooperation or obedience to the laws of his country is if he is commanded to act contrary to the law of God (Acts 5,29) (Tumsa 2003, 12)<sup>23</sup>

He refused to cooperate with the regime. During his arrests, he was extremely interrogated. As time passed, it was clear to both him and his closest friend that to stay in Ethiopia was extremely dangerous. However, he decided to stay although it was arranged for him to go to Tanzania. He was caught on the evening of 28 July 1979 and killed the same night.

The new Marxist policy was implemented on all levels. Young cadres with Kalashnikovs were sent to different associations to proclaim the advantages of Marxism. A culture of informing was created and the consequence was an intense feeling of suspicion and fear. It

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<sup>23</sup> See also The Gudina Tumsa Foundation (2003) *The Life and Ministry of Rev. Gudina Tumsa* for a collection of lectures on Rev. Gudina Tumsa's life and ministry.

was especially difficult for young Christians. They were engaged in sports activities and forced to attend meetings with the result was that “[p]erhaps as many as one-third of the young people left the church” (Eide 2000, 219).

Eide informs that:

Faith in Ethiopia is lived as community life. The closing of the churches and the ban on private group meetings was an assault that went on the heart of religious life in the Western Synod...If we also take into consideration that many church members were illiterate and that only a limited number of them had access to a Bible, we may imagine the deep effect of church closures” (Eide 2000, 221).

Eide also quotes one of his respondents: ”The ten last years have been a special experience for the congregation. Before the revolution it was easy to become a Christian. Since the persecution started it has been very difficult. In many congregations there are only a few left” (Eide 2000, 221). In most congregations, a few were left and they lived their life of faith in secret. They gathered in private homes and usually changed the meeting place each time. On market days, pastors went to the market where they met their congregation members and talked with them there.

However, many pastors, that is over 50%, did not tend for their members by visiting them after the churches were closed. One reason for that was that the pastors were recruited among well-educated people. They were paid rather high salaries compared to the peasants. In that way, they were not very well integrated into the congregations and their salaries were financed from abroad. Another reason was that some of them lived away from their congregations and severe travel restrictions made it difficult for them to move. Still another reason was that the pastors were paralysed, not by restrictions, but by fear. They were educated and they understood the radicalism of the communist government better than the peasants and were afraid of what could happen to them (Eide 2000, 224). The new platform that was developed in 1976-77 also included lessening the dependence from outside. One consequence of that was to lower the highest salaries (Andersen 1980, 69). This reform created a lot of tension in the church. Instead of accepting what was decided, some pressed for higher wages, and some also accused the church (Eide 2000, 225).

The gravest outcome was that some workers also joined in the campaign against the church. They became atheists and informants and even joined the party at the same time as they received salaries from the church. (Another matter that created conflicts was that the church

had to continue to pay salaries in institutions the state had confiscated. The church tried to negotiate with the state to agree on how to hand over institutions, but usually in vain.)

How was the persecution understood or interpreted by the church? Eide (2000) explains that the EECMY did not develop a theology of persecution and martyrdom, and says the reason for that was that it was perhaps too dangerous to discuss an issue like that, even at a theological seminary. In some charismatic groups, persecution was seen as a sign of the Spirit, and imprisonment was seen as an honour. This was not the case in the EECMY. Among ordinary people, the situation was often seen as punishment from God. But inside the EECMY, a quotation may serve at least as one expression of how persecution was understood: “Suffering is to be understood as a time of testing, as a possibility of rejoicing for being chosen to share in Christ’s sufferings, as an opportunity of witnessing to the world” (Eide 2000, 229).

Another quotation sums up a common opinion of what happened in the church during the heavy persecution:

Many left out in fear. Many become stronger. Persecution works this way: One group becomes weaker. The other group becomes stronger. Those who kept close to God became stronger. Before they prayed once a day, now they kneel down four times a day. They talk about God all the time. Prayer has become very important to us (Eide 2000, 228).

During the first years after the execution of the general secretary, the church kept a low profile concerning all the problems they faced. But at the end of 1980, a letter was sent to the authorities (Eide 2000, 182). The letter listed many violations against the church and assured that the EECMY was not involved in any subversive activity. It also drew attention to the fact that the EOC and the Muslims could practice their faith while the EECMY churches were closed. The letter also argued that the repression against evangelical churches would give Ethiopia a bad reputation in the international society resulting in the withdrawal of financial support as a consequence. This letter and many follow-up letters were never answered.

### **3.2.4.3 Cooperation**

Nevertheless, during the years to follow, the relationship between the regime and the church changed to a more cooperative relationship. The most obvious reason for that was the heavy famine that hit Ethiopia in 1984-85. Through cooperation with many international churches

and relief organisations, the EECMY was able to give a substantial contribution to the fight against the consequences of the famine. At the same time, the EECMY was asked to participate in a process to prepare a new constitution. This resulted in a debate about how to relate to the regime, how their image abroad would be affected, and whether cooperation with the authorities would imply a kind of silent acceptance of the former and current oppression etc. The church decided to accept the invitation and participate in a commission. In 1987, the new president in the EECMY (since 1985) was elected as a member of the national parliament (Shengo). This helped him to keep in touch with high officials in the government and in the army. According to Eide, this

cooperation between church and state officials at the centre gave support to church leaders at the periphery who tried to establish better relations locally. However, against the background of local persecution and severe harassment, these attempts were met with criticism by those who had suffered at the hands of the cadres and local officials” (Eide 1996, 302).

During 1984-86, the authorities implemented a resettlement programme<sup>24</sup>. The plan was to move as many as 1.5 million people from famine stricken areas in Tigray to the south-western part of Ethiopia. The plan was motivated by the famine, but observers believed that political considerations were more important. The problem was that the people were forced to move in a very brutal way and that the transport and the living conditions they were offered were very bad. Many died during transportation and many were separated from their families. In 1985, the EECMY made a request to the LWF to assist this programme. The LWF decided to support this request since it was proposed by one of their member churches. The support was to help people who had been resettled. The dilemma was whether this aid would be taken as evidence of support of the governmental policy on the one hand and the needs of the people that have already been resettled on the other hand (Eide 1996, 305).

At the end of 1980s the tensions between the regime and EECMY decreased (Eide 2000, 245) and several churches were reopened.

#### **3.2.4.4 The charismatic movement**

Another important aspect of the situation in the Mekane Yesus Church during the same time was the charismatic movement, as “[o]ne of the most significant and fascinating developments within Mekane Yesus Church during the revolution ” (Eide 1996, 306). This

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<sup>24</sup> See Niggli, Peter, (1985) *Ethiopia – Deportation and Forced-Labour Camps. Doubtful methods in the struggle against famine.*

was a movement among the youth that started in the 60's but accelerated during revolutionary times especially during the 1980's. It was a movement that in many ways was in opposition to the church, but also, in many places, integrated into the church. They did not comply with the legal authorities who had had forbidden prayer meetings, and met secretly. They were also in opposition to the many pastors who collaborated with the regime. Finally, they did not join the OLF, at least partly because the liberation front revitalized some elements from the traditional Oromo culture. The movement had leaders with a high level of authority and they challenged both the organisational hierarchy in the church and its theology.

### ***3.2.5 International relations***

How did the partners of the EECMY react during the period of heavy persecution? During the time of the red terror, the missionary societies reduced their staff in Ethiopia by 77%. As the repression increased again in 1978, Eide formulates the dilemma of the partners in this way: "the question of how to interpret developments and events in Ethiopia, and when to speak up and when to keep quiet, gradually became a most difficult and controversial subject in international and ecumenical forums" (Eide 2000, 207). He also points out the dilemma that arose, because the Ethiopian government permitted foreign agencies to support the victims of drought and war, but not the needs of the suffering Christian community.

In the beginning of 1979, the British Council of Churches passed a press release that gave details about persecution. The criticism was balanced by also notifying the improvements in different areas and the cooperation between the church and the authorities concerning relief work. At the same time, the Swedish Ecumenical Council made an appeal to the government to stop any discrimination and persecution. The allegations towards the Ethiopian authorities were called "calculated malicious lies" (Eide 2000, 208) in an answer from the Ethiopian embassy.

International financial support was channelled through the church and the regime benefited from that.

During 1981-2 churches and agencies were receiving considerable privileges from the government in the development and humanitarian aid sector, while the local church, actually being part and parcel of the same global community, had to experience serious threats and difficulties (Eide 2000, 209).

The cooperating partners had to ask themselves if attention in the media or financial pressure could make any impact.

The strategies chosen were different. The former Berliner Mission missionary, Gunnar Hasselblatt, wrote about the causes of why many Ethiopians fled the country (Eide 2000, 209). The regime saw these writings as evidence of a connection between the OLF and the EECMY. The situation was very serious. Among other things, the regime tried to silence critics through a bomb that went off in Berlin intended to harm the staff of the mission. But the consequences in Ethiopia were also very clear, so clear that the president of the EECMY on several occasions appealed to Hasselblatt to stop using the name of the EECMY in his writings, but in vain. Emmanuel Abraham writes: “Persistence on this matter has led to much suffering in our Church and has virtually paralysed our activities in the interest of the Gospel of Christ in certain areas of this country” (cited in Eide 2000, 210). Eventually, the EECMY decided to terminate the cooperation with the Berliner Mission.

The position of the Berliner Mission was clearly stated in a declaration called “Revolution and Nation, Human Rights and Refugee Relief. A Statement of the Berliner Mission on the Christian Service at the Horn of Africa on 2 March 1982” (cited in Eide 2000, 211). This statement gives an analysis of the current political situation and says among other things that the Oromos look forward to “regional and cultural autonomy”. One important aspect in the statement concerning the relationship between the EECMY and their international partners is the conviction that “statements made by people living and working in the country cannot be taken at face value” (Eide 2000, 211). That is the reason why they could not join together with the EECMY to form a united statement.

The opposite position was taken by another German Missionary Society, namely the Evangelische Missionswerk in Niedersachsen (ELM). In a Counter-Declaration, the ELM argues that the EECMY should have been consulted before the Declaration was made and they state that: “Christian service by different churches should not have any political motivation so that Christian service may not be misunderstood or come into discredit” (cited in Eide 2000, 212). The declaration touches on many of the sensitive issues also covered in the BM-declaration, but the conclusion is the opposite: “To interfere in these internal affairs cannot be the task of foreign bodies” (cited in Eide 2000, 212).

In Norway, too, different approaches were advocated. The Norwegian Lutheran Mission (NLM), which worked in the south where conditions were easier, were very cautious not to aggravate the government and put their work in jeopardy. The NMS, however, which worked in an area of severe oppression, wanted to speak out clearly about the violations against human rights.

International pressure also affected the regime, especially the threat from Sweden and Norway to withdraw relief aid. It seems that pressure from outside hampered actions against the EECMY synods. The cooperation partners were dependant on reliable information and a group of experienced expatriates was established. This group managed to give reliable information to institutions like the LWF and proved its importance many times.

Eide (2000) concludes by describing four options for the partners. In Eide's own words:

The CMCR partners of the EECMY were placed in an extraordinarily difficult situation, in which they had to choose between a number of options. The first option was to deem the missionary and spiritual task all-important. When this task was made impossible, the church should shout the injustices and oppression to the world, or, as seemed to be the policy of the Berliner Mission, regard the violations of human rights as being so serious that their conscience forbade them to keep quiet about what they knew. Publishing their interpretation of the sufferings of the EECMY was an act of political significance at the time. The church, struggling to survive within a totalitarian state, was left with no choice but to break off relations with the Berliner Mission.

The second option was therefore to make use of opportunities, and not put them at risk by provoking the government by exposing violations of human rights. This would mean continuing to provide humanitarian assistance, but remaining silent about the oppression, hoping that the government, because of the assistance, would be more lenient with the local church. The official policy of the EECMY came near to this and this approach was supported by most of the missionaries in the country. The very careful counter-declaration of the ELM and the official stand of the NLM seemed to support this approach. However, when it came to actually speaking out against the persecution, both missions worked in cooperation with the LWF and other missions.

The third option was an integrated approach in the form of rendering all possible humanitarian assistance, but using it as a means of pressure or a bargaining point vis-à-vis the government. Although this approach was voiced in the media in Europe, it was not deemed to be useful by anyone who knew the character of the Ethiopian politics.

The fourth option was to offer any kind of humanitarian assistance on the basis of need, with no strings attached, and at the same time voice the injustices and oppression taking place, and publicly express concern for the church. This was



the policy chosen by CMCR partners in cooperation with LWF until 1985. They stuck to the facts, without attempting any interpretation of them, and at the same time they documented their good intentions towards Ethiopia. This approach proved its worth on several occasions (Eide 2000, 216-217).

For South Africa and Ethiopia, only a limited period is presented. The next chapter is about Egypt and the Coptic Church. Here a much longer time span is used. This is because the history of the Orthodox Church can be traced back to almost two thousand years ago and because their situation, after the Muslims became a majority, alternates between periods of heavy persecution and milder discrimination. Moreover, it is necessary to understand this history in order to understand the present day situation.

### **3.3 Egypt**

The Coptic Orthodox Church has roots all the way back to the very beginning of Christianity. As it the Coptic Church has a long experience of working under authoritarian regimes, a more thorough historical review is taken here than for Ethiopia and South Africa. This outline starts with the church history and then returns to the church's situation today, after taking a look at the role of the state. The focus will be on the Coptic Church, but the situation for other churches will also be mentioned.

#### ***3.3.1 The history of the Coptic Church***

The history of the Coptic Church can be divided into the following periods (Thorbjørnsrud, 1989):

<i>:The golden age of the Coptic Church</i>	(ca.60 AD - 451 AD)
<i>Isolation</i>	(451 AD - 1956 AD)
<i>Minority under Islam</i>	(642 AD – to the present)
<i>Apostasy and decline</i>	(642 AD – to the present)
<i>Reforms and revitalisation</i>	(ca. 1870 – to the present)

##### **3.3.1.1 The Golden Age of the Coptic Church**

The Coptic Church draws its history all the way back to the holy family's travel to Egypt. The Evangelist Mark, who became a martyr, is considered to be the first patriarch in an unbroken line of 117 patriarchs (Meinardus, 1999). According to tradition, the Coptic Church was

founded when the apostle Mark began to baptise in Alexandria, in approximately 60 AD. At that time, Egypt was part of the Roman Empire. In the Upper Egypt, fragments of the Gospel according to John have been found written in Coptic, dated approx 100-200 AD. In Egypt, the transition to Christianity happened in an atmosphere of a break between the traditional Pharaoistic religion, Hellenistic religion and Greek philosophy. The Christians founded their first educational centre (Didascalia) in Alexandria as early as the second century (Meinardus 1999, 38). The education emphasized Christian theology and Greek philosophy. Thus, Christianity gradually became the dominant religion in Egypt.

According to Coptic sources (Marcos Marcos, 2008), the Coptic mission was active in Africa, Arabia, Persia, India and Europe before the church meeting in Chalcedon in 451 AD. Tradition also states that the apostle Mark together with the Copts travelled with the Gospel to Pentapolis (five nations in North Western Africa). In Ethiopia, Christianity became the state religion, and a bishop was appointed and ordained in Alexandria in the fourth century. Coptic missionaries came to Great Britain and Ireland long before Augustine of Canterbury in 597 AD.

The first persecution of Egyptian Christians (284-311 AD) was effectuated by the Roman emperor Diocletian (Moseid, 2002, 7). Consequently, the year 284 AD is referred to as “the year of the martyrs”, Anno Martyrum (A.M.), and is the beginning of the Coptic calendar. Martyrdom became closely tied to the possibility of salvation, and the martyrs became heroes and characters to look up to, and it gave strength to Christianity. Apart from the martyrdom, asceticism was counted as the highest form of devotion to God.

Persecution resulted in many people moving out to the wilderness. Empty graves and mountain caves became a refuge for men and women who wanted to live according to the Gospel, which stated: Sell all your positions and follow me (Luke 18:22). The first Christian monasteries were founded at the same time. According to the religious historian Kari Vogt (1984, 5), there may have been as many as 7.5 million Egyptians at that time, and approximately 3.7 million Christians. Close to half of them “left this world” and moved out into the wilderness. Cloisters and eremite colonies were pillaged by desert tribes, and after the large invasion of desert tribes in 434 AD, the golden age of the Coptic Church was past.

### **3.3.1.2 Isolation**

During the first centuries AD, churches were established all over the Middle East. Alexandria developed into an important junction and in the fourth century, the diocese of Alexandria was one of the most important in Christianity (Hasan 2003, 27). The bishops from Egypt were central in the ecumenical church meetings, namely Athanasius in Nicea (325, the Nicean confession) and Cyril I in Ephesus (431, condemnation of the teachings of Nestorian).

Following the church council in Chalcedon in 451 AD, Alexandria became isolated from the other Christian centres of Rome and Constantinople (Hasan 2003, 28). The Patriarch of Alexandria was dismissed and exiled, the reason being a theological controversy about the nature of Christ. That is, the Egyptians believed that the divine and human nature were melted into one (monophysitism). This did not concur with the majority's conception, which claimed the double nature of Christ (diphysitism). Theologically, the dissension was about the nature(s) of Christ, but it is also claimed that this was a church political battle of powers. According to Fr. Marcos Marcos in his presentation of the Coptic Church, "the real reason was more political than theological. The hidden agenda was to move the papal seat from Alexandria to Rome" (2008, 11).

This theological dissension laid the foundation, according to Hasan (2003), for a permanent separation between the church in Egypt and the rest of Christendom. This had consequences for the theological development in Egypt as well. Alexandria, which had been part of the theological development outside of Egypt, became isolated. Coptic theological literature now became more defensive and conservative (Hasan 2003, 28).

The consequences of Chalcedon were, according to Fr. Marcos Marcos (2008), one of the saddest periods in Coptic history. Having dismissed the Coptic Patriarch, the authorities and the church in Constantinople installed their own Byzantine patriarch. Christian Byzantines, with the help from the authorities, persecuted the Copts and massacred them in their own churches. All attempts at reconciling the parties failed. The Copts were subjected to immense sufferings and therefore saw the Arabian invasion in 642 AD as opportune.

The Schism had extensive consequences. Hasan (2003) writes that the Egyptians' national pride was wounded in Chalcedon and the result was that monophysism became an expression of Egyptian religious nationalism. This condition, it has been said, made it possible for the

Coptic people to unite with the Muslims against other Christian forces from then on and until the period of British occupation before the turn to the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Hasan 2003, 29). The isolation started with Chalcedon. The Copts felt tricked by the other Christians, and fearing domination of other church societies, they retired and acted almost as a national church without formal ties with other Christians until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Thorbjørnsrud 1989, 57).

### **3.3.1.3 Minority under Islam**

The Arabs chased the Romans out of Egypt in 642 AD (Moseid 2002, 8). The term “Coptic” was originally used by the Arabs about the ethnic (and Christian) Egyptians. The word “Coptic” originates from the Greek “Aigyptas”, which was one of the names for Memphis, the capital of ancient Egypt. The Muslims freed the Egyptians from the political bondage of the Roman Empire and from the bondage of Byzantine religion. When the Arabian army had conquered the Romans, the commander promised the Egyptians safety, freedom and that their properties would not be touched. The Coptic patriarch, who had been in hiding, could now stand forth in his official capacity. But the Copts had to accept an agreement of submissiveness under Islam and conversion to Islam came gradually during the years of Islamic rule, and by the ninth century, the Muslims had gained the majority in Egypt (Meinardus 1999, 64).

The conditions for the Copts have varied under the Islamic masters from open tolerance to ruthless persecution. Usually, the “non-Muslims” have been given the following alternatives:

- 1) convert to Islam,
- 2) submit to total subordination in addition to paying protection taxes, or
- 3) suffer the sword (death).

Persecution of the Copts has therefore continued under Islam, especially during the rule of the Mamluks from 1253 to 1517 (Hasan 2003, 32).

In the first two centuries of the Arabian rule, many converted to Islam. However, Christians and Jews basically continued to practice their religion, but with so-called *dhimmi* status. This status implied both a kind of protection and discrimination. During the Arabian rule, which lasted until 1250, the Christians were not much exposed to persecution (one exception was the Fatimids-period under al-Hakim, 996-1021). This changed when Egypt came under the rule of the Mamluks, when persecution was concentrated on Christians and Jews.

Egypt came under the Ottoman regime in 1517. During the Ottoman reign, a system was introduced (millets), where the different religions were given a legal function. Religious societies (to begin with, the Muslim, the Jewish, the Greek Orthodox and the Armenian) acted as links between the state and the individuals. They had jurisdiction within their areas, not only in religious matters, but also in civil and criminal law (Pacini 1998, 5).

It is probably necessary to remember the old peace agreement entitled “Covenant of Umar” (Paul Halsall 1996) between Christians and Muslims to understand why this difference in treatment was possible without more opposition from the Christians, and why the Muslim rulers have this discriminating master and ruler attitude. The peace treaty may be seen as the beginning of the asymmetrical power relation between the Christians and the Muslims which has characterised and still is a feature of this relationship in Egypt. This peace treaty was allegedly entered into in 637 AD between Abd al-Rahman ibn Ghanam (a Syrian bishop) and Umar ibn al-Kattab, the second caliph after the Prophet. The agreement is conserved in a Spanish (and probably a more stringent) version from the 11th century. The Christian leader took the initiative to write to the commander and victorious Umar:

In the name of God, the Merciful and Compassionate. This is a letter to the servant of God Umar [ibn al-Khattab], Commander of the Faithful, from the

Christians of such-and-such a city. When you came against us, we asked you for safe-conduct (aman) for ourselves, our descendants, our property, and the people of our community, and we undertook the following obligations toward you: ....

We shall not build, in our cities or in their neighborhood, new monasteries, Churches, convents, or monks' cells, nor shall we repair, by day or by night, such of them as fall in ruins or are situated in the quarters of the Muslims.  
.....

We shall not teach the Qur'an to our children.

We shall not manifest our religion publicly nor convert anyone to it. We shall not prevent any of our kin from entering Islam if they wish it.

We shall show respect toward the Muslims, and we shall rise from our seats when they wish to sit.....

We shall not mount on saddles, nor shall we gird swords nor bear any kind of arms nor carry them on our- persons.....

We shall not display our crosses or our books in the roads or markets of the Muslims. We shall use only clappers in our churches very softly.....

We shall not build houses overtopping the houses of the Muslims....

We accept these conditions for ourselves and for the people of our community, and in return we receive safe-conduct.....

Umar ibn al-Khittab replied: Sign what they ask, but add two clauses and impose them in addition to those which they have undertaken. They are: "They shall not buy anyone made prisoner by the Muslims," and "Whoever strikes a Muslim with deliberate intent shall forfeit the protection of this pact. (*Paul Halsall 1996, 1-2*)

Living through the centuries with this background naturally changes people and their attitudes. Living conditions for the Christians in Egypt were fairly good during, for example the 'Abassids', but as said before, catastrophically bad under many of the Mamluks. The degree of oppression has varied, but the pressure has always been in the same direction, from the Muslims against the Christians. The "Covenant of Umar" is a good example of a historical incident which has been the basis for the Muslim tradition (*sunna*). It should be mentioned here that in the Koran and other Muslim texts (*hadith*), there are many positive verses and traditions about the relationship between Muslims and Christians. But it is evident in the "Covenant of Umar" that anybody looking for textbook reasons to treat the Christians badly, may actually find them. To begin with, other religions were not tolerated, but "the People of the Book" (Christians and Jews) were in a privileged position. The *dhimmi* status gradually became part of society's laws and regulations. When Pacini (1998) describes this privileged position, much of the thoughts from the "Covenant of Umar" can be found. In exchange for accepting Islam as the highest religion and highest political power, the "Dhimmi" people were permitted to stay alive and practise their religion in a Muslim, political context. This freedom, however, constituted clearly defined religious limits, such as: prohibition against public utterances, mission activity, religious processions, Christian symbols in public, ringing of church bells, and also restrictions against building new churches or repairing the old. Furthermore, the *dhimmi* status implied social limits, such as being banned from public positions with political or military power and also having to pay "protection money", the head tax *jizziyah*. In family questions and marriage between Muslims and Christians, Islam was favoured (Pacini 1998, 3).

The *dhimmi* status is not only of historical interest, comments Pacini (1998). It was in practice until the 1800's and still has influence on cultural, social and judicial connections (Pacini 1998, 2). The fact that this status is formally abolished makes the situation for the Christians more unpredictable, according to Cragg (1991). Arabian Christians went from regulated

inferiority under the Ottomans to unpredictability under the new rulers after WW1 (Cragg 1991, 12). Kari Vogt (1986, 58) claims that the Copts are discriminated against both culturally and socially in today's Egypt, and that this is maintained to the full by extensive restrictions and laws.

#### **3.3.1.4 Decline**

Discrimination in the form of religious and social limitations, combined with extra taxes, resulted in the Copts demonstrating repeatedly in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. According to Meinardus (1977), this opposition was beaten violently back and made it even more prestigious for the conquerors to convert the Copts. Many did convert and the Coptic Church lost its vitality. The church, which had apparently been strengthened during the horrendous persecutions under the Romans, seemed to go under during the long-lasting discriminations by the Arabs. Simultaneously, the church was isolated from other Christian churches, which added to the state of its decline. The decline is also reflected in what Meinardus calls a nearly complete absence of theological creativity during the period from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Meinardus 1977, 8).

From the 11th century, the Christians became a minority in Egypt. They were not really persecuted, but the discrimination continued in various ways and they were always subject to the Muslim ruler's goodwill. The Copts therefore developed what is called *quietism* (Thorbjørnsrud 1989, 59). That is, they stayed "quiet" in the place they were given in society and tried to negotiate with the authorities discreetly, often through well-to-do Coptic laymen. Their position was so reduced that they did not dare to provoke the Muslims. Conflicts had to be avoided otherwise the church could be threatened by complete dissolution. They existed more or less on the memories of a glorious past and the rites and dogmas of the ancient church.

But isolation did not mean that all was on hold or in decline. Arabic gradually became the language of the churches as well, and in the 10<sup>th</sup> century the writings of the old church fathers were gradually translated into Arabic (Rubenson 1997, 37). The Arabic common language also opened for cooperation with other Arabic speaking Christians in the Middle East. Moreover, in the meeting of Islam and the philosophy of Aristotle in Arabic, literature blossomed for a short period and the Coptic-Arabic theology developed towards what in the West is called "scholasticism" (the Christian teachings explained with Greek common sense).

Still, the isolation basically bears evidence of decline. Meinardus (1999, 60) gives as an example of the decline that Coptic history writing ceased between the 14<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Church positions were subject to corruption, and theological debates were replaced by political conflicts and intrigues. Inner disputes developed, the monasteries decayed and by the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century the Coptic Church also lost members to other church societies. As Moseid (2002, 9) informs, “Catholic and protestant missionaries from the West had started sending missionaries to Egypt, and part of the Coptic social and cultural elite left the Orthodox Church in favour of the more vital mission churches”. Thus, the Copts felt let down and alone.

### **3.3.1.5 Reforms and revitalisation**

Thorbjørnsrud writes that: “The church was in a crisis. But due to this situation, it managed to introduce new vitalizing initiatives. For the first time in hundreds of years, the church managed to do something to stop its own decline and start the active battle for its existence” (1989, 59). According to Meinardus (1999, 61), a turning point came under Cyril IV (the Patriarch from 1854-61). He was known as the Reformer, and used his time to improve the education for the Copts and to establish schools; one theological school, two girls’ schools and a boys’ school. He started an Arabic printing press, and took the initiative to maintain dialogue with other Christian churches in Egypt (Greek and Anglican). His dynamic character and efficiency drew the attention of the authorities, whereby he was quietly removed from his position (Meinardus 1999, 70).

The period of decline continued through the 19th century. Different Protestant and Catholic mission churches established themselves with aim to educate the Copts (Rubenson 1997, 38). (The Anglican Church’s mission strategy was to gradually influence the Coptic Church from the inside.) At the same time as the Egyptian nationalism was progressing and during the British occupation in 1882, parallel resistance reactions grew in the church. The Copts wanted independence and distance from the mission churches. The lay people in the church especially disliked the increasing competition from the other church societies. Initiatives were taken to reform the church and strengthen the fellowship. A layman movement took over the structural power of the church and in 1874 constituted a “church council” called ‘maglis il-milli’ (Thorbjørnsrud 1989, 60; Meinardus 1999, 70-71). This gradually became very influential on the way the church was organised. The laymen were represented in financial decision-making



and in the law courts of the church, but often landed in opposition to the Patriarch and his theological staff. The layman movement focused on the need for education, and the church established among other things girls' and boys' schools, theological seminaries, charity organisations and journals.

The theological literature blossomed, but with a sting directed against Protestants and Catholics more than the Muslims (Rubenson, 1997, 38). The Copts maintained what they had learned from the mission churches about education and, following the active layman movement, they started Sunday schools for children and youths. What is known as the Sunday school movement, established in the 1930's, has been of vital importance for the development of the church. Children became enthusiastic about the church, and having completed their education, many of them returned to the church and revitalised the monastic life. The monasteries became the spiritual centre and force which has given new life to the present day Coptic Church. Theologically, the scholastic tradition has been held on to and supplemented with the forefathers of the other churches and Western inspired ecumenical theology (Rubenson 1997, 36-38).

In the 1950's, the monasteries started to recruit young monks with a background from the Sunday school movement and often also with a university degree (Rubenson 1997, 39) They were focused on the renewal of the church. Within the Coptic Church, monastic traditions were seen as the ultimate ideal and all bishops were chosen among the monks. In 1959, Cyril VI was elected the new Patriarch. He was a charismatic leader who managed to unite the Copts and their church. He appointed monks as new bishops and reformed the structure of the church. He appointed bishops connected to specific activities, such as an Episcopal counsel for social services, for religious education for children and youths, and for higher studies within the Coptic language and culture (Moseid 2002, 11). In this way, the leaders of the church were constructively reinstated. Laymen lost much of their influence, which was also connected with the state's political encroachment. (See the state under President Nasser).

In 1954, the Coptic Church became a member of the World Council of Churches (Moseid 2002, 19), and has since then had ecumenical cooperation with, among others, the Catholic and Protestant churches. An example of this is the signing of a "Common Christological Declaration" by the Coptic Patriarch and the Roman Catholic Pope in (Vatican, 1973).

### 3.3.2 State power and oppression

#### 3.3.2.1 A short history

During the colonial period, both France (1798-1801) and Britain (1801-1806) had footholds in the country. Egypt became independent in 1806, but was still dominated by the Ottomans until the British occupied the country again in 1882. National revolt threatened when the Ottoman “khedir” (Persian for lord) asked for British protection. The main reason for the British interest in Egypt was the Suez Canal which from 1869 was the British trade route to India. In 1914, Egypt was made a British Protectorate and the connection with the Ottomans was broken. The British appointed Hussein Kamel as Sultan of Egypt. (He was the son of a former Ottoman khedir.) The Sultan’s family later became the royal family of Egypt. In 1922, Egypt officially became an independent kingdom with a parliamentary reign, but was still strongly influenced by the British until 1946.

The following chart shows the Egyptian rulers from a historical perspective:

<i>Independent, ca.30 pharaoh-dynasties</i>	<i>(ca 4-3000 - 332 BC)</i>		
<i>Under the Persian Empire,</i>	<i>(525 - 402 BC) (358 - 332 BC)</i>		
<i>Under the Roman Empire</i>	<i>(332BC - 642 AD) Alexander</i>		
<i>Under Muslims:</i>			
<i>Arabs</i>	<i>(642 - 1250)</i>		
<i>Mamluks</i>	<i>(1250 – 1517)</i>		
<i>Ottomans</i>	<i>(1517 – 1914)</i>		
<i>Under France</i>	<i>(1798 – 1801)</i>		
<i>Under Britain</i>	<i>(1801 – 1806)</i>		
<i>Independent (/Ottomans)</i>	<i>(1806 – 1914)</i>		
<i>Under Brittain</i>	<i>(1914 – 1922)</i>	<i>Sultan Hussein Kamel</i>	<i>(1914 – 1917)</i>
<i>Independent, Kingdom</i>		<i>King Fouad</i>	<i>(1917 – 1936)</i>
		<i>King Farouk</i>	<i>(1936 – 1952)</i>
<i>Independent, Republic</i>		<i>President M. Nagib</i>	<i>(1952 – 1953)</i>
		<i>A. Nasser</i>	<i>(1953 – 1970)</i>
		<i>A. Sadat</i>	<i>(1970 – 1981)</i>
		<i>H. Mubarak</i>	<i>(1981 - )</i>

Source: Wikipedia 2008.

In the period before the military coupe in 1952, the power balance between the king and parliament was not clarified, and the British also played a role. After the coupe, the king had to abdicate. Egypt became a republic and got its first president in 1952, M. Nagib. Not long after, Nasser replaced him and introduced the one party system with the “National Union”. The British left Egypt in 1956, the same year as they lost the war of Suez against Egypt (together with France and Israel). Israel occupied the Sinai Peninsula in 1967. Nasser died in

1970 and was followed by Anwar Sadat. The one party system continued under the new name: “The Arab Socialist Union”. Opposition within the government with sympathies to the West resulted in imprisonments in 1971. Egypt attacked the Israeli occupants in 1973 and forced a UN resolution in Egypt’s favour. This led to a peace treaty aided by USA and total withdrawal in 1979. It was a big victory for Sadat, who in addition received the Nobel Peace Prize. His new relationship to the West led to protests on a national level from the fundamentalist Islamic groups. They felt, among other things, that Sadat did not go far enough in the islamisation of Egypt. Islamists stood behind the murder of the president in 1981 during a military parade in memory of the war in 1973.

Sadat was followed by Mubarak, who reorganised Sadat’s socialistic single party which was renamed “National Democratic Party” and opened for the possibility of multiple parties. (According to the Constitution, parliamentary elections are to be held every 5 years and presidential elections every 6 years. At present (2005) there are 8 political parties in the parliament.) Whether this system is democratic is a matter of discussion. The country declared itself to be an Islamic state in 1956 and a law of 1977 prohibits religious based political parties. This leads to practical consequences for both Islamic fundamentalists and Christian Copts. Neither of them have their own political parties, but both are represented through the other parties. The House of Representatives consists of 444 representatives plus 10 who are appointed by the president. Since the time of Nasser, there has been a tradition that the Copts are represented through the president’s appointments (2005 election: 4 copts, Wikipedia 2008). It would probably cause unrest if a large group of the population, such as the Copts, were left out of the House of Representatives. At present, the Brotherhood has 88 representatives (approximately 20%). This shows that both the Islamists and the Copts have political influence, even though the state prohibits religious based political parties.

### **3.3.2.2 A political period with Islamic good will and Coptic optimism**

The Arabs had early on introduced various prohibitions and regulations to discriminate against the Christian Egyptians. The Christians were always humiliated and reminded of their inferior citizenship (*dhimmi*). But when the European colonialists withdrew, Pasha Muhammad Ali was elected State Leader. He and his descendents during the 19<sup>th</sup> century made life easier in many ways for the minority groups to function in social life (Meinardus 1999, 68). During the last part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Copts gradually increased their judicial and political equal rights. The Jiziyya (protection) tax was abolished and the Christians were

given the possibility of joining the country's military forces. In 1866, during the first Egyptian council elections, the Muslims and the Copts received equal voting rights. However, first and foremost, the Copts' battle together with the Muslims against British occupancy (from 1882) contributed to their further integration in the Egyptian society. During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Copts experienced a period when they were included in the community and were optimistic about changing from second rate citizenship to equal rights. As Meinardus points out, "this was the first time in the history of Egypt that cross and crescent appeared on the same flag. Coptic priests paraded arm in arm with Muslim ulema through the streets of Cairo" (1999, 76). The *Warf*-party here played an important role for the Copts. But in the 1950's, after Nasser became president, the pan Islamic ideas came into focus. The Copts, as non-Muslims, were again marginalised and made anonymous by political Islamism and nationalism. This is still the case.

### **3.3.2.3 Why does the state oppress the religious minorities?**

Ibrahim (2003, 187) informs that the State of Egypt has a religious constitution which favours its own citizens and discriminates against other beliefs. Egypt has a culture of oriental despotism and an omnipotent ruler, a culture for power struggles, invasions and conflicts where religion and politics are woven together. The traditionally authoritarian Egyptian state is challenged and pressed, according to Ibrahim, from two political actors: the fighters for democracy and the Islamic fundamentalists.

The organisation "Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization" has a general formulation, from its 2004 Forum, about *why* Christians are persecuted in Muslim countries. Among others, it is stated that:

There is a prevailing attitude amongst Muslims that *Christians are naturally inferior to Muslims* and should be treated as such(...) Muslims are far superior to all other religious groups. Only Muslims are considered able to be full citizens, and only Muslims can exercise political rule. The God-ordained relationship between Muslims and non-Muslim communities is that of dominant versus subordinate(...) the non-Muslim minorities are seen as weak and shameful (dhimmi). An Islamic revival is seen in the increasing power and influence of conservative expressions of Islam within the Islamic world. (...) as the Wahabbism that prevails in Saudi Arabia. In such an understanding of Islam, Christians are often defined not as protected 'people of the book' (as in mainstream classical Islam) but as rejecters of Islam, pact-breakers or even infidels. (LOP No.32, 2005, 16)

This may well seem as generalisation and falsely draw a picture of Islam that many Muslims do not recognise. Muslim democracy fighters, for example, do not fit into this “Muslim picture”.

Furthermore, the Lausanne report states that it is a widespread conception that “Christianity is a Western faith and is only embraced by Western collaborators (...) [and] spies for the West”. The Evangelical Christians are described as having the closest ties to the West and Western organisations, actively evangelising among the Muslims. The Evangelical Church is therefore accused by the traditional local church communities of being the reason for much of the persecution and isolation that all the other Christians are exposed to (LOP No.32, 2005). Furthermore, there is a long tradition in Egypt for conspiracy theories where Christians (Copts and mission churches) are associated with the West/enemy countries (LOP No.32, 2005, 16). Sadat also accused the Copts openly for wanting independence and their own state (Hasan 203,109).

The development under Mubarak, has, as Ibrahim (2003) has also mentioned, led to a similar hard line between the State and Islamists. On the homepage of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) ([www.ikhwanWeb.com](http://www.ikhwanWeb.com)), Dr. G. Kemaiha, a prominent representative of the MB, criticises the Egyptian State for being tyrannical and dictatorial with despotic attitudes. He warns the State against these “attitudes which may release anger and encourage citizens to denounce their national identity” (ikhwanWeb, interview 15.11.2006).

#### **3.3.2.4 How does the state suppress religious minorities?**

From a historic perspective, the church has been subjected to bloody and violent persecution under the Roman Empire and at times also under the Islamic rulers. Muslim suppression of non-Muslims has, however, mostly been characterised by consistent and permanent discrimination. The laws concerning the *dhimmi* status in Egyptian Law no longer exist. Still, according to Pacini (1998, 2), much of the original intention is still in practice culturally, socially and judicially. The law still justifies the supervision and control of religious minorities.

Two sets of values have in the past two decades influenced the Constitution of Egypt in connection with religious freedom: Islam with its *Shari'a*, and modernism (secular humanism) with its human rights. In Article 2, it is stated that “Islam is the Religion of the

State. Arabic is its official language, and the principal source of legislation is Islamic Jurisprudence (Sharia). President Sadat changed Article 2 of the Constitution in 1980 with one word, making Sharia “*the* principle source” for Islamic legislation and not as previously “*a* principle source” (Forum 18, Report “Freedom of Religion” 2001, 78).

In 1990 in Cairo, under the 19th Islamic Foreign Minister Conference, the OIC (Organisation of Islamic Countries) launched its own declaration of human rights (Opsal 2006). The declaration refers to “sharia” in 14 of its 28 articles. Articles 26 and 27 tie the whole declaration to “sharia”. The Cairo Declaration is in form and shape similar to the Universal Declaration of the UN, but in addition to be overruled by *sharia*, it leaves out the rights to religious freedom for Muslims.

In practice, the various forms of oppression are listed as follows:

1. Prohibition against apostasy (defection) and no right to change religion.
2. Problems connected to building and maintaining church buildings.
3. Restricted admission to the work-marked, higher official positions and military duty.
4. Censorship of public information (in favour of Islam); press, TV, internet.
5. Turning a blind eye when injustice is done.
6. Forced cooperation.

Source: US Department of State Report 1993

#### 1. Apostasy (defection), no right to change religion

In theory, neither the constitution nor the civil or penal codes prohibit change of religion. But Muslims who wish to change their religion meet both civil and Islamic restrictions. Sharia, the source of all legislation, refers to *Hadith*, where the Prophet said: “He who forsakes his religion, kill him”. For Muslims, it is a disgrace to have an apostate in the family. The family is therefore often the biggest threat for Muslims who wish to change religion. For example, a Muslim wife is required to divorce an apostate husband (Law no. 25 of 1920); converts from Islam lose all inheritance rights (Law no. 52 of 1929); and they also lose custody of their children (Law no. 77 of 1943). No similar legal consequences befall converts from Christianity to Islam.

Since converting religion is not illegal in Egypt according to law, it is controlled by using ID-cards, which have three alternatives to religion. Converting from Judaism or Christianity to Islam is permitted. However, converting from Islam, the ultimate (and highest) religion and revelation, is forbidden. Since Egypt does not have separate conversion legislation, the accused is not charged for converting, but for espionage, the reason being the instability of the person's character. If a person is capable of changing religion, then they may also change their national loyalty. Furthermore, the law demands imprisonment of suspected spies without legal procedure or conviction. In addition, it is not a duty to inform the family of a suspect spy about imprisonment. With jails that are based on relatives contributing food and clothing, these type of "criminals" have the odds against them (Opsal 2006).

Muslims converting to Christianity risk being sought out by the SSI (State Security Investigators), who often arrest converts for either insulting Islam or threatening the security of the country. Non-Muslims, converts and Muslim extremists may all be suspected of being a risk for the security of the country and therefore sought out by the SSI. False accusations, casual arrests, interrogations, imprisonment and torture may occur when the state feels provoked or threatened.

## 2. Problems with building and maintaining church buildings

The jurisdiction giving the right to control the church buildings is the Ottoman Hamayoui-verdict from 1856, which was renewed as the Alazabi-verdict in 1934. This verdict states that the president must give permission to build or maintain Christian churches. In 1998, the president delegated this authority to the 26 province governors, but the Coptic leader claimed that this in practice is the same as before. New church buildings need a permit from the president, but this does not apply for new mosques. Churches must not be built closer than 100 meters from a mosque. The Coptic Church feels that these restrictions are very restrictive. Very few applications are approved. There are examples where 30 years have passed before the president has given his permission (Forum 18; Report of February 2001, "Freedom of Religion", 83). It is hard to understand that the church can survive as an institutional organisation in Egypt where all the churches are old and subject to arson and it is almost impossible to get permission for restoration or new constructions. At the same time, many new mosques are built, always with a tower a little higher than any church in the vicinity.

### 3. Limited access to the working market, higher official positions and military service

According to the abovementioned official American report on religious freedom, it is difficult for non-Muslims to get into the working market, get access to higher official positions and the military service. There is no legislation for this discrimination. It is also difficult to confirm this assertion with statistics, as it is uncertain whether there are any statistics available. However, this is claimed from various sources, while the Muslim counterpart claims that everybody competes on equal terms and that the Christians are only trying to get advantages and sympathy due to their minority status. In higher official positions, it is easier to see that the Christian representation is low in relation to their ratio of the population.

### 4. Censorship of public information (in favour of Islam); press, TV, internet

The American report on religious freedom claims that the authorities censor official information in favour of Islam. Christian universities are not permitted. Islam is taught as religion in all state schools, while the Coptic history in Egypt is hardly mentioned. Although Christian universities are prohibited, there are several Christian high schools. The Forum 18 report claims that Christian presence or votes are more or less non-existent in the press and on national TV channels, although there are several Christian essayists in the larger newspapers.

According to the Human Right Watch homepage, President Mubarak is very open and positive to the new Information and Communication Technology (ICT), but in practice private bloggers are censored and harassed by the State Security Police (ISS) when their web pages are unfavourable for the state. Internet cafes are asked to register their users. Using cryptic information demands permission from the state. However, most of the ICT-censorship is ineffective. Human Rights organisations in Egypt say that the internet has given them strength. More and more bloggers are involved in politics. Simultaneously, Egypt has been tied to Interpol's database and the state says that it fears that the internet could be a tool for electronic terrorist recruitment (Human Rights Watch 2005).

### 5. Turning a blind eye when injustice is done

According to the American report on religious freedom, the Christians are subjected to discrimination from both the authorities and groups within the Muslim population. The state discriminates efficiently and grossly by turning a blind eye to the Muslim mob's injustices towards the Christians. This is done, according to the report, by "permitting" violence such as arson, theft, raids, rape, torture and murder. (Islamic extremists use rape as a way of



converting Christian girls to Islam.) It is also claimed that the police quietly watch families execute their own apostates (US Department of State Report 1993).

If the authorities really do turn a blind eye in this way, it would seem that the protective role of the state is unstable and not very dependable for those who are not protected. It would also give the impression that the state in this way practises “split and rule” to balance political unrest and justify its display of power. Bishop Thomas gave an example of this during his visit in Norway in 2006:

Remember the Alexandria rising one year ago. In a small church they were showing a Christian play, which *absolutely did not* contain any confrontation with Islam! But then rumours were spread in the Muslim quarters, there were lies and wild stories about how this play insulted the Prophet. After a while this small church – which nobody had cared about before – was surrounded by as much as several thousand aggressive protestants. One nun was stabbed, several were killed and there were large upheavals in the streets. The police had problems when trying to calm the tempers. – Nobody could have foreseen that this would erupt, so suddenly and without reason. And this is the case: We never know *when* nor *how* this will happen. This creates fear. (Bishop Thomas 2006, 13)<sup>25</sup>

It seems coincidental whether a person is protected or not. It also seems coincidental who is arrested or when there is a rumour about apostasy or mission activity. It is likely to think that the state and the police know about many more than those arrested, but they arrest a few to set a warning to the public.

#### 6. Forced cooperation

The state forces the church to repeat the message of the state that “we are one community”, “nobody is persecuted”, etc. Critical voices in the church against injustice in society are seldom heard, although there are exceptions. The fear of further pressure from the authorities has, as often before, resulted in the Copts “cooperating” and in “quietism”. The Copts have evidently accepted their “quietism”, since this after all has given them the possibility of a dialogue with the state.

According to Moseid (2002), the wealthier lay elite had a central role as the mediator between church and state over a period of time. During Nasser’s reign, the lay elite had their land confiscated and the lay council of the church, *maglis-il-milli*, was forbidden. Nasser

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<sup>25</sup> From his lecture on “Religious Freedom for the Copts today” held in Drammen, Norway, 7<sup>th</sup> November 2006. (Author’s transl.)

negotiated directly with the Patriarch, the charismatic Cyril VI, and thereby transferred the power in the church to the clergy. The civil family rights, which had been tied to the different religious law courts, were under Nasser placed directly under Islamic jurisdiction. The Coptic political influence was considerably reduced after Nasser took over power.

President Sadat (1970) and Patriarch Shenouda III (1971) followed Nasser and Cyril VI. The 1970's were characterised by the Islamic dominance which led to polarising between the Christians and Muslims (Moseid 2003, 12-14). Sadat was more or less on the Muslims' side; however, Patriarch Shenouda broke the traditional "quietism" strategy and protested openly and actively. The religious unrest increased and in 1981 the president dismissed the patriarch. After living in exile for three and a half years, the patriarch was reinstated by President Mubarak. Shenouda's will to fight had diminished and the church returned to its traditional "quietism", loyalty to the authorities, and apparently in cooperation and agreement. This example shows how the church is made to cooperate with the state and how the state oppresses a religious minority.

### ***3.3.3 The Church in present day Egypt***

#### **3.3.3.1 The size of the Church today**

The Christians are the dominating religious minority in Egypt today. The Jews have more or less left the country. The number of Christians varies from 6% to 18% of the population, depending on the sources. Official Egyptian figures say 6%.<sup>26</sup> Realistically, the figure is somewhere in the middle, from approximately 10 to 12%, or between 6.2 to 7.5 million of a total population of 62 million.

The main group of Christians in Egypt is the Oriental Orthodox Coptic Church with more than 5 million members. Then, the largest of the smaller minorities are the Catholic Coptic Church and the Coptic Evangelical Church, which both have about 100,000 members each or more. Further, according to Horner, there are a large number of smaller churches with less than 100,000 members (1989).<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Info from Embassy of the Arab Republic of Egypt in Norway. <http://egypt-embassy.no/facts.htm>

<sup>27</sup> Horner, Norman A (1989): *Christian Churches in the Middle East*. (p.104-105.)

Eastern Orthodox (7,000), Oriental Orthodox: Coptic (5,000,000), Armenian (12,000), Syrian (400), Catholic: Coptic (100,000), Melkite (7,500), Latin-rite (6,000), Maronite (4,000), Syrian (2,000), Armenian (1,000), Chaldean (750), Protestants and Anglican: Coptic Evangelical (100,000), Anglican

The largest churches are all Coptic, a fact that mirrors the ethnical and national identity of the churches.

### **3.3.3.2 Church reactions to the oppression**

#### Reactions to the state's authoritarian discrimination and harassment

Church life is not one-sidedly a product of the state and its harassment. Other factors like culture and social life are in constant change and influence church life. Inner life in the church develops as well, such as power structure, organisation, degree of isolation/extrovert and introvert focus, decay, apostasy and revitalisation. Looking at the historical overview, some reactions to the state's systematic discrimination can be listed as follows:

Isolation (apparent indifference to the public social life, but inner strengthening of the minority community)

Quietism (loyalty towards the authorities, apparent cooperation and agreement)

Decline (survival due to the church's traditional role as a cultural bearer)

Apostasy (converting to Islam)

Emigration (establishing Coptic churches in the Diaspora)

Revitalising (monasteries, asceticism and inner life; social, health and educational possibilities)

Openness (ecumenical and international).

#### Asceticism and spiritual focus

Thorbjørnsrud (1989, 70-71) sums up the church reactions as follows:

The Coptic church identifies itself with a church which most of the time has stood alone against persecutors and oppressors. The church members contemplate their long and complicated history with pride. (...) Persecution, God's cleansing and their own obedience and ability to subject themselves to God's almightiness, problems, defeats and their ability to once again assemble in the church and for their God, - all this seems to be the essence of the history as the Copts see it. This essence is the foundation of their collective identity.(Author's transl.)

She also says:

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(1,000), Other protestants (Assemblies of God, Christian Brethren, Free Methodist, Gospel Preaching Church, Pentecostal, Seventh-day Adventists, Church of God, Armenian Evangelical, Churches of Christ) (32,000). TOTAL: 5,261,000

The Copts have rarely gone into open conflict with the Muslims. Instead, they have outwardly followed a strategy of unity, - and within the church turned their attention to the spiritual world., and still have a strong contemplative character. The ascetic ideal of the golden age have remained dominating. In the same manner has their strong ideology of martyrdom given meaning to the trials they have felt and been subjected to... suffering may be seen as a privilege (Thorbjørnsrud 1989, 68).(Author's transl.)

This is in accordance with the Bible and what the church teaches about persecution and oppression; Matthew 24, 9-10: "You will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other."

#### Welfare and organisational work

When the Coptic Church became revitalised in the 20th century, this is basically because of the inner spiritual renewal, the lay movement, the monastic life and the Sunday School movement. Furthermore, the church focused on the inner renewal of its organisational structure and work. The social work of the church grew. The work was often done in the church centres, offering among other things child care, health centres, after school activities, Christian bookshops, Sunday school and meetings. This resulted as a reaction to the increasing social and economic problems in society and the increasing influence of Islamism. Simultaneously, asceticism and non-secular ideals were being held onto (Thorbjørnsrud 1989, 69).

#### Political involvement

The main trend in the Copts' reaction pattern when meeting oppression has been "quietism"; that is, an introverted "be silent and endure" strategy. Still, there was wide extrovert political optimism and activity among laymen in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (the Warf party). This was strangled by the growing Islamism under Nasser. The Muslim militant movement, the Muslim Brotherhood, got its equivalent in the 1940's through the organisation called "the Coptic Nation". Mentioning the use of paroles in these two militant movements may be of interest. The Brotherhood's parole was: "One religion and not two religions, henceforth no cross". The Copts' parole was: "God is our King. The Bible our constitution. The gospel is our law. Egypt is our country. The Cross is our flag. Martyrdom for Christ is our hope." (Thorbjørnsrud 1989, 68-69). The Coptic Nation organisation took responsibility for kidnapping Patriarch Joseph II in 1954. The patriarch was publicly accused of

mismanagement and the kidnapping led to his dismissal (Meinardus 1999, 77). Both organisations were forbidden, and later political parties based on religion were prohibited. Today, Islamists and Copts are represented in the parliament as individual members of various non-religious parties.

### The Patriarch protests

Under Sadat (1970-1981), the polarisation between Christians and Copts increased. Several researchers have made a point of how the defeat in the war in 1967 against Israel started a national, religious self-examination. The Islamists mobilised and Sadat gave them his support (Moseid 2002, 13). As Hasan (2003, 105) informs:

In casting about for an antidote to the leftist forces that had tried to unseat him in 1971, he found it politically expedient to lean on the religious forces. One of the unintended consequences of this marriage of convenience was the growth of the power of Islamic militants, of which not just the Christians but he himself was ultimately to be the victim.

Towards the end of the 1970's, the religious contrasts increased. This resulted in violence, with churches and mosques being burned, shops raided and people killed. What was new was that the patriarch, Shenouda III, confronted the authorities. Muslim Groups accused the Copts of alliances with foreign powers, wanting to split the nation and make their own nation (Moseid 2002, 13). Hasan (2003, 10) continues:

When Sadat, among others, accused the Copts of trying to set up a nation of their own, he was not wrong. The nation, however, was not a geographical entity with a capital in the Upper Egyptian province of Assuit, as he conceived it. Its topography was invisible to him, because it lay in the religio-cultural realm. The politics Copts were engaged in was a different sort of politics, namely the *politics of identity*.

The relationship between the patriarch and the president became critical and in 1981 Shenouda was dismissed by Sadat and exiled in one of the desert monasteries (Meinardus 1999, 85). This strengthened the solidarity within the church. But when President Mubarak reinstated Patriarch Shenouda in 1985, the patriarch had taken the traditional attitude towards the authorities. Hasan (2003, 113) asks: "The question, then is why the church tactics shifted from confrontation to conciliation?", and answers: "(...) there are examples of persons being released from custody because of diplomatic efforts by the pope or the bishops".

But the patriarch was in no way brought to silence. Meinardus (2002, 81) points to Shenouda's great effort in rebuilding desert monasteries in the Nile Valley following his

exile. He has also criticised the Copts abroad as well as American reports which give a negative picture of the church situation in Egypt. He means that this is damaging for the Christians' situation in Egypt both in the short and the long term. One of Shenouda's trademarks as a patriarch has been to hold an open question time before the bible study every Wednesday night in his cathedral in Cairo.

### Back to "quietism" and a hope of democracy

The church's traditional way of handling its situation as a minority has been to show loyalty with the authorities, apparent cooperation and agreement. The status as minority is ignored in favour of national unity. Instead, the Copts state their political views by focusing on the state's responsibility concerning the equality of all citizens. As Hasan (2003, 18) comments:

An interesting aspect of the Copts' response to political and cultural developments in Egyptian society is that in defending their rights, they do not insist on the fact that they are a minority whose rights must be defended, but on the State's responsibility to guarantee *equal rights to all citizens*. For this reason the Copts emphasize their adherence to the national cause and insists that both Coptic identity and Muslim identity should contribute equally towards the construction of Egyptian national identity.

The state of Egypt has since 1922 been judicially a Muslim state. Today, the Copts work for a separation between state and religion, and as much as they may be called politically active, they stand up as advocates for democracy. Ibrahim (2002, 267-268) states that:

The main actors in the Egyptian drama have remained the same: *the state*, Islamic activists, and democracy advocates. The state, the strongest of the three actors, has yet to fully emerge from a form of centralized rule that Weitfoggel labelled 'oriental despotism', in which the entire polity revolves around an omnipotent ruler. *Islamic activism* has been for the last quarter of the twentieth century the second strongest actor in the Egyptian drama (and for that matter in the region). In some ways, Islamic activism is a mirror-image of state despotism, but with its own brand of religious cosmetics, which makes total submission to God only one step above total obedience to a human 'Commander of the Faithful'. ... *Democracy advocates* are the weakest of the three... Instead of viewing them as an ally against extremism, the state has repeatedly repressed democracy advocates... The Luxor event (17. Nov. 1997) dramatized a national crisis of governance, the American event (11. Sept. 2001) a global one. ... extremism cannot be quelled by prisons and security apparati alone. The way forward lies in democratic opening, genuine respect for individual rights, and the creation of participatory public space for all citizens. ... The dilemma of Egypt at the start of the third millennium is that of a regime reluctant to democratise the country and meanwhile unable to stamp out or accommodate Islamic activism.

Through the many political changes in Egypt during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there are many who have lost their faith for a future in Egypt and have emigrated. Many Copts have also reacted to the continuous religious discrimination by giving over to the Muslim pressure and converting to Islam.

### Converting to Islam

It is impossible to convert from Islam, but easier to convert to Islam. In a poor community, it may be tempting to obtain a new identity card with religious status as a Muslim, to avoid discrimination in education and in the work market (LOP: Nr 32 2005, 17). With growing Islamism and religious polarisation, the fear of harassment, violence and criminal actions may be real. This also applies to the fear of the authorities' persecutions and imprisonments. Because of this some choose to convert, others to emigrate.

### Emigration and emigration churches

According to Meinardus (1999, 129): "They leave, talking not of greener pastures elsewhere but of closed doors at home," and MacMillan (2006, 159) informs that the percentage of Christians in the Middle East has decreased from 15% to 4% over the last hundred years.

Due to the population increase, the number of Copts in Egypt has not been reduced, even though the percentage of the population has been reduced by more than two thirds in less than one hundred years.

Egil Fossum (2003, 30) writes that "Christianity is leaving its childhood home" and that "the Christians who remain in Egypt fear emigration or plan to emigrate themselves. If you ask what the main problem is for the Christians, the answer is 'emigration' for both layman and learned. The end is not in sight".

As early as the 1960's, the Coptic Church in Egypt reacted by appointing its own bishop with responsibility for the Copts and the growth of the Coptic Church abroad as well as supplying them with clergy (Meinardus 1999, 129). These churches have grown and today consist of an important part of the new life of the Coptic Church, which is changing from national isolation to an international Christian community.

### Ecumenical work

The situation for the Copts became much worse when Nasser gained power in 1953. It seems possible that the harassment by the regime in the Copts' disfavour has resulted in the church feeling a need for contact and support from other Christians outside of Egypt. As early as 1954, the Coptic Orthodox Church became a member of the World Council of Churches. From the 1970's, the Copts led by their Patriarch have taken part in a number of theological debates, conferences and communications with other churches. The Copts have now been accepted as Orthodox Christians by all other Christians (Meinardus 1999, 123).

Today the Coptic Church and its monasteries are using modern computer- and communication technology and are available for outsiders in completely new ways. This new openness has, in addition to the ecumenical community, also led to an international community by establishing emigration churches and concentration on mission work.

### ***3.3.4 International relations***

#### **3.3.4.1 From isolation to openness**

During and after the colonial period, the Copts were not open for allegiance with either the French or the British "Christian" occupants. Besides that, the occupants were more concerned about politics than religion, while the Copts identified more with the national freedom movement. However, following the Western occupation, tenacious conspiracy theories suspected the Christians for being in allegiance with the West. The Christians were potential spies and enemies of the state. Cragg (1991, 121) informs that it was also an "opportunity of European powers to take Christians into protégé status, the protected of foreign 'protectors'".

Many European countries developed trade and political connections with the Ottoman Empire. In this connection, the "millet" system was important. Close connections developed between Europe and the Christian communities and the Ottoman Empire. A consequence was that they had access to and were influenced by European culture, and they improved their economical standard of living through their trading companies.

After a while, the mission activities (run by Catholic and Protestant churches) also contributed to "The Eastern Christians" meeting with modern life. Western mission work in the Middle



East in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries basically consisted of health and school work. As Cragg (1991, 7) informs:

The missionaries established a network of health institutions and schools through which they contributed enormously towards cultural development and the improvement in the standard of living of Arab Christians in particular, who were offered access to modern education locally.

#### **3.3.4.2 Cooling relations with Western mission churches**

Western missions appeared more vital than the Coptic Church and obtained recruits from them. The Patriarch Demetrius II (1862-70) created an unfavourable atmosphere in the church, which to a certain extent prevails, by judging the new churches and their members as heretical (Meinardus 1999, 70). The Lausanne Committee Report (LOP No. 32, 16) shows that the distance is still present between the traditional church and the Western mission churches. The report states that the Evangelical Christians have the closest ties to the West and that they are the most active in evangelising among the Muslims. The traditional church therefore accuses the Evangelicals of being the reason for the persecutions which befall all Egyptian Christians of today.

The contrasts may also be seen when Fossum writes about his meeting with a group of Copts in Shubra: “There are many people wearing a cross in Shubra. A group of men and women ... straight behind them stands a church from the 50’s in total decay, large flakes of grey masonry lie on the ground. ‘What church is that’ I ask. A man laughs: ‘Evangelical...’” (Fossum 2003, 38). This Copt’s laughter over a decaying Evangelical church may be interpreted as a public and negative attitude to the West, and perhaps even towards the Western mission churches.

#### **3.3.4.3 International partners**

Thanks to the revitalisation in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Coptic Church today appears with a large degree of integrity and openness. The Church has more or less controlled its building of international networks, and has, according to Meinardus, during the previous fifty years developed from a national to an international Christian community. In this process, the Church has emphasised international work in connection with:

- 1.- *ecumenical recognition and community,*
- 2.- *establishing emigration churches,*

3.- *separate Coptic mission work in Africa,*

4.- *Copts in Jerusalem*

(Meinardus 1999, 122-141).

In addition, the Copts have also experienced getting support from:

5.- *human rights organisations.*

These points are explained below.

### 1. Ecumenical recognition and community

After splitting up in 451, there have been sporadic attempts at dialogue and recognition between the Copts and the Roman Catholic Church ever since the 15<sup>th</sup> century. (Meinardus 2002, 123-129) As mentioned before, the Coptic Church became a member of the World Council of Churches in 1954. At the beginning of the 1970's, Patriarch Shenouda took the initiative to conduct theological conversations between the Coptic Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic, the Greek Orthodox and the Oriental Orthodox churches. In 1973, for the first time since the split, the Coptic patriarch visited the Pope in Rome. They agreed on a common understanding of the formulation on the nature of Christ provided by St Cyril from the 5<sup>th</sup> century. In 1991, Shenouda invited 120 bishops and theologians from all the abovementioned churches to a gathering in the St. Bishoi monastery with the intention of being done with the split of 451 once and for all. During the past thirty years, the Copts have through dialogue and innumerable conferences and meetings been united to a large extent with the other orthodox churches. In this respect, they have gained a position in the international church and have become a visible and active part of the worldwide church.

### 2. Emigration churches

Since the 1950's, the Copts have emigrated in large numbers, most of them to the West. Many of them have also moved to other countries in the Middle East, such as Lebanon, Jordan, the Gulf States and the Emirates (Meinardus 1999, 129-131). In the 1960's, the Copts obtained their own bishop with the responsibility of planning and following up the emigration churches. The first Coptic clergyman was sent to the USA in 1965 and to Canada in 1967. Today, there are more than 70 Coptic congregations in the USA and Canada. Meinardus (1999) writes that the mainstream to the West goes to USA, Canada, Australia and Europe (Great Britain, France, Germany, Austria, Italy and Switzerland). There are no certain

numbers of how many emigrated Copts have access to or use their own churches abroad. The numbers vary from 300,000 to one million (Dorn-Harder 1997).

### 3. Separate Coptic mission work in Africa

In the golden age of the Copts until 451, they ran mission work and founded monastic communities. There are traces of them along the North African Mediterranean coast (Libya and Pentapolis), in Ethiopia, Palestine, France, Switzerland and Ireland (Meinardus 1999, 132-136). Coptic mission work had a renaissance at the end of the last century. Although it is forbidden to evangelise for religions other than Islam in Egypt, the revitalisation has given strength to go for mission work. In 1962, the “Institute of Coptic Studies” in Abbasiya, Cairo, founded its own mission school. In 1965, the patriarch started using the title of “His Holiness Patriarch Cyril VI, Pope of Alexandria and all of Africa”. In 1976, the church appointed a bishop for mission work in Africa, and today there are African Coptic churches in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Zaire, Zambia, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Namibia, and Sudan as well as the older churches of Ethiopia and Eritrea. The Coptic Church in Ethiopia was founded in the 4<sup>th</sup> century and was subordinated to Alexandria until 1959.

### 4. Copts in Jerusalem

A fourth and still unsolved task has been to clarify the ownership of the holy places in Jerusalem (Meinardus 1999, 136-141). Since the ancient church, the Copts have gone on pilgrimages to the “Holy Land”. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, they established their own bishop and monasteries in Jerusalem. As a result of the 21<sup>st</sup> century’s revitalisation, the twentieth Coptic bishop of Jerusalem was appointed in 1991. Today, Coptic monks and clergy are in Jerusalem as well as in Bethlehem, Nazareth and Jericho. There has been disagreement between the Copts and the authorities in Jerusalem about the ownership of the holy places and buildings ever since the sultans and the Ottoman Empire. Dair al-Sultan has especially been disputed. Ethiopian and Egyptian Copts have argued about the ownership since 1958. In 1971, the State of Israel and the judicial authority were involved. This dispute is still unsolved and is the reason why Patriarch Shenouda still does not allow Copts to go on pilgrimage to Israel.

### 5. Support from human rights organisations

When the Christians in Egypt are subjected to discrimination and violation of human rights, the chances are that they may just as well gain support from international human rights organisations as Christian organisations (Cuomo, Richardson and Adams 2000, 55). A

number of both human rights organisations and church organisations are focused on the political conditions of freedom of faith and speech throughout the world. When Patriarch Shenouda III was disposed and exiled in 1981, national actors reacted and Shenouda was among other things registered as Amnesty International's prisoner of conscience during his exile (Moseid 2002, 14).

International attention (media, diplomacy, letter campaigns) related to violence of human rights in any country gives the authorities a bad reputation and is therefore not popular. This is therefore often the only relative effective, non-violent means in the fight for human rights. Most countries have in various degrees committed to the UN's Declaration of Human Rights. Egypt, as a member of the UN, has not adjusted its own constitution in relation to freedom of faith and the right to convert *from* Islam (Article 18). Although religious rights are drawn up in the secular laws of the country, Muslim countries will in fact interpret legislation in their favour and in the light of religious laws, namely the *sharia*. According to the Lausanne Committee (LOP No. 32 2005, 28), both the Cairo Declaration and the national *sharia* laws must be interpreted with a wish to protect Islam rather than freedom of faith.

It is when the freedom of faith is violated in combination with the violation of other human rights that the Christians in Egypt experience support from international organisations with a focus on freedom of faith, but with different ideological foundations. These may be organisations who have a humanistic human rights perspective, such as HRW (Human Rights Watch), Amnesty International and the Norwegian International Centre for Human Rights, University of Oslo; or a Christian, religious community foundation, such as Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Forum 18, Open Doors and the USCIRF (United States Commission on International Religious Freedom). It may be difficult to place some of the organisations in one or the other category, in the same way as it may be difficult to separate between secular humanism and Christian humanism. Christian organisations may just as well be placed under the above category of *ecumenical communities* as human rights organisations.

Here are two examples (Cuomo, Richardson and Adams 2000) of harassment from the state, which show how political rights and religious (non)freedom may be tied together. In the first example, a journalist and human rights advocate tries to give his support against the injustice which a group of Copts are subjected to. In the second example, a Coptic bishop fights the same battle, but with a different basis.

A journalist and leader of an Egyptian human rights organisation, Hafez Al Sayed Seada, tells how his own right to freedom of speech was violated:

Political rights: The police first arrested me in 1979, at university, because I participated in a demonstration against the government to uphold the rights of students to free association and to work on political issues. They beat me, gave me electric shocks, and tortured me for one month. They kept telling me to reveal who was supporting me, what country or leader was backing me. These scars across my face are from when they pushed me through a window. ... My country had been suffering since the Emergency Law had been declared in 1981. The Emergency Law annuls all constitutional rights – any rights – under international conventions. The press is restricted, independent newspapers and television are banned, and all the other newspapers are owned by the government. The police, security, and intelligence forces enforce this by regularly employing all kinds of torture. ... There are now twenty thousand detainees in prison. They have had no trial, and no charge have been pressed. Recurrent detention is widely resorted to. The emergency Law gives the authorities the right to detain someone without charge or trial for thirty days. But this often extends to six months or more.

Our group (the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights) works with the UN Commission for Human Rights, which condemns the abuses in Egypt. Their support helps, though we know that we will have to pay the cost of this struggle. Look at what happened to me: I went to prison for writing about the torture of the Copts. The government didn't accept our report documenting the abuses so they targeted our organization. But what I wrote are facts. Hundreds of people were arrested. Hundred were tortured in the police stations. We couldn't remain silent and call ourselves human rights defenders. So we published this report and then the government accused me for spying for a foreign country, Britain. They accused me for receiving money from the British Embassy to make the report. (...) If we are not willing to sacrifice, then we cannot complain when we are thrown in jail without reason, without any charge, and without any due process. We can expect no better. Because the fact is that this government doesn't respect the UN Conventions on Human Rights. They don't respect the democratic system. They want only to continue retaining sole political power. (Cuomo, Richardson and Adams 2000, 55-57)

Bishop Wissa's experiences shows how difficult real life can be for the Coptic minority:

Religious freedom. Today, there are nearly ten million Copts living in Egyptian territory who face frequent harassment at the hands of state and local authorities. Bishop Wissa's story is a visceral example of continuous oppression. On August 15, 1998, thirty-five miles north of Luxor, five Muslims from the village of el-Kosheh allegedly murdered two Christians from their community. The police investigating the case went on a rampage, and in the next two months arrested and imprisoned twelve hundred Christians. More than half of the children, women, and men arrested reported being tortured, many by beatings, whippings, and electric shock to ears and genitals. Bishop Wissa witnessed the events in el-Kasheh, his diocese, and personally

interviewed over eight hundred victims. He reported the abuses to Egyptian authorities, human rights organizations, and the international community. On May 9, 1999, the interior minister dropped the investigation and authorities then arrested Wissa and charged him with defamation and other criminal offences. - To this Bishop Wissa says: "Protecting my people is part of my job. This is what I am supposed to do. If you were at your house and someone was beating up your child, wouldn't you stop him?" "In spite of this overwhelming amount of evidence against the police, nobody would prosecute the government." (Cuomo, Richardson and Adams 2000, 172-175)

#### **3.3.4.4 Mission work in today's Egypt**

The Christian church in Egypt is acknowledged by the state as part of the national cultural heritage and permitted as a religious community of faith. It has been mentioned how the many small church communities exist side by side with the Copts and the state, making it difficult to build new churches. The existence of the church is accepted, but evangelising and mission work among the Muslims is prohibited. The Copts have adjusted by focusing on the renewal of their own inner life, bonding with other church communities, and growing through emigration and mission work abroad.

It has been seen how the mission churches from the West have 'overrun' or ignored the Coptic Church during the two past centuries. Consequently, how do the Copts look upon the Western mission churches today? Do the Western mission churches behave as competitors or partners with the Coptic Church? It is difficult to give any answer to these questions since mission activities are forbidden and information is difficult to get hold of. Still, it is noteworthy to point out some of the facts that characterise mission work in modern Egypt.

Modern technology has no country boundaries. It is therefore natural to separate between those who evangelise from outside the country via satellite TV and the internet and those who are present in established church communities or referred to as "tentmakers". There is naturally not much information available about the latter group.

Actors in the "public space" in the form of radio, satellite TV and the internet are more available. A search on the internet, in newspapers and TV programs gives the impression that the number of Arab-speaking TV programs via satellite is growing fast. New stations are being launched, and the more established stations are expanding their repertoire and hours of

broadcasting. The use of the internet and mobile phones has exploded in Egypt.<sup>28</sup> This has also given new possibilities for communication, evangelising, religious dialogue and congregational building. A multitude of private blogs and chat rooms on the internet relate to Christian faith, mission and Muslims. For example KABA's (Christian Work Among Arabs) leader, Paul Johansen, says that he can "talk" to two full chat rooms, each with 500 people, simultaneously, and in this new way spread the gospel to Muslims (Dagen, 2006). Satellite TV with corresponding internet pages and electronic mail courses are part of the mission strategy of today. The Scandinavian Pentecostal movement's media mission, IBRA Media, reports on a fast growing interest for the Christian faith among Muslims in the Middle East. During the past two years, the number of inquiries has increased from 6,000 to 33,000 per month, informs the IBRA leader, Jan Nestvold (Gjerlaug 2007).

The Copts and well-educated monks have also started using modern technology to communicate with the rest of the world. So has the Muslim Brotherhood. The state has certainly, according to the HRW (Human Rights Watch Report 2005) censored blogs and confiscated computer equipment; however, this task seems impossible in the long run. In addition to the internet, the Gospel is broadcast to Muslims in their own mother tongue in widespread areas of the Muslim society via satellite TV, FM, shortwave, long wave, DAB (digital audio broadcast) and net radio. Additionally, Paul Johansen (Dagen 2007), the leader of KABA, has pointed out that converts from Islam are subjected to systematic supervision by the authorities. By using information in a naive way, the Western fellow Christians put the converts in grave danger.

As to cooperation between mission churches and the Copts, it has been difficult within the scope of this report to find information about any cooperation strategies. The theme is sensitive and the information difficult to come by. But seen at a distance, it seems as if the mission churches are characterised more by their own mission enthusiasm, while the Coptic church is mostly engaged in ecumenical cooperation with (and being accepted by) other orthodox churches. Mission churches who wish to establish themselves in Egypt with the approval of the authorities may achieve this easiest by organising themselves under one of the already existing churches. For example, the presence of the Anglican Church has been accepted by the state, but under the supervision of Patriarch Shenouda.

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<sup>28</sup> There are more than 5 mill cell phones  
([http://www.joinafrica.com/Country\\_Rankings/mobile\\_phone\\_africa.htm](http://www.joinafrica.com/Country_Rankings/mobile_phone_africa.htm)).

These statements considering mission work in Egypt closes the presentation of the Coptic Church in Egypt. In the next chapter, material from all the three countries introduced in this report will be used in an overall discussion about the persecution of and discrimination against the Christian Churches.



### ***3 Part III Discussion***

This part tries to link circumstances in the different countries to each other and to more analytical concepts. The suggested format is still the same. It starts with a discussion of the forms and background of repression, then the situation the repression creates in the churches is discussed and the report is round of with a discussion about international partners and the church as a world-wide unity.

#### **3.1 Forms of repression**

Oppression and persecution have many faces and many forms. It embraces, as has been seen, the whole field from torture and killings to (apparently) milder forms like discrimination in working life and restricted freedom of speech. There are also big differences tied to whether the oppressor is the state or whether it passively accepts oppression, or if oppression takes place even though the state (to some degree) tries to oppose it. Often there is cooperation between the authorities or individuals in the state apparatus and organisations that mobilise harassment and even pure terror organisations. In this way, the state, to some degree, avoids being associated with, for example, murder or harassment. Frequently, many forms of oppression occur simultaneously and the state also often varies between different forms of oppression and between tightening up and liberating. A short list of the different forms of persecution and oppression is given under. Reasons and effects will be discussed later. The descriptions provided earlier will be referred to as well as forms which have not been represented so far. But the following list is still probably not complete:

- Killings may be done in many ways. There may be disappearances or murder where others are pointed out as the perpetrator. But there may also be executions with or without a trial.
- Torture, which may naturally vary from the most brutal and destructive to milder forms that do not give permanent physical damages.
- Imprisonment, with or without law or court order. This may be combined with “education”/brainwashing.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> For instance, China: “Harsh treatment may not simply be the result of brutality; it can be a coldly rational way to bring about a compliant attitude. One French priest, Jean de Leffe, tells of this technique in a Chinese prison that he inhabited. The prisoners were made to sit all day in absolute silence to regret for their “sins”. Some days they would write out endless letters of confessions, or discuss the subject of the radio propaganda programs to which they were forced to listen. Three points were the constant subject of their discussion.1) They had to confess their crimes against the regime,

- Arrests and questioning, often repeatedly.
- Obligatory/forced education in the ideology of the regime.
- Surveillance and infiltration, recruitment of informants, informing.
- Discrimination of the freedom of faith by jurisdiction (restrictions, orders and prohibitions).
- Support to “cooperative” church leaders and members.
- Forcing churches to organise in clearly set out and thereby controllable co-operations or unities.
- Prohibition of certain church societies.
- Prohibition or disturbances of meetings.
- Closing churches.
- Prohibition or restricting the building or maintenance of churches.
- Censorship or restricted freedom of speech.
- Restricted freedom of movement.
- Discrimination in work, denied access to parts of the work market and of the educational system.
- Confiscating property, destruction of property.
- Lacking protection against violence from gangs and mobbing.

### **3.2 The background for oppression**

In order to give effective resistance or to be a good partner for the persecuted churches, it is decisive to know the background or reasons tied to the persecution. Who is behind the persecutions and why do they do it? In the following, a short summary will be given of how the situation is understood in the three countries presented earlier. Then, a description will be presented of how to understand the growth of public support which the regimes usually depend upon. Finally, a more general description will be provided of some social characteristics that may be seen as the forces behind persecution and oppression.

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and they had to do this with evident complete sincerity. An incomplete or half-hearted confession would be met with further demands. 2) They had to convince their jailers not only that they had stated all their sins, but that they were regretful about them. 3) They had to prove that the whole charade was sincere by denouncing all their accomplices, including friends and family members” (Schlossberg 1991: 72).

### ***3.2.1 South-Africa, Ethiopia and Egypt***

In the section on South Africa, it was the resistance against the apartheid policy which was the basis for the oppression of the churches. This was not persecution of the Christians, because they were Christian or even religious. Those who were persecuted were supporters of the opposition against apartheid. *The survival of the regime* is a central issue here. To follow this thought, it might be said that oppression was one of several means to achieve political aims.

In *Ethiopia*, however, the situation was more complex. The communist regime was based on a strongly anti-religious ideology. Christians were therefore under pressure to join the communist ideology. Nevertheless, the regime realised that it needed support or at least acceptance from the religious groups to stay in power. By executing the patriarch of the Orthodox Church and appointing a patriarch who supported the regime, the regime gained control of this church and the Orthodox Christians were permitted to continue their activities. The result was that Evangelical Christians were also oppressed by the Orthodox Church. In this way, the situation in Ethiopia becomes multi-faceted, as various connecting reasons act together and give a rather complicated picture.

In *Egypt*, there has been a tradition where the church has subordinated itself to the ideology of the authorities, namely Islam. The regime of today realises that the Christians do not represent any real danger to the power of the authorities. The regime has more to fear from the opposing wing; but unfortunately, any actions against the fundamentalist Muslims will also affect the Christians. More or less for the sake of domestic peace, state initiatives are aimed at the Christians. By balancing the power, they maintain their legitimacy towards the Muslim part of the population as well as toward other Islamic regimes. Furthermore, other outcomes of the persecution have been seen, such as the rejection of family members and the mobs' unchecked ravaging. Social and political unrest also contribute to a generally bigger pressure towards the Christians from the large Muslim majority.

### ***3.2.2 How can persecution get public support?***

It is important to observe that persecution is never static. The extent and the methods will vary over time. Liberation and limitations are influenced by inner conditions in the power structure as well as national and international incidents and trends. To understand the concrete expression of persecution at any given time, it is necessary to have extensive knowledge about

the affecting factors. This also applies when trying to understand how a society can move from having great freedom to becoming a society where oppression and persecution of Christians (or followers of other religions) is widespread. The authorities or the oppressors totally depend on support to continue the persecution. The main question is therefore what they do to gain this support. Boyd-MacMillan (2006) thinks that this change often follows a pattern. Below is an extensive quote to illustrate this:

We think that we will spot a crude ideology of hate, but in practice the persecuting justification is often cloaked in the beguiling lie that is quite popular and appealing. In Nazi Germany one of these successful lies was, "Why can't Germany just be run by Germans, rather than Jews that do not like us?" In modern India the lie was, "We have to stop the Muslims taking over our Hindu country". Even under slogans as apparently innocuous as, "We have to make our country strong," or "We have to make the world safe for our way of life," persecuting ideologies can take a shelter and then arise to make the world suddenly unsafe for religious minorities.

We may think we will be alerted by millions on the march shouting, "Death to Christians!" In reality it does not take millions to create a climate of persecution. Often it is a tiny elite who manipulate some handpicked mobs, and they manufacture a chaos that leverages them into power. At the risk of melodrama, I must say persecutors are clever, sinister figures, who shoot their arrows from the shadows (Ps. 11:2). Few vote for persecution – knowingly! Persecutors gain power by spinning an elaborate deception, and only when the prey is caught in their web do they reveal their venom.

The creeping nature of persecution results in three historical facts about Christians and persecution that are rarely acknowledged:

Rarely does persecution come the way we expect it.

We often don't see it coming at all.

When it comes, we see that we are partly responsible for its appearance (Boyd-MacMillan 2006, 44-45).

In other words, Boyd-MacMillan thinks that persecution often occurs following a certain pattern. With India as an example, he shows how persecution is the result of a thorough planning with some clear phases:

1. A vacuum. "First, there needs to be a vacuum, a power vacuum that gives extremists an opportunity to move to the power centres of society." (48)
2. A villain. "The villain is the architect who comes up with the strategy to get the extremists into power." (49)
3. A lie, or a series of lies. People do not put extremists into power because they like them, but because they feel what they are doing is just or right. That is

why lies are needed. Like “The Christians .....are the agents of western powers, often CIA backed, and are intent on converting Hindus by bribery and other coercive measures.” (51)

4. A mob. We often believe that mobs are spontaneous. That is a myth. Boyd-MacMillan gives a striking example from India. A mob breaks in to a Christian meeting in a school, destroys furniture and equipment and beats up the pastor. Then the mob calls the police and says that the congregation was practicing “forced conversion”. Then the police come and arrest the Christians. The result is that the Christians do not dare to meet again, and the church closes. (54)
5. A megaphone. The thought here being as Goebbels’: If you repeat a lie often enough, people will believe it.

In this report, all three countries seem to have clear similarities to these phases. Here they may also be seen as parallel elements. When it comes to the first phase, South Africa in 1948, when the National Party came to power under the parole of “apartheid”, this seems to be characterised by increased opposition from the already discriminated black population. The background for the revolution in Ethiopia was, among others, the increasing ethnic tension, while the situation in Egypt seems more to be marked by a regime which had to give in to the Muslim Brotherhood and pan-Islamic flows.

This report does not permit a closer look at phase two, but the last three phases or elements seem to comply well with the conditions in the countries studied here, and especially in Ethiopia and Egypt. This will not be probed deeper now nor will what has been said earlier be repeated. But one matter will be reviewed and considered further. One condition that is repeated in Egypt and Ethiopia, and also mentioned above in relation to India, is the accusations about the church being allied with foreign powers, and thereby a threat to national (religious) identity. These seem to be very potent accusations when it comes to getting support, or passive acceptance, for opposing the churches, also with violent means. Religious nationalism may therefore seem an important reason or source for persecution. A closer look will now be taken of the religious nationalism and other forces behind persecution.

### ***3.2.3 Forces behind the persecution***

Boyd-MacMillan (2006) describes in his book the four “engines” for religious persecution: religious nationalism, Islamic extremism, totalitarian insecurity and secular intolerance. A report published by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization (2004)<sup>30</sup> also describes four contexts where the pressure against Christians is large:

- Persecution of Christians in Islamic contexts.
- Persecution of Christians in Hindu contexts (selected as an example of oriental religions).
- Persecution of Christians in communist and post-communist contexts.
- The challenge posed by secularism to the Church in the West.<sup>31</sup>

As can be seen, the categories correspond to a large degree. The following provides a short description based on Boyd-MacMillan and ends by relating these categories to the conditions in the three countries which are represented in this evaluation.

*Religious nationalism* ties together religion and the nation, and the nation is defined with a basis in the religion; India is for Hindus, only a Muslim is a real Palestinian, Serbia is for Christians etc. Boyd-MacMillan explains that there are two reasons why religious nationalism has grown into an important primary source for persecution in the 1990's:

First, a whole crop of new nations, spawned by the end of the cold war conflict, looked around for ways to define their identity and expand their boundaries. Religion was quickly seized as justification, and when wedded to mythologies about how populations from other religions were a “plague in their house”, the result could often approach genocide (Boyd-MacMillan 2006, 125).

He adds that:

The second reason religious nationalism became prime source of persecution is that governments began to realize in the 1990s that religion was an important way to increase their legitimacy. Before the present era, religion was regarded as an unimportant factor. But now political elites saw that religion could be useful either in grabbing power or in maintaining it (Boyd-MacMillan 2006, 126).

He concludes with: “...the general trend is clear – the more religion is regarded as important, the more likely governments are to control it, resulting inevitably in more persecution” (Boyd-MacMillan 2006, 127).

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<sup>30</sup> *The Persecuted Church*, Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 32

<sup>31</sup> *The Persecuted Church*, Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 32, p 10

*Islamic extremism* diverges from religious nationalism by not being connected to a state or an area. The aim is that the whole world should become Islamic. Boyd-MacMillan mentions several reasons for why this extremism has been increasing during the last 20-30 years: The building of new mosques is financed by money from Saudi-Arabia, support given to Islamic groups from the West during the Cold War, and opposition against secularisation and moral decay which the Muslims feel characterises the West.

Persecution of the Christians takes place in different ways: partly as a direct persecution staged by the state, partly as violence from the local community, and partly as a direct attack from Islamic terror groups. However, the main reason for persecution is, according to Boyd-MacMillan, found in Islamic history and theology.

During the first thousand years of its history, it had an incredible progress. The Muslim world controlled much of the world trade and lay ahead of Europe scientifically. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, this changed. The decline which started then must be turned back. Their God is victorious. There is no possibility of defeat. So that territory has to be taken back, lest God be shamed ... This is the deepest reason why Muslims persecute Christians. They have to take the "territory" back. That is why they cannot lose a person or a land or a tribe to another religion... (Boyd-MacMillan 2006 , 132).

*Totalitarian Insecurity* refers to totalitarian states where the authorities want to control all aspects of civil society. Christians who have their deepest loyalty somewhere else will therefore repeatedly be suspected of opposition and attempts at undermining the power of the authorities. Often, "milder" methods are used to register and thereby survey and influence the churches and eventually also use them as actors for the authorities. Churches which do not wish to register may then be defined as dangerous political extremists and persecuted judicially, because they are said to be a threat to the stability in the country.

*Secular intolerance* refers to all people having a faith, and that one faith is as good and true as any other. Basically, religious tolerance was aimed at the state. The state was not to favour one religion above another, says Boyd-MacMillan (2000, 138):

But now a new definition of tolerance is being applied, this time not to the state but to the individual, who is told, in effect: 'You must accept that all religious beliefs really just amount to the same thing.' The secular state has recently abandoned its historic neutrality and is seeking to impose its own version of religious truth on everyone".

With a last look at the three examples seen from this standpoint, it seems that the perspectives are practical and give meaning, but at the same time they may overlap and do not mutually

exclude each other. In South Africa, the state was totalitarian without being characterised by religious nationalism (or of course Islamic extremism). In Ethiopia, there has been a totalitarian regime which little by little became tied to a religious nationalism by claiming that the Orthodox Church was the only “Ethiopian Church”. In Egypt, a mix of totalitarian/authoritarian rule is evidenced with religious nationalism tied to Islam, and where Islamic groups have great influence.

### **3.3 How do the churches relate to oppression and persecution?**

Basically, it seems that the churches choose different strategies in relating to totalitarian regimes. Some largely adapt to the limits given by the state or society, while others choose to confront the rulers, and yet others go under cover and become illegal organisations or groups. From the former Eastern Europe, there are many examples of churches becoming obedient channels for the regime and denying any oppression (Schlossberg 1991, 135-138). In the examples provided here, one example depicts clear legitimising of oppression (South Africa) and passive and active acceptance, but there are also clear examples of church leaders from all three countries standing up to the oppressors, and as has been seen, sometimes with the result of being killed. Additional examples illustrate where part of the organisation has gone under cover and met illegally.

The above three strategies of adjustment, confrontation or going under cover, however, need to be qualified. The picture is very complex. Churches may go from adjustment to confrontation in a short time (Egypt), or from adjustment in certain areas and confrontation in others, and it may even be that parts of the activities are illegal, while other parts are undertaken in full publicity. In Egypt, a separation occurred between the lay movement and the clergy when it comes to the will to confront and which fights they choose to take on.

The complexity in the churches’ way to react is partly rooted in external circumstances, namely how oppression changed character depending on individuals on different levels, international attention, movements in the area etc. However, the complexity is also rooted internally. The churches may be large or small; they may have a hierarchical structure or more equal rule. The leaders may enjoy a large degree of confidence among their members, or not so much. The role of the clergy may also vary. Contact with other churches, nationally or internationally, may also differ. All this makes the concept of “church” in the meaning “the



church relates” such and such, problematic. Often, different groups within the church will relate differently and may be in opposition to each other. Centralised churches may frequently be an easier prey to the oppressors than churches that have a looser organisation. By offering the leaders benefits and privileges and at the same time putting them or their families under pressure, the leaders become corrupt and more or less obedient spokesmen for the authorities. On several occasions, it has been found that the church leaders have been reporting to the authorities as well. In this way, persecution not only comes from the outside, but also from within. In the examples provided here, it has been seen how the authorities in South Africa and Ethiopia recruit informants within the churches. This naturally influences the relations between the members of the church, as there is no way of knowing who will report conversations and activities to the authorities. In this way, the churches may even disintegrate from within, as illustrated by (Eide 2000, 228):

Many left out in fear. Many become stronger. Persecution works this way: One group becomes weaker. The other group becomes stronger. Those who kept close to God became stronger. Before they prayed once a day, now they kneel down four times a day. They talk about God all the time. Prayer has become very important to us.

This quote from Ethiopia might summarise well what happens during persecution. In Ethiopia, the brutal oppression probably led to a considerable decrease in the number of members during the most oppressive period. It has also been seen in Egypt that the long period of discrimination and oppression has led to many people converting to Islam or emigrating. In South Africa, the situation was different. When the churches became involved and the church leaders were interned, this led to an awakening in the church which strengthened the opposition against the oppression.

The most extreme form of persecution is killing people. This has different effects on the communities which are affected. It is known from South Africa that some leaders who were killed in resistance fights became important symbols (Steven Biko); on the other hand, the most important symbol of unity, the interned Nelson Mandela, was not killed. The fact that the authorities were terrified of creating a new “martyr” may have been decisive. In Ethiopia, the oppression was so brutal and the murders of political opponents so many that the execution of General Secretary Tumsaa probably did not get the same symbolic function in the Ethiopian society. However, it must be assumed that his martyrdom was of considerable

importance for many of the church members, although this is not documented in this report. In Egypt, the patriarch was exiled and not killed.

Boyd-MacMillan discusses thoroughly the meaning of *martyrdom* for the church (2006, 21-42). He shows how martyrs send shock waves and, to a certain degree, reveal and clarify the serious and dark sides of the conflict all Christians are part of, and partly acts as inspiration and self-examination in relation to how people live their lives. Nevertheless, he says that although martyrs play an important role, there may be aspects of martyrdom that are worth noting:

1. “It was the Latin church father, Tertullian, who first came up with the phrase, ‘The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.’ Ironically, he was wrong about his own city, Chartage, and much of North Africa, which had martyrs aplenty, yet the church virtually disappeared with the arrival of Islam. A martyr brings no guarantee of revival.” (Boyd-MacMillan 2006, 39)
2. One consequence of martyrdom may be that the attention is turned more towards the earlier martyrs than the present situation.
3. Furthermore, martyrdom is after all so rare in most countries that focus on martyrdom gives a faulty picture of the situation for most people in areas of persecution.

When trying to evaluate how persecution works, it is important, in other words, to include all factors, all forms of oppression and persecution. It may seem, from the given examples, that brutal oppression and persecution, as was seen in Ethiopia, have a two-sided effect: many members left the church while many of those who stayed experienced a more profound relation with the church and Christianity. In Egypt, it seems that a lengthy period (of relatively mild) discrimination and oppression, which also seem to be supported by the majority of the population, led to resignation that in turn resulted in emigration or conversion to Islam. The situation in South Africa was different. Here the churches became involved because of the political situation and international pressure. This situation of direct oppression of the churches caused, at least in the last phases of the resistance, an awakening of the churches and increased resistance.

The question about how oppression affects the churches also raises the question about *persecution and growth*. Is it possible that there is a connection between persecution and growth? Among the examples of this report, it is the situation in Ethiopia that comes to

attention here. The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) has since it was founded grown incredibly. However, during the Mengistu reign it was reduced, at least in the first half of the period and in areas that were particularly affected. It therefore does not seem right to think that persecution in itself brings about growth. If there is a connection between persecution and growth, it is probably more reasonable to think that persecution is a reaction to growth than the contrary. It is known that the EECMY largely recruited its members from the periphery, especially from the Oromo population, in other words, outside the established power centres. Resistance against the regime was also strongest in that group. The most reasonable explanation is probably to maintain that the church growth and persecution to a certain degree had a common basis, namely the growth of a new Oromo identity.<sup>32</sup>

Schlossberg (1991, 139) concludes this question with his comment: “The common saying that the persecuted church becomes stronger needs to be qualified. Our earlier examples of grave weaknesses of persecuted churches should be enough to demonstrate that”. This report does not give factual evidence of any general conclusions in this area, but as far as is understood, persecution will often cause a weakening of the church in various ways. In spite of this, there are also examples of churches being strengthened. An important factor here seems to be the avoidance of isolation, and this is where the international partners can play an important role. This issue will be explored later. Another aspect of a more practical nature, is discussed first.

Herbert Schlossberg writes that many persecuted Christians have made valuable experiences that seldom have been passed on to others. He also writes that no systematic work has been done to map these practical experiences, but he still presents some examples to show what kind of information is available (Schlossberg 1991, 166f:

- Public ceremonies. Very often religious meetings are forbidden outside church buildings. But there are examples that outdoor funerals, weddings and even birthday parties have turned to evangelistic meetings.
- Youth training. Often youth-meetings are forbidden. Teaching of children and youth must for this reason take place in homes or illegal Sunday Schools, or through activities that engage the youth such as music and choirs.
- Publishing.
- Mutual help. Practical and financial help to the persecuted.

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<sup>32</sup> See Eide, Øyvind M., Vekst og forfølgelse – Historiske og politiske forhold som belyser to trekk ved Den etiopisk evangeliske kirke Mekane Yesus. In *Misjon og teologi*, Vol. 4, 1997, p. 56-69 (p. 66 ).

- Act, don't ask. Asking for permission will often give negative results, at least official persons will take the safe way out by saying no.
- Place people in key positions.
- Learn to use sympathetic officials. Even in the most brutal regimes there are persons who sympathise with those who are oppressed, and who may be willing to help if they are not caught out.

Schlossberg also writes that gathering and systemising these kinds of practical tips should be a future task.

### ***3.3.1 What reasons do the churches give for their reactions?***

#### **3.3.1.1 The legitimacy of the State**

In South Africa, the churches took different approaches. The Reformed Church developed a theology which defended and legitimated the apartheid policy. The other churches basically dissociated from this policy, but (more or less) adapted to it. In other words, the policy was to a large degree alive in the church institutions as well. Eventually, this situation initiated a debate about the legitimacy of the rulers. A parallel to the Norwegian Church and its situation during WWII is drawn here. There are several reasons for this parallel:

1. Since one of the criteria for choosing countries was that the country might have a relation to the NMS (as a mission organisation in the Norwegian Church), it might be useful to see which experiences and lines of thought characterise the Norwegian Church.
2. The situation during WWII is directly relevant to the discussion on how churches in South Africa should relate to the apartheid regime, and there is also evidence of this in (German) mission organisations and their strategies in Ethiopia.
3. The example from Norway during the war also shows, together with especially the situation in South Africa, that there is a development of theological attitudes as a response to a given situation. This again makes possible a revision of past attitudes, and this process seems to be an important factor in the resistance work.

Torleiv Austad sums up the situation in Norway towards the authorities in the following precise points:

We can sum up the typical tendencies in the Ministry of church politics in 1941 like this: Firstly it was vital to incapacitate the church by prohibiting it to comment on the ideological political conflict in the country when evangelising. Secondly, the Ministry wanted the evangelisation and religious teaching in the schools to contain support to NS and the national-socialism. Thirdly, the Ministry tried to split the bishops and get their own advocates into leading positions in the church. Fourthly, the Ministry favoured clergy who were loyal to the new authorities, and made it difficult for clergy and congregations who took a stand on the other side of the conflict. Fifthly, the Ministry tried to strengthen its position in the church department by taking over a number of functions which earlier had been placed under the bishops. Sixthly, the department supported, both in theory and in practice, a view of the totalitarian character of the state which was not consistent with international law and the elementary human rights (Austad 1974, 85; author's translation).<sup>33</sup>

As can be seen, the methods the authorities use are much the same as in the case studies here. In particular, the situation under the Nazi regime seems to have clear parallels to the situation under the apartheid regime in South Africa:

To give a very short characterisation of the Norwegian church fight, you could say that the first was a battle for human freedom, the second for the freedom of the church. It started with the church defending law and conscience against injustice and violence. After a while it also became necessary for the church to defend the evangelic independence and self-government of the church (Austad 1974, 20; author's translation).

The reason to refrain from protesting was the idea that the authorities were appointed by God and should therefore be obeyed. It became necessary to develop a theology which asked *under what conditions* were the authorities *not legitimate* and therefore beyond obedience. During Easter 1942, the church published a document, Kirkens Grunn, where the central issue is the relation between state and church. For the rest of the war, this document became a "mark of unity for the church's independence from the state, yes, even for the whole church front" (Austad 1974, 15). An even longer quote from Austad shows how Kirkens Grunn reasoned in this area:

In the same manner as Berggrav, the Kirkens Grunn document accentuates the importance of Rom 13.3, where it says that rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. This statement by Paul is used in Kirkens Grunn as a basic criterium for the legitimate rulers. A positive attitude to doing good and a negative attitude to wrong acts seems to be the mark of a constitutional government.

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<sup>33</sup> Austad, Torleiv, (1974) *Kirkens grunn – analyse av en kirkelig bekjennelse fra okkupasjonstiden*.

If doing good meets with disapproval from the authorities, it is a sign that this is no longer a ruler according to the will of God. According to article V, this is the case when the authority exercised by a state intervenes in matters of faith and conscience, and creates fear among those who follow the “way of the Lord”. The understanding of the state concept in Kirkens Grunn may be characterised as a conditional understanding. In other words, a legitimate state must comply with certain conditions. These conditions are not primarily judicial or political, but theological, or rather ethical. When we put together what has so far been said about the state being an exponent of the secular power, with the exegesis and application of Rom 13, we could say that Kirkens Grunn puts forth the following criteria for the constitutional government/the right authority:

- (1) It acts according to the will of God, in other words according to the law.
- (2) It sticks to day to day business, not faith or matters of conscience.
- (3) It advocates law and justice in society and controls the raw powers.
- (4) It knows how to separate between good and evil and does not create difficulties for the good deeds (Austad 1974, 166-167; author’s translation).

It may also be worth mentioning that Kirkens Grunn “represents a break with uncritical loyalty to the state which was widespread in the history of lutherdom. The tradition of using Paul or Luther as support for any existing regime is indirectly rejected” (Austad 1974, 168; author’s translation).

The limits applying to this preview do not permit more fundamental theological reflections implied in this document. Neither will the situation in Germany during WWII be discussed. Here, the inner disagreement in the Lutheran Church related to these questions created a deep split in the church. These questions were treated further after the war in international forums such as the Lutheran World Federation.

### **3.3.1.2 The freedom of the Church**

For many church leaders, the possibilities for the church to do its work have been an important guide in the relation to the authorities and public society. As long as the church could do its work, nothing should be done to jeopardise this. The reasoning could be out of principle; the church should not get mixed up in political affairs, but works on the spiritual level, or more pragmatically; the church should avoid doing anything that will lead to (further) restrictions for the working conditions of the church.

Schlossberg discusses (1991, 151) how a singular spiritualisation of the churches' mission suits the regimes perfectly. He shows how several churches in this way have been isolated and marginalised. This is also a current issue for the examples given in this report. It has been observed how the Coptic Church in Egypt has had a tradition where adapting and quiet diplomacy has been their main strategy. However, there have also been periods where the Copts have had more political influence (the Wafd-party) and even openly protested against discrimination against the Copts (Shenouda III). The historic background for the change in strategy lay in the renewal process in the church through the layman movement and the Sunday School Movement. The process of renewal took place among other things in the revitalisation of the monasteries. As was seen, this might be considered as withdrawal, but also as a parallel process to what is going on in Islam, basically as building a barrier against secularisation and modernity.

In Ethiopia, the EECMY to a very large degree included politics in its theological work. As the persecution increased, and following the execution of the general secretary, it was extremely dangerous to discuss political questions; therefore, the church kept a lower profile. Eventually, the church even introduced a certain degree of cooperation with the regime.

In South Africa, several church communities openly went against the regimes' politics, without getting any practical consequences. There is no evidence that the churches' freedom to work was a central reason why so little was done. This was, however, a central question for the NMS in its partner role in South Africa. Below, the role of the international partners is discussed.

### **3.4 The role of the international partners**

Among those who have put a lot of work into plotting the extension of persecution, it is a clear opinion that international partners have often let down the persecuted. For example, Schlossberg states in the chapter *The failures of the churches in free countries*: "They all want to preserve their access to these countries. They think the gospel is going to be served by furthering the promulgation of lies. Remain silent about persecuted Christians and you'll serve God. This is literally a hell of a theological position." (Schlossberg 1991, 202). However, Schlossberg also comments that international partners may play a decisive role for

the persecuted churches. The largest challenge is to find out what is actually going on. This may be very difficult, because totalitarian regimes will, more or less per definition, try to either produce or at least to influence all information that is let out. If people do not know what is going on or (partly) believe the information given by the authorities, it is impossible to know whether any actions taken will aid or hurt the persecuted.

### ***3.4.1 Forms of opposition***

Boyd-MacMillan (2006) goes through various forms of opposition in his book<sup>34</sup>. These forms of opposition are largely related to the international partners' role and are therefore included under this heading. Many of these forms have been presented earlier in this report.

*The Role of Prayer/Intercession:* Boyd-MacMillan gives many examples of the effect of prayer and in many ways sums up the point of prayer with a quote:

Moses Xie, a man who spent more than twenty years in jail in China for his faith, shared with me that when asking visitors to pray for him he was really after three distinct outcomes: “First, I want them to experience the blessing of prayer for themselves. They will go to God on my behalf, but they will receive a great blessing from being in the presence of God. I have noticed that Western Christians don't seem to pray too much. Second, I know that as much as they pray, their burden for the persecuted will increase, and as their burden grows, so their commitment to assisting us in all sorts of other ways will increase also. Prayer alone makes them be the body. Third, I want them to release more of God's power into our situation through intercession, since I know that God has blond himself not to act until we ask (2006, 256).

*The Role of Truth Telling/Publicity:* Boyd-MacMillan states by using several examples that publicity works, but at the same time he says that: “It is probably a fair generalization to say that while it is not always helpful to speak out on behalf of a persecuted individual, it is always helpful to speak out on behalf of the persecuted church” (2006, 260). In this connection, Boyd-MacMillan quotes the China veteran Tony Lambert who “insists on four key rules when publishing individual cases of persecution:

Permission must be gained from the person concerned, or more usually, their immediate family. It must be their call.

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<sup>34</sup> What Works When? – Seven Tactics of Intervention Assessed p 254 f



The tactic should be talked through with local church leaders and approved. They are in the best position to know if publicity will help or hinder the testimony in their area.

It is used as a tactic of last resort, after other methods have failed. This is because of publicity's power to compromise the ability of the person to return to their ministry as before.

The publicity must not contain any "intelligence gifts" to the authorities (Boyd-MacMillan 2006, 261-262)

*The Role of Private Representation.* The advantage of this method is that since it is not public, one can avoid embarrassing the regime if it should give in to inquiries. In many cases, this makes the method very effective. This method often implies informal contact on different levels through people who for various reasons have access to influential people. But writing letters to influential people has also proved effective.

*The Role of Legal Intervention.* Boyd-MacMillan writes (2006, 268) that often this tactic is dismissed as a waste of effort. In countries where Christians are severely persecuted, the rule of law is paid scant regard. Judges are bought or intimidated, and justice is whatever the ruling party or leader say it is. But even in cases where the rule of law is ignored, there can be three useful effects of taking the legal route. The first is the ammunition effect. Even though a law suit in itself does not help, it gives other people documentation so it is easier to maintain the pressure on the authorities. The other is the embarrassment effect. Even though some countries seem to disregard "the international society", most prefer that violence to human rights does not become commonly known. The third effect is the empowering effect when someone stands up and gives others the courage to do the same.

*The Role of Illegal Intervention.* Illegal intervention by the partners has often been tied to discussions about smuggling bibles, but other roles are naturally also current, as seen in South Africa. Boyd-MacMillan emphasises that the partners must only act when asked to by the recipients.

*The Role of Political Pressure.* This method of influencing may partly be individually based; for instance, a politician from one country applying pressure through

conversations with politicians in a country with persecution exists in order to free imprisoned Christians. Or it may be the official politics of a country that it tries to influence another state through different means to put an end to the violence of human rights. Both these forms may be very effective, but Boyd-MacMillan states that political pressure from the USA in some cases is less effective than direct pressure from for example other organisations, because communications from the USA may be rejected as Western imperialism or the like.

*The Role of Positive Engagement.* Boyd-MacMillan describes this line of action like this:

Positive engagement refers to Christians contributing to building up the society where the persecution is taking place. This can include conducting relief work, building and running orphanages or schools, teaching English in state universities, setting up investment projects, and even running profitable businesses, all in the hope that the benefits of the engagement eventually will result in better treatment for the persecuted (Boyd-MacMillan 2006, 279).

There are clear advantages and disadvantages with this latter method. One advantage is that trust and thereby influence may be built through lengthy periods of contact and commitment. Another advantage is that this kind of engagement may change the conception that Christianity is another negative imperialistic religion. Finally, the third advantage may be that if the contact becomes widespread, the regime will become more sensitive to criticism from the rest of the world.

Conversely, the disadvantages are also clear. Christian institutions may be seen as Trojan horses even though this was not their intention. Ethically, it may also be a problem if people have signed a paper promising not to evangelise and still do. Another disadvantage may be that the authorities use this engagement in their propaganda and people may be forced to distance themselves from those who do not cooperate with the authorities. A fourth disadvantage may be that people compromise (unnoticeably) the gospel to keep good relations and to be allowed to stay in the country.

All the above indicates that this procedure may be effective, though very difficult, and requires knowledge and close cooperation with those who are persecuted.

### ***3.4.2 The NMS and the three countries in question***

When looking at the situation in Ethiopia, it seems that the NMS and most other partners chose the methods of *cooperating* closely with the church, getting good *information*, pointing out/*publishing violations* without interpreting or attacking the regime and continuing the *positive commitment* through relief work. However, some partners have chosen other strategies and political pressure was evaluated, but not found suitable.

In South Africa, the South African Church Council received much support from the partners abroad, both financially and otherwise. This support was to a large degree illegal and gave major support to the resistance movement. In Norway, this support was mainly channelled through the Church of Norway Council of Ecumenical and International Relations. The situation for the NMS was different. A missionary codex prohibited involvement in political relations and their commitment to building new churches based on ethnic belonging meant that they often worked in practice in accordance with the apartheid regime, although the NMS (gradually) both openly and in secret supported the resistance against the regime.

In Egypt, the NMS has not had any direct relation to a church. The state accepts the churches that already exist, are registered and have a clear line of responsibility in relation to the state. For example, the Anglican church/mission has now been approved and organised under Patriarch Shenouda's supervision. Something similar would be necessary if the NMS wanted to work as a mission organisation in Egypt. There is little or no information about the NMS's work in Egypt, apart from there being a low profile activity and the backing of media (Sat7). As seen in this study of the pressured situation of the Christians in Egypt, it seems that the challenge is as much to preserve the Christians in their faith as to preach the gospel to the Muslims.

### ***3.4.3 Co-operation and church networks***

It seems evident from this report that different actors have different roles. The situation for the different churches, mission organisations and co-operating churches that are involved in a country may be very different. Internal organisations, traditions, loyalties and so on play a part. The strategy of the authorities will often be to put different actors in opposition to each other. By giving some organisations that are cooperative better conditions than others, the

authorities effectively gain control over these organisations, while simultaneously using their example to legitimise further oppression of organisations that do not cooperate. In other words, this means that strategies are not chosen in a vacuum. Choices may result (unintentionally) in consequences for others. This underlines the importance of communication and cooperation between the different actors.

In the examples of this report, church organisations have played important roles, for example the World Council of Churches in South Africa and the LWF in Ethiopia. This report does not permit a deeper discussion of the roles played by these inter-church organisations. It has been shown that these are areas which are interesting for the authorities in oppressed regimes, and that they try to place “their people” there. Therefore, forums like this will sometimes be experienced as running errands for the authorities.<sup>35</sup>

#### ***3.4.4 What reason do the co-operating partners give for their commitment?***

It seems possible to separate between two principally different reasons for this commitment.<sup>36</sup> One is the human rights perspective and the other is a more specifically Christian view on persecution. The UN’s Declaration of Human Rights is signed by most countries and in many ways acts as a universal standard that all, independent of religious affiliation, are obliged to promote. This means that partners can argue with commonly acknowledged principles when pointing to violence and that non-Christian or non-religious organisations may also play an important role for many who are persecuted.

A more specific Christian argument is suppressed in this episode where an American politician tries to free four men from prison in Egypt: “Why do you care about that garbage?” snarled Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, referring to the four men. “Because they are my

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<sup>35</sup> Zoltan Kaldy, the Hungarian bishop who was president of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) from 1984 to 1987, was an agent of his country's secret police from the late 1950s, says Norwegian theology professor Tormod Engelsen to Oivind Ostang for Ecumenical News International. Engelsen told the Christian daily newspaper Vårt Land on 5 October 2006 that he reached his conclusions after a three-year study of relations between the Lutheran Church in Hungary and ecumenical organisations, in particular the LWF. The Norwegian theologian had access to Kaldy's files in Budapest secret police archives. Assisting in his study was Laszlo Terray, a Hungarian who was a (Lutheran) Church of Norway priest for several decades. The full study will be published in 2007 (10. Oct. 2006)

[http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/content/news\\_syndication/article\\_061010oslo.shtml](http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/content/news_syndication/article_061010oslo.shtml)

<sup>36</sup> See for example Schlossberg p 21.

brothers” answered Baker (Boyd-MacMillan 2006, 275). The church is seen as one body. When one limb suffers, all suffer.

Agøy (2000, 324) also discusses why the Norwegian Church was so actively engaged in the fight against the apartheid regime in South Africa. She thinks that this commitment was especially strong, because the policy of segregation was legitimised theologically.<sup>37</sup> The result was that theologians were very visible.<sup>38</sup> The apartheid regime was based on false doctrines and it was the fundamental understanding of the gospel that was in question. Other reasons mentioned by Agøy are the clear appeal for support from South African churches and the close contact which developed on the personal level between church leaders in South Africa and Norway. But as mentioned in the introduction (p. 4), a Christian perspective embraces more than this. The document “The Persecuted Church” (2004) from the Lausanne movement debates whether there is a theology about persecution. To sum up, it could be said that:

Scripture seems to teach that God allows persecution and uses it, but also grants protection against it, and that a disciple should not seek to be persecuted, but rather to proclaim the gospel. If we should not seek persecution, neither should we fear it. Nothing should deflect us from proclaiming the gospel (The Persecuted Church 2004, 32).

The document also discusses the fact that the relationship to human rights may not be without conflicts:

Human rights can be a useful tool to help defend suffering Christians but must not become an idol. Christians belong to the heavenly Kingdom. The priority for them must be to fulfil the will of their King. The Bible is a higher authority for us than the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Our main objective is to spread the word of God in all circumstances; this might not always be understood by people whose highest priority is human rights and democracy (The Persecuted Church 2004, 33).

However, the role of the partners does not only concern different forms of support to the persecuted Christians. With a basis in 2.Tim 3;12: “In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted”, Boyd-MacMillan (2006, 301-349) discusses, for example, how the churches in the free world depend on contact with the persecuted Christians to keep their faith and learn from their example. Here the perspective is turned around and the

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<sup>37</sup> See also Bakkevik (1995, 65).

<sup>38</sup> Norwegian theologians have also addressed this subject: Hovland, Thor Halvor, (1993) *Apartheid-teologien, et eksempel på ideologisering*; Hovland, Thor Halvor (1993) *Svart teologi som frigjøringshermeneutikk*; Jørgensen, Torstein (1989) *Apartheid og legitimering*; Nordengen, Per Anders (ed), (1994) *Det farlige ordet*; Ruus, Olav Christian (1988) *Sannhetens øyeblikk er kommet – en studie av Kairosdokumentet, og dets anvendelse av noen sentrale teologiske motiv og begreper*.

attention is drawn to how important the contact with persecuted Christians is for the Christians in the West. Nevertheless, Christians in the West may be challenged and corrected when it comes to what is most important in life and whether or not the churches really are the salt of the earth as they should be. At the same time, experience from the persecuted Christians will inspire and encourage Christians in a secularised West.

Contact with the persecuted Christians therefore raises fundamental questions tied to what it means to be a church, what the church's aim and ideology is, and how it relates to the world around it. In this perspective, some of the separation between persecuted churches on the one side and their cooperating partners on the other side disappears. The questions will be the same: What does it mean to be a church? How does the church proclaim the gospel? How does the church relate to the society it is a part of? What place does suffering and persecution have in the life of the church?

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## **Senter for Interkulturell Kommunikasjon**

**2009**

ISBN: 82-7721-113-9

978-82-7721-113-8

ISSN: 1500-1474

Misjonshøgskolens forlag

Misjonsmarka 12, 4024 Stavanger, Tlf.: 51516247

Fax: 51516253, E-mail: forl@mhs.no