“On a ‘Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’ IMPULSE within the Reverend Gudina Tumsa’s Holistic Theology”

5 CLUES FOR TRACKING A “DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.” IMPULSE IN REV. GUDINA TUMSA’S HOLISTIC THEOLOGY

“[My father’s] studies in the U.S.A. [from August 1963 until May 1965] coincided with the civil rights movement led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. This exposure expanded his awareness of cultural, social, and political issues, and enriched his thinking about the role of church in society.

Returning to Ethiopia, he became heavily engaged in matters affecting the spiritual, social, economic, and political life of his people.”
(Lensa Gudina Tumsa, 15)

“Led by the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., the Civil Rights Movement was a convulsive, history-altering protest among African Americans who were no longer willing to accept their status as second-class citizens in a nation that claimed that all people were equal under God and under the law. During the semester before Gudina’s arrival [at Luther Seminary], my seminary class wrote a letter of support to Dr. King as he and his colleagues sat in the Birmingham jail for their non-violent transgression of racist laws [when Dr. King also wrote his famous “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”].”
(Paul Wee, 16)

“Another reason our time at Luther Seminary was exciting [beyond Roman Catholicism’s Vatican Council II] was that the civil rights movement was in full swing. Although the movement had started in 1954, the March on Washington occurred in August of 1963, the Civil Rights Act was approved in 1964, and, in Selma, Alabama, the tragedy of ‘Bloody Sunday’ occurred on March 7, 1965. Public reaction to this event made possible the passage of the Voting Rights Act in the summer of that same year.”
(Darrell Jodock, 13)

“For the EECMY, God’s mission cannot be dichotomized between the spiritual and physical because it is holistic in nature.

The EECMY articulated its understanding of holistic ministry for the first time in a 1972 letter sent to the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) with the title, ‘On the Integration between Proclamation of the Gospel and Human Development.’ . . . The letter was written as a response to the Western dichotomy of the proclamation of the Gospel and human development . . . Iteffa Gobena, the former president of the EECMY (2001-2009) describes the time in which the 1972 letter was produced as significant due to the fact that it signaled the start of EECMY’s self-expression as a national church.”
(Samuel Yonas Deressa, 86)

“In fact, it is very difficult to determine how much of his [Gudina Tumsa’s] mature theological outlook he brought with him from Ethiopia [to Luther Seminary], how much he absorbed from his studies, or how much his insights were shaped by the experiences and responsibilities thrust upon him after he graduated from Luther Seminary. So, when I discuss the experiences we shared, I am *not* claiming that these were somehow the most formative.”
(Darrell Jodock, 12)

“THE VOICE” OF DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

“The gospel at its best deals with the whole man, not only his soul but his body, not only his spiritual well-being, but his material well-being. Any religion that professes to be concerned about the souls of men and is

not concerned about the slums that damn them, the economic conditions that strangle them and the social conditions that cripple them is a spiritually moribund religion awaiting burial.
(King, Jr., "Pilgrimage to Nonviolence" (1960) 37-38)

"During this time [of studying the great philosophers] I had almost despaired of the power of love in solving social problems. . . . Then I came upon the life and teachings of Mahatma Gandhi. . . . As I delved deeper into the philosophy of Gandhi my skepticism concerning the power of love gradually diminished, and I came to see for the first time that the Christian doctrine of love operating through the Gandhian method of nonviolence was one of the weapons available to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom."
(King, Jr., "Pilgrimage to Nonviolence" (1960) 38)

"Make a career of humanity. Commit yourself to the noble struggle for equal rights. You will make a greater person of yourself, a greater nation of your country, and a finer world to live in."
(King, Jr., "Speech Before the Youth March for Integrated Schools" (1959) 22.

On the Myth of Time
"And you know, my friends, there comes a time when people get tired of being trampled over by the iron feet of oppression. [thunderous applause] There comes a time, my friends, when people get tired of being plunged across the abyss of humiliation, where they experience the bleakness of nagging despair. ["Keep talking"] There comes a time when people get tired of being pushed out of the glittering sunlight of life's July and left standing amid the piercing chill of an alpine November. ["That's right"] [applause] There comes a time. ["Yes sir, Teach"] [applause continues]
[The myth of time alleges] just wait; in some unknown future everything good will eventually work itself out. Human progress never rolls in on the wheels of inevitability.
Justice delayed is justice denied. (William Gladstone)
One of the great liabilities of history is that all too many people fail to remain awake through the great periods of social change. Every society has its protectors of the status quo and its fraternities of the indifferent who are notorious for sleeping through revolution. But today our survival depends on our ability to stay awake, to adjust to new ideas, to remain vigilant and to face the challenge of change. . . .
[Rather, Christians together become] co-workers with God. . . . So we must help time and realize that the time is always ripe to do right."
(King, Jr., "Address to the Montgomery Improvement Association," Holt Street Baptist Church, Montgomery, AL, December 5, 1955).

On the Myth of Time
"One of the basic points in your statement is that our acts are untimely. . . . My friends, I must say to you that we have not made a single gain in civil rights without determined legal and nonviolent pressure. History is the long and tragic story of the fact that privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntarily. Individuals may see the moral light and voluntarily give up their unjust posture; but as Reinhold Niebuhr as reminded us, groups are more immoral than individuals.

We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed. . . . For years now I have heard the words 'Wait!' It rings in the ear of every Negro with a piercing familiarity. This 'Wait' has almost always meant 'Never.' It has been a tranquilizing thalidomide, relieving the emotional stress for a moment, only to give birth to an ill-formed infant of frustration. We must come to see with distinguished jurist of yesterday that 'justice too long delayed is justice denied.' We have waited for more than 340 years for our constitutional and God-given rights. The nations of Asia and Africa are moving with jetlike speed toward the goal of political independence, and we still creep at horse and buggy pace toward the gaining of a cup of coffee at a lunch counter.'
(King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham City Jail," April 1963, 292)

On the Inescapable Network of Mutuality

"Moreover, I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

(King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham City Jail," April 1963, 290)

On Expansive Empathy

"I guess it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say, 'Wait.' But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim; when you have seen hate-filled policemen curse, kick, brutalize and even kill your black brothers and sisters with impunity; when you see the vast majority of your twenty million Negro brothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society; when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six-year-old daughter why she can't go to the public park that has just been advertised on television, and see tears welling up on her little eyes when she is told that Funtown is closed to colored children, and see the depressing clouds of inferiority begin to form in her little mental sky, and see her begin to distort here little personality by unconsciously developing a bitterness toward white people; when you have to concoct an answer for a five-year-old son asking in agonizing pathos: 'Daddy, why do white people treat colored people so mean?'; when you take a cross-country drive and find it necessary to sleep night after night in the uncomfortable corners of your automobile because no motel will accept you; when you are humiliated day in and day out by nagging signs reading 'white' and 'colored'; when your first name becomes 'nigger' and your middle name becomes 'boy' (however old you are) and your last name becomes 'John,' and when your wife and mother are never given the respected title 'Mrs.'; when you are harried by day and haunted by night by the fact that you are a Negro, living constantly at tiptoe stance never quite knowing what to expect next, and plagued with inner fears and outer resentments; when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of 'nobodiness'; then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait. There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over, and men are no longer willing to be plunged into an abyss of injustice where they experience the blackness of corroding despair. I hope, sirs, you can understand our legitimate and unavoidable impatience."

(King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham City Jail," April 1963, 292-293)

On Nonviolence & Beloved Community

"The aftermath of nonviolence is the creation of the beloved community. The aftermath of nonviolence is redemption. The aftermath of nonviolence is reconciliation. The aftermath of violence however, are emptiness and bitterness. This is the thing I'm concerned about. Let us fight passionately and unrelentingly for the goals of justice and peace, but let's be sure that our hands are clean in this struggle. Let us never fight with falsehood and violence and hate and malice, but always fight with love, so that, when the day comes that the walls of segregation have completely crumbled in Montgomery that we will be able to live with people as their brothers and sisters."

(King, Jr., "Birth of a Nation" (1957) Dexter Avenue Baptist Church after returning from Ghana)

THE VOICE OF REVEREND GUDINA TUMSA

"We therefore see the development of the inner man as a pre-requisite for a healthy and lasting development of our society. Unless our people are helped to the spiritual freedom and maturity which enables them responsibly to handle material development, we are afraid that what was intended to be a means of enhancing the well being of man can have the opposite effect and create new forms of evil to destroy him.

We believe that in integral human development, where the spiritual and material needs are seen together, is the only right approach to the development question in our society. . . .

The other aspect, which in our opinion has been overlooked and for which there is little room within the present framework . . . is the question of **man as an agent** in the development process. The basic question which is asked is: How many will benefit from this project? The community which the project is supposed to serve is seen more as an object than as an agent for betterment.
. . .
In order to get the ordinary man involved with a view to becoming an agent in the development process, provision must be made to work with unimportant groups over long periods of time. Within the Church structure this brings us down to the congregational level where in our view this potential is available. . . . 'Equally important, because of its grass-root penetration the Church could provide one avenue for the democratization of development by allowing scope for participation and expression by the local rural population.' Here again the artificial division between Church work and development is an obstacle in the attempt of the Church to develop the manpower potential it has within its congregational structure.
We submit that a fresh approach to development aid through Church channels would be to consider man and his needs as a totality. This would mean that the present artificial division between spiritual and physical needs would be done away with, and provision would be made for an integral development of man in order to enable him to play his role as an agent in the development process. . . . "
(Gudina, et al., "On the Interrelation between Proclamation of the Gospel and Human Development" (1972) pp. 86-87)

"Western theology has lost the this-worldly dimension of human existence, and Wholistic Theology is an effort in rediscovering total human life. Apolitical life is not worthy of existence, un involvement is a denial of the goodness of creation and of the reality of incarnation. We are not interested in creating medieval monasteries, in setting up ghettoes (modern monasteries), but in being involved in the complex social life of our people as we find it daily, with full knowledge of our Christian responsibility.
The history of the people of God in the Old Testament starts with the liberation of a group of slaves from oppression. Nothing is more political than this Biblical narrative. In our continent what is prevalent is the basis to define economic policy, agricultural development, foreign relations—'Politics decides who should die and who should live.' African theology should develop a political theology relevant to the African political life. . . . Political theology should grow out of such experiences on the local congregational level."
(Gudina, "Memorandum to Emmanuel Abraham," (July 21, 1975) pp. 69-70)

"The ECMY has to interpret the signs of the time, as we believe in the God of history who determines the destiny of nations. History is the field of activity of the Creator of the universe, and it is our duty to detect and interpret the guiding hands of God in the present historical development in our country, and to cooperate with the God of history in order to shape her future history."
(Gudina, "Memorandum to Emmanuel Abraham," (July 21, 1975) p. 72)

"The ECMY has won credibility for working not only for but with the people, and the evidence for this is that through the Yemissrach Dimts Literacy Campaign recognition was given by an international organization to the fact that she has been working with communities at the grass-roots level.
. . .
At present the Ethiopian people are in active process of being organized, taking their destiny into their own hands; marching forward towards handling their own affairs and deciding for themselves.
(Gudina, "Memorandum to Emmanuel Abraham," (July 21, 1975) p. 60)

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