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Uuras Saarnivaara

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

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Miscellanea

Finland and the Finnish Lutheran Church

By URAS SAARNIVAARA

Finland (in Finnish, "Suomi") is often called "the land of thousands of lakes." About ninety per cent of its inhabitants are Finns, speaking the Finnish language. Most of the rest speak Swedish. Finns belong to the Finno-Ugric racial family, and the closest relatives to them are Esthonians (mostly Lutherans), south of the Gulf of Finland. Hungarians also belong to the same racial family. Their relationship to the Aryan race is uncertain, at least from the point of view of language. Anthropologically, they belong to the Nordic race, to the same race as the Baltic and Scandinavian peoples.

Having been converted to the Roman Catholic faith during the Crusades (1150—1300), the Finns accepted the Lutheran faith in the sixteenth century in the same manner as the Swedes, under whose rule they were from the time of the Christianization to 1809. Finnish men who studied at Wittenberg under Luther and Melancthon brought the evangelical faith to the country. This faith was deepened in their hearts through great revivals in the Church in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Two of these revival movements were pietistic, having close contact with similar movements in Germany and the Scandinavian countries. The greatest leaders of the pietistic awakening of the past century were Pastor N.K. Malmberg and the peasant Paavo Ruotsalainen. An evangelical branch of this movement was started by Pastor Fredrik Gabriel Hedberg in southwestern Finland (closely related with the Rosenius revival in Sweden). The Finnish National Church of America (associated with the Missouri Synod) is a "daughter" of this movement.

In the northernmost part of Sweden, where people are mostly Finnish or Lappish speaking, a fourth revival began a hundred years ago (1844), led by Provost Lars Levi Laestadius, and accordingly it is often called the "Laestadian revival." It spread to the northern parts of Sweden and Norway, but especially to Finland. Generally speaking, this awakening has been evangelical in spirit, and in it private confession and absolution have been much used for the release of sin-burdened souls and for the consolation of afflicted believers. This revival spread to large numbers of Finns in America, where they are usually called "Apostolic Lutherans."

The whole population of Finland is about 3,850,000, and of it about 3,690,000 belong to the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Thus, about 96 per cent are Lutherans. Finland has been said to be the most Lutheran country of the world, and the Lutheran Church is sometimes called the National Church of Finland. The second largest body is the Greek Orthodox Church, mostly in the eastern part of the country, about 72,000 or 1.85 per cent of the population. Besides these there are smaller groups: Roman Catholics, about 2,000; Methodists, about 2,800; Free

Church ("Alliance" group), 5,700; Baptists, 1,500; Pentecostals, 2,000; Jews, 1,800; Mohammedans, 350. In the "civil register" there were before the present war about 70,000 people outside all religious groups. This last group has somewhat diminished during the war, for many who previously left the Church have returned.

In 1809 Finland was taken by the Russians, but it continued to have a rather broad autonomy, with its own government, parliament, army, postal system, etc., as a grand duchy in the Russian empire. In 1917 Finland declared itself independent and became such in reality the next spring after having suppressed the Russia-instigated and supported Communist rebellion.

When Finland became an independent nation, the position of the Lutheran Church remained unchanged in all essential points. It had been a State Church since the Reformation. Up to 1870, when the new church law came into force, it was closely tied to the State. From 1870 on, these ties were considerably loosened, and the Church became entirely free in all spiritual matters. Only its financial and organizational matters remained under the control of the State.

The Church has a General Church Assembly every fifth year. About two thirds of the delegates to the Assembly are laymen, elected by local congregations. The chairman of the Assembly is the archbishop. The Assembly accepts Bible translations and hymnbooks to be used in the whole Church. The present Bible translation and hymnbook were accepted in 1938 and have been in use since the first Sunday in Advent, 1939. These, together with church handbooks, catechisms (in addition to Luther's Small Catechism, the basic textbook since the Reformation), etc., are prepared by committees appointed by the Assembly. In these matters the decisions of the Church Assembly are final.

In 1922 complete freedom of religion was established by law, and after that each Finn has had the freedom to remain a member of the Lutheran Church or to separate from it, either joining some other religious body or staying outside all of them. The great majority of the Finnish people have chosen to remain in the Church. The members of parishes have to pay church taxes which are fixed by the treasurer of each parish in accordance with the communal tax roll. The lowest-income group, however, has been placed outside the church taxation. All voluntary religious work depends on freewill offerings, as for example, the missionary and seamen's mission work, diaconate work, and most of the Sunday school and youth work.

The salaries of ministers are fixed by a state law, and the State has a general oversight in the financial affairs of the Church, although most of the "business" of this kind in individual parishes is controlled by the trustees, of whom the chief pastor of the parish is the chairman.

The Lutheran Church of Finland is an episcopal Church, as are also churches of the Scandinavian countries, episcopacy having been retained in the introduction of the Reformation. The country is divided into five Finnish and one Swedish diocese. To each of the dioceses belong 96,000 to 196,000 communicants, besides the children. The Swedish diocese is smaller, with about 49,000 communicants. There is an average of one minister for 3,700 church members.

Erkki Kaila, the late archbishop of Finland, having his seat in Turku, the ancient capital, died last December at the age of 77. His successor is Aleksí Lehtonen, Bishop of Tampere, former professor of practical theology at the University of Helsinki. He has participated in the ecumenical conference at Edinburgh in 1937 and several other inter-church conferences, and he is acquainted with several Lutheran leaders of America. The Bishop of Oulu, Y. Vallinmaa, was killed by Russian guerrillas about two years ago while visiting some parishes in Lapland.

Most of the ministers receive their training in the theological department of the University of Helsinki, controlled and supported by the State. In 1931 there were 325 theological students and in 1936, 486. At the present time the number is considerably lower. In the theological department of the Swedish University of Turku (Abo Akademi) in 1931 there were 29 theological students; in 1936 the number was 60. In these numbers are included female students who take the theological degree required of ministers and work then as teachers and parish workers.

During the war the theological work and also the training of ministers has been badly disturbed, for several of the teachers of the theological department have been called into the army, and also practically all the theological students have been at the front. Even the ministers are not exempt; however, one minister at least has been left to each parish. About thirty ministers have been killed in military service, some as chaplains and others as officers.

For a little more than a decade Finnish theologians have been intensely interested in modern Luther research, and there has been a "Luther-renaissance" in Finnish theology. Practically all the theologians working in the systematic field have published studies on Luther. The beginner and recognized leader of this Finnish Luther research is Eino Sormunen, Bishop of Kuopio, previously professor of systematic theology at Helsinki. In the field of Biblical archaeology Aapeli Saarisalo, professor of Oriental languages at Helsinki, has become internationally known for his work in Palestine and for his publications in that field.

In the field of church history the theological work has for decades centered in the study of the revival movements. The beginner and leader of this work has been Martti Ruuth, former professor of church history at Helsinki, after him Ilmari Salomies, his successor in the same position.

In all schools from the elementary to the college level (but not in professional schools) instruction in Christianity belongs to the regular curriculum, being compulsory and provided by the State or the counties. In the curriculum there are Bible history, Catechism, Bible, church history, and elementary dogmatics. Elementary school teachers receive training for the teaching of Christianity in the teachers' colleges.

There are a number of societies taking care of various kinds of religious or philanthropic work in the Lutheran Church of Finland:

(1) *Foreign Missions.* The Missionary Society of Finland, with headquarters in Helsinki, was established in 1859. It has mission fields in Ovamboland, Southwest Africa, and in Hunan, China. In 1935 the number of missionaries in Africa was about 50, besides approximately

270 native workers in fifteen main and 150 subordinate stations. In China the number of missionaries in 1935 was seventeen, in addition to a number of native workers. The Evangelical (Hedbergian) movement has been doing missionary work in Japan since the last years of the past century. Altogether it has eight missionaries in the neighborhood of Tokyo and on the island of Hokadate.

The missionary work is supported with freewill offerings. A few collections are taken every year for it in all churches, and many parishes give annually some amount for this purpose from the money received through taxation. The annual income in Finland before the war was about five million seven hundred thousand Finnish marks (\$114,000). For about five years practically no money has been sent from Finland to these mission fields, and these missions have been dependent almost entirely upon the help sent from America through the National Lutheran Council.

(2) *Seamen's Missions.* The Finnish Seamen's Mission Society has worked in a number of ports which Finnish seamen visit, but the buildings of the most important of these stations have been wholly or partly destroyed in the present war. The mission stations at Antwerp, Amsterdam, Hull, and London have been destroyed by German aerial bombs, and the station at Hamburg by Allied bombs. The Society will have tremendous difficulties in carrying on its work after most of its property has been destroyed.

(3) *Diaconate Work.* The Lutheran Church of Finland had four deaconess houses for the training of deaconesses, who mostly work in parishes. Two of these institutions (those of Viipuri and Sortavala) were in the territory which Finland had to cede to Russia, and practically all the property was thus lost. That which had been removed had to be returned according to the truce terms. The work of these deaconess institutions is being organized in the territory that was left to Finland, although the difficulties are great, since the whole work depends on freewill offerings.

(4) *Publication Work.* The Inner Mission Society, which owned the deaconess house at Sortavala, had in the same city a publishing house for Bibles, hymnals, church handbooks, etc., and it, too, was lost to the Russians. These books have been published since 1939 with the help of secular publishing companies.

Most of the Viipuri diocese, to which these institutions belonged, was lost to Russia, also Petsamo and other areas in northern Finland, and a densely populated rich area in the neighborhood of Helsinki—the peninsula of Porkkala and adjoining territory, with about 40,000 Swedish-speaking people. Practically all the people who lived in these districts moved away from their homes to the independent part of Finland, being forced to leave all their property behind.

This immense transfer of population has caused tremendous problems and difficulties, not only to the Finnish nation as a whole but also to the Church; for all churches, parsonages, and other church property of these half a million people were lost, and the people, having been deprived of almost everything and living at the mercy of others, naturally cannot support church work, at least for some time.