

Structural Tensions and New Strategies

Trends in Evangelical Lutheran Church of Kenya in the period 1990-2005

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The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya (ELCK) has its origin in the mission efforts of Swedish Lutherans, later strengthened by other Scandinavian and American Lutherans. Since the start in 1948 the church for many years was limited to two-three ethnic communities in Western Kenya and Nairobi, but determined evangelistic efforts in the 1980s and 1990s has made ELCK of today to be a nationwide church with congregations in nearly all provinces. In many communities the church has opened up the future, provided the door to the world outside. Through its gospel message on Sundays and various community development institutions it has brought temporal and eternal hope and strength for living to thousands of people.

But the church has also experienced growth pains – needless to say. Missionaries played a major role in the initial stages, with varying success. Then came a period of transition with greater national participation in leadership. Although leadership was now nationalized, it was not always easy to build consensus and unity

behind the church policies and strategies. Some problems could be dealt with immediately, others were too complicated to enter into – and were postponed. As the church entered the 1990s it had reached a point where certain conflicts and financial problems could no longer be ignored.

Others have described well the history of ELCK up to 1990.¹ To document and explain key issues in the period after 1990 is the aim of this article. Towards the end we shall introduce a theoretical model which can be helpful in the analysis of present leadership and administration aspects of ELCK.

Christian mission work in Kenya – a brief overview

The arrival of German J.L. Krapf to Mombasa 1844 in the service of Church Missionary Society (CMS) is generally considered to be the start of modern missions to East Africa². In the Portuguese period in the 16th-17th century there were converts. 23 were put to death for refusing to submit to Islam. But there is no trace of a surviving church.³ Krapf established himself and was able to continue despite the loss of his wife and little girl. Through extensive travels, translation work and publishing he laid a foundation and alerted the larger mission community to the needs of East Africa. It was, however, close to impossible to penetrate the inland because of hostile tribes. Up to 1890 mission work, i.e. CMS and since 1860 the Methodists, was largely limited to the coast, chiefly among freed slaves⁴.

But Kenya was caught up in the “scramble for Africa”, and the European powers decided that the territory should be under British supervision together with Uganda. In order to facilitate administration and encourage economic activity a railroad was built from Mombasa to Lake Victoria, followed by large-scale immigration from India and England. The construction teams reached Nairobi in 1899, and in 1901 they reached the Lake.

This created of course new opportunities for mission work as well. The Anglican and Catholic missions were strengthened, as well as new societies like Scottish Presbyterians, Baptists, Quakers, Adventists and, somewhat later, Pentecostals. Most of them targeted the central, densely populated regions in Taita, Ukambani, Kikuyu and Western Kenya. The evangelistic efforts were largely successful, but the issues of local culture (e.g. circumcision) and politics (missions in a colonial setting) play a dominant role in the history of the church in Kenya. Large numbers of

Kikuyu Christians withdrew from the mission churches on the circumcision issue in the 1930's and formed independent churches. The political issue also split the church and missions community. Most missions wanted to see an educated and liberated African church. This was fundamentally at odds with the goals of the settler community who primarily wanted a subordinate and obedient work force on the farms and in public service. Other missions and missionaries were all too comfortable with the settler mindset, provided they could preach true religion to the people⁵.

The growth of the church in Kenya has been uneven, both in terms of depth and numbers. The densely populated regions of central and western Kenya has experienced extensive numerical growth, while the economically poorer regions with nomadic peoples in the North, North-East and South have seen less or even no growth⁶. The area stretching from the North Coast along the Somali and Ethiopian border is hardly reached at all, and you will find most people there are still Muslims or adherents of traditional religion.- And all churches have been painfully aware of the need to teach and disciple new converts, but given the large numbers one has often been unable to follow up properly. Many professing Christians have received little or only the most basic instruction with obvious consequences for daily Christian life.⁷

Lutheran mission work in Kenya up to 1990 – briefly explained⁸

Lutheran missions were quite early established in Kenya, but were fully permanent and rooted only on the third attempt. Firstly, German Lutherans were engaged among the Kamba and on the North coast of Kenya from the late 1880s⁹. When the governments in Berlin and London agreed that Kenya should become British-dominated territory and Tanganyika German¹⁰, the German Leipzig Mission withdrew and relocated in Tanganyika after handing over to the newly arrived British Africa Inland Mission, while the Neukirchener Mission handed over to Scots and Swedes to carry on whatever they had started¹¹.

The second attempt was made by the Swedish Evangelical Mission¹². For quite some years their missionaries were established in what is now Somalia and Kenya North coast, but after World War 1 all their personnel were transferred to Tanganyika to take over the German fields that were left vacant as a consequence of the war.¹³

On the third attempt, however, the Swedish Lutheran Mission (SLM)¹⁴ successfully established a mission in 1948 at Itierio in Western Kenya among the Kisii. This project had been long in the making as envoys from Sweden had visited the area around 1938, but the project was held up by WW2¹⁵. From Itierio and Matongo stations the missionaries in due time established congregations all over Kisii as well as in neighbouring Luo-land. At Ogango, near Nyamira, a women's work centre was later established, while at Itierio and Matongo one had a secondary school and a health centre besides the evangelistic work. The school and the health facilities answered a real need and were held in high esteem by the local people.- From 1957 a Bible school was established at Matongo to educate the evangelistic workers of the church. It developed into Matongo Lutheran Theological College (MLTC) which was opened in 1977. In the 1970s the SLM extended their work also eastwards to the Kipsigis area and established a new centre at Chesinendet.

The different congregations in this Lutheran network formed in 1963 the Lutheran Church of Kenya¹⁶. Later the name was changed to Evangelical Lutheran Church of Kenya (ELCK). In 1964 another Lutheran mission came to join hands, namely Swedish-Lutheran Evangelical Association of Finland (SLEAF)¹⁷. Their original plan was to start new work north of Kisumu among the Maragoli. They ran into serious difficulty, however, with the former owner of the church plot. The missionaries had to leave, and the owner later formed a Lutheran church all of his own¹⁸. The missionaries turned their attention to the Luo and established a blossoming work from Atemo and Rukongo church centres.

The US-based World Mission Prayer League¹⁹ joined ELCK in 1969. They had personnel for new evangelistic work in Nairobi, for the health centres and for what later became theological education at Matongo. In the early 1980s this mission also pioneered Lutheran evangelistic and health work among the Samburu²⁰.

Another Finnish Lutheran mission organization²¹ came on board in 1970, i.e. Lutheran Evangelical Association of Finland (LEAF). They built up an extensive evangelistic and social work in Kisumu, opened up evangelistic and health outreach to the Masai, contributed in congregational work in Nairobi, and occupied key positions at Itierio as well as at MLTC.

Norwegian Lutheran Mission²² became part of the team in 1977, but NLM was determined to target unevangelized areas. They

started out in West Pokot District and built up four church centres from which they have run an extensive evangelistic and Bible teaching ministry, besides health, school and community development work in the area. In the early 1980s they extended their outreach to include also the nomadic Borana and Gabbra of Northern Province as well as the Muslim Digo along the South coast²³. Since 1971 NLM had been running a media ministry at Voi²⁴ besides having a number of missionaries serving the churches in Ethiopia and Tanzania. The new administrative office and missionary children's school in Nairobi could now serve all of East Africa.

The latest mission to join ELCK has been the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS).²⁵ They had for years been established in West Africa, but opened up an East Africa Office in the early nineties. Through different contacts and joint projects it has served as a de facto regular mission partner of ELCK for years, but the relationship was not officially formalized until 2004. ELCK has now been granted full altar-and-pulpit-fellowship with LCMS.²⁶

Lastly, we must mention the Lutheran Heritage Foundation (LHF) which has played a major role in ELCK in the period we are considering.²⁷ LHF is under LCMS, but not answerable to LCMS board. LHF objective generally is to spread Lutheran literature. In Kenya LHF runs courses, seminars and evangelistic projects besides regular literature translation and distribution.

ELCK has from its formal beginning in 1963, been a well organized church with a closely defined working structure outlined in the church constitution, complete with work agreements with each cooperating mission partner. The constitution stipulated three different administrative levels, i.e. congregations, parishes, and districts, all under the authority of the Executive Committee and Head Office. As the church grew, however, deaneries were added in the mid 1990s. These deaneries were converted into dioceses in 2003.

Structural changes in the 1990s – tension points and fault lines

As previously mentioned the church progressed fairly well up to 1990, but then it experienced rather serious turbulence. The problems surfaced particularly in the areas of administration and leadership, in the handling of economic affairs, the transition to diocesan structure, and the relationship to old and new mission partners.

Administration and leadership – the ethnic factor

Kenya experienced profound political change in the early 1990s. From being a de facto one-party state, president Moi opened up for multi-party system. People were tired of years with corruption and limited opportunities to express themselves politically. Unfortunately, the parties formed were not broad national entities with a political ideology, but rather ethnic associations that worked as a political platform for ambitious leaders. Unfortunately this ethnification of politics could be observed not only in Kenya.

In ELCK similar sentiments could be heard. The way Head Office was run was considered old fashioned and authoritarian with little participation and ownership at the local level. Some church institutions experienced serious problems which the office was unable to deal with in a satisfactory manner. Old ethnic rivalries began to surface, especially between Kisii and Luo. Head Office intervention, or lack of it, was considered to have an ethnic twist that was not well received.²⁸ The church officers were not able to agree in certain cases, and malpractices continued unchecked. This perceived lack of concern for church ethics created serious unrest among many church members.²⁹ A high profile student discipline case at the Matongo seminary proved to be a sad example of poor judgement on the part of Head Office – which increased the pressure for change.³⁰

The handling of economic affairs

ELCK had several excellent health centres and clinics, in Kisii-land, Luo, Masaii, Samburu and Pokot. As long as these institutions were managed well, received financial support and subsidized medicine, things went well.

However, in the early 1990s condition for health services changed. Treatment become easier available at a cheaper rate than before, and it was difficult to run even, not to mention with a profit. It was obvious for all to see that ELCK institutions were by now overstaffed with the number of patients going down. Some had noticed cases of nepotism in the hiring policy coupled with a corresponding reluctance to lay off surplus staff. Cases of outright theft and fraud were not dealt with decisively. Lacking income, the church nonetheless had to pay salaries and pensions. Contrary to the church constitution, the Head Office even allowed health staff to receive retirement benefits from a fund designated for evangelistic workers – which was soon emptied. The little

money available was not able to meet running expenses, and most evangelists and pastors went with reduced or no pay for months and years. It is not hard to imagine how hard this was on their families.

The financial situation degenerated to the extent that by 2003 the church was technically bankrupt, and the incoming leadership was threatened with fines and/or jail for over years failing to pay to Kenya Government minimum pension and hospital fund fees as required by law.

In an attempt to handle the serious situation, the treasurer in 1993 borrowed money from a development project, money that did not appear in the church balance sheet. The loan increased year after year until the project auditors refused to accept such huge "cash" amounts - and the scheme became known. The project bank signatories were the church officers. Many saw in this a structural flaw besides being an obvious case of financial mismanagement. There was time and need for serious change.

*The transition to diocesan structure –
Head Office moves to Nairobi*

The ELCK constitution provided for three administrative levels, as already mentioned. But when all district minutes had to be ratified in Executive Committee before implementation, the church administration became an obstacle in stead of a facilitator in the work. New structures had to be created.

In 1996 the church created deaneries with limited self rule, i.e. South West, Lake, North-West and Central Deanery. These deaneries were the coming together of local church districts. The thinking behind was that the church represents an ethnic mix that can work together in harmony. Things did not, however, work out that well. The ethnic factor resurfaced. The old tensions between Kisii and Luo became more pronounced. The churches of Western Province could not agree among themselves where to belong. The Kalenjin were part of North-West, but withdrew and joined Central. The restructuring should release energy and facilitate greater efforts in evangelization and ministry, but it turned into a church variant of the mistrust and unrest one could find in society generally. The church became another arena of ethnic tension.

The election of Pastor Francis Onderi as bishop in 1996 marked the transition from synodal to (soft) diocesan form of church government, from church chairman to bishop. In 2002

Onderi was succeeded by Pastor Walter Obare. Obare has worked purposely to move the church further along the same line, e.g. towards what is basically an Anglican church structure.

Moving Head Office to Nairobi had been planned for years, but previous church chairmen did not have the administrative power or vision to carry it through. Obare did, but unfortunately the move was not coordinated well with the Nairobi church community. Bishop Obare held that he had the mandate from the Executive Committee (Excom) to implement the move, whereas the local church felt they were not sufficiently consulted nor listened to in the process. Above all they complained that they were not given a chance to elect him as their bishop, he was imposed on them. But there were also other disagreements, e.g. the allocation and use of church offices, the deployment of pastoral staff at the Uhuru Highway congregation, and the leadership role of elders who for years had become used to a very democratic structure. It was a clash of cultures where an assertive bishop found it increasingly hard to cooperate with self-conscious elders used to internal self-rule.

The tension came to a head when in 2004 the senior pastor at Uhuru Highway, an American missionary, resigned and moved to Dagoretti, a small congregation under Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church. Most of the congregation and elders followed him. It was a loss to all parties concerned that the conflict could not be solved peacefully. Bishop Obare did not take lightly the role played by his bishop colleague in the other church, but that story is outside the scope of this article.

The Uhuru Highway congregation is now in the process of recovering from the split, and Sunday attendance is on the increase. A major building program will make sure both ELCK Head Office and the local congregation will have enough office space.

Needless to say, the Nairobi case outlined above was causing serious concern and consternation all over the church. Taken together with the ethnic tension many asked themselves: How can we preach reconciliation and peace with integrity when we find it so hard to live it – even in our own church? At the same time, the cases forced many to accept ethnicity and leadership as issues and problems that must be dealt with also in ELCK. Hopefully that realization can lead to an opening up, a greater sense of maturity and growth in these questions.³¹

*Old partners downsize - new mission partners –
Lutheran Heritage Foundation*

ELCK has its roots in Scandinavian Lutheran missions. In the early 1990's it became clear that the mission involvement ought to decrease, especially in the "old" areas. SLM in particular was determined to downsize its involvement in Kenya, both in terms of personnel and financial support. The missions wanted the church to have a greater degree of self-support as it was a national church running its own affairs.

In 1996 a transition plan was finally agreed upon which outlined how support should decrease by 10% each year. Overseas government funds to Health Department institutions had already been significantly reduced. In addition, in the early 1990's Scandinavian countries experienced a severe financial crisis with a significant drop of support for missions. The missions would not have been able to continue the same level of support, even if they had wanted to.

The plan was not well received. Many church members and leaders hardly considered it a plan of their own, it was another mission idea. Only reluctantly, for lack of alternatives, was it finally implemented, starting the year 2000. We have already described the financial crisis that the church found itself in. The transition plan came on top of that crisis. The church leaders became convinced that ELCK must find new partners who can shoulder the financial burden together with them – the old partners had tired.

All the missions were not enthusiastic about the plan. SLEAF was willing to continue supporting the Luo-congregations considerably. In Pokot support was still coming in, but NLM concentrated their support and personnel in evangelization of new areas and development work. Bishop Obare, on his part, said openly that he had never been part of the plan, and it was detrimental to the church. Still, the missions stuck to the plan – hoping that somehow the adverse circumstances would force the church into healthier patterns of managing their financial and human resources.

It was at this crucial time that LCMS started its operations in East Africa. Several pastors had attended LCMS seminaries in America, among them Obare. LCMS teachers were contributing to theological conferences at the ELCK seminary at Matongo. The relationship deepened. Through various international ministries of LCMS the church succeeded to secure enough funds to carry it through the severe financial crisis. Besides, ELCK invited LCMS to

run some of their regular mission projects in the church. This was an extended process over years where both LCMS and ELCK came to know each other better. Then, in 2004 it was announced that the two shall have full altar-and-pulpit-fellowship.

Lutheran Heritage Foundation is, as previously mentioned, an independent part of LCMS. Around 1996 they recruited a former missionary of ELCK to be their new Africa director.³² Being a very dynamic leader he built up a ministry that soon included all the countries in the region, translating and distributing various kind of basic Lutheran literature.

Some of LHF translation projects were not easy to understand, e.g. translating the Book of Concord into tribal languages of areas where people were still struggling to read and write their own language. More puzzling and disturbing was, however, LHF employment policy and principles of work. LHF would employ for translation work, or call for seminar and courses, people who were under church discipline - without informing or asking for advice or recommendations from the local church. At the same time expecting the local church's full confidence in the outcome of the translation! LHF also had the peculiar habit of calling regular church employees to their ministry functions without informing the church or seek permission from department heads. There were also cases of hand-outs or promises of financing that would entice church personnel in a way that many considered deeply unethical. Several were over time forced to submit to the director because they had become financially dependant on LHF in terms of employment, scholarship, project contribution or children's schoolfees.

The LHF leadership for years enjoyed a close relationship with the Head Office and contributed strategically to the always present financial needs of the church. As a result, however, the LHF office and director became a very controversial political issue in ELCK. LHF was pulling strings openly or behind the scenes in all areas of the church, despite the fact that the organization had never become an official partner of ELCK. The relationship between LHF and ELCK leadership became more cautious after bishop Obare found reason to believe that LHF challenged him personally by supporting a pastor who took the church to court in a dispute concerning transfer.

Looking back over the period we are considering, the relationship to the missions has been rather varied. In response to the

financial crisis both church and missions opted for solutions that in hindsight could have been better prepared and followed up. The old missions' cutback on subsidies had two major premises, namely that other missions should not interfere in the process, and that this would bring a measure of financial maturity to ELCK. It didn't happen that way, however. New mission partners seemed more than willing to pay. But one can also ask: Did the old mission partners fully realize the gravity of the situation?

Head Office has worked hard to adjust to the new situation. However, old spending and hiring habits are hard to break, so it remains to be seen whether ELCK in general is better off than before to handle its finances. Financial troubles tend to bring out the worst. A pastor from the Anglican Church warned in a conference at Matongo: "A beggar has no dignity." Neither has the one who exploits an unfortunate partner's temporary weakness to gain short-term influence.

Long-term theological and administrative issues

The period we have considered has been very challenging for the church leadership. The overriding concern was: How can the church survive economically? How can we get an administrative structure that serves us better? There were, however, other issues of theology and administration that surfaced as well. These issues had to do with how ELCK understands itself at a deep level:

The issue of relating to various Lutheran traditions

ELCK historically is a result of the evangelistic efforts of different Scandinavian missions, being confessionally Lutheran and at the same time of the evangelical low-church revival tradition. That means that inside ELCK somewhat diverse Lutheran traditions have peacefully coexisted where each has honoured the other. But time and again it has been necessary to remind the church, especially when there were calls for strong liturgical uniformity, that *Confessio Augustana* is quite clear about what constitutes unity - and what does not.

The missionaries have contributed according to their theological traditions. Finnish missionaries e.g. have been strong on liturgy and confessions. The Americans have been strong in pioneer evangelism and diakonia. The old Swedes are still speaking through their writings, being strong on pastoral theology.³³ Norwegians have stressed evangelism and church planting in appro-

prate cultural forms. Although there could be at times quite refreshing discussions on questions of church order and traditions, it was never serious theological differences as such. ELCK and supporting missions were decidedly conservative Lutheran – much more so than the sister church in Tanzania. One could ask if this was a tested and tried position - or was it the result of theological and ecumenical isolation?

ELCK was, however, not theologically isolated. ELCK has for a number of years (against the wishes of the parent mission, SLM), been a member of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). Chairman, later bishop Nyamwaro, served at one time as one of LWF's vice-presidents. As long as LWF respected ELCK the relationship was prospering. When LWF supported and promoted a perceived liberal theological agenda in Africa the relationship turned sour. Students could obtain LWF scholarship to what was considered liberal institutions, but they were refused funding at more conservative theological colleges. The church leaders were dismayed by what they could see and hear of theology and ethics in ecumenical fora, and they consciously turned elsewhere for international contacts.

The recent warming up to LCMS as official mission partner must be understood in this perspective. Besides helping out financially, LCMS has provided first degree and graduate level theological training to several of present ELCK leaders. LCMS teachers have figured prominently at local Lutheran confessional conferences.³⁴ LCMS has provided ELCK with contacts to the outside world when the opportunities provided by LWF were not so attractive any longer. ELCK has still, though, retained its membership in LWF.

Hardly anybody has complained about spending less time with LWF. One could raise a question, however, if LCMS and its "hard confessionalism" is the answer to the challenges of ELCK. LCMS is strong on Lutheran theology and liturgy, but have shown little appreciation for local African culture. When LHF started translation of the Book of Concord into tribal languages, what does it mean? ELCK urgently needs *culturally relevant* theological input to the Kenyan church and society context.³⁵

How has the inclusion of LCMS affected the church theologically? One question is rather obvious: LCMS has traditionally not been cooperating outside strictly defined confessional frames. With full altar-and-pulpit-fellowship with ELCK, shall now all

ELCK pastors and missionaries be required to subscribe to the Book of Concord, like they do in LCMS?³⁶ Some fear that ELCK can become more theologically polarized – but perhaps on the wrong issues.

*The issue of diocesan church order –
what consequences does it have?*

The old constitution provided for a democratic structure where the local elders together with church employees provided executive leadership. In the new constitution³⁷ this basic structure has been retained, while at the same time the role of the clergy is strengthened. This might not present a problem as long as we deal with officers elected for a certain number of years – also bishops. In the Kenyan context, however, most churches elect their bishops for life and with greater ecclesiastical authority. Powerful bishops appointed for life answerable to an executive committee democratically elected can be a recipe for prolonged power struggles which can prove destructive. This issue, which is now before the constitution committee, must be handled very carefully.³⁸

Interestingly, the determination and speed of this development towards a stronger diocesan church order, to the point of even electing an archbishop, is somehow surprising. It can be seen as a clear break with ELCK's recent past. The introduction of the office of archbishop is particularly odd in the context of the express wish to implement basic Lutheran convictions. Luther was quite clear about the destructive ways of bishops and popes, and given a choice, he elected "superintendents" for the congregations. When supporting bishops, he changed around the way the office of a bishop should be interpreted theologically³⁹. The American LCMS has a strong synodal church structure, similar to what ELCK had previously, as do several free Lutheran churches in Europe, Africa and Asia⁴⁰. After the Reformation Lutheran national churches in Scandinavia continued to be of the old diocesan order more out of tradition – less of choice. Sweden (and with it, Finland) retained the office of archbishop, while Denmark (and with it Norway) did not. Could it be that ELCK here is in the process of adopting elements more from an Anglican rather than a Lutheran tradition?

The issue of church-mission relationship

We have earlier mentioned the transition plan which has been in operation since 2000. That plan deals with the financial support that mission partners contribute to ELCK. Other aspects of the relationship have for years been regulated in formal agreements with each individual mission.

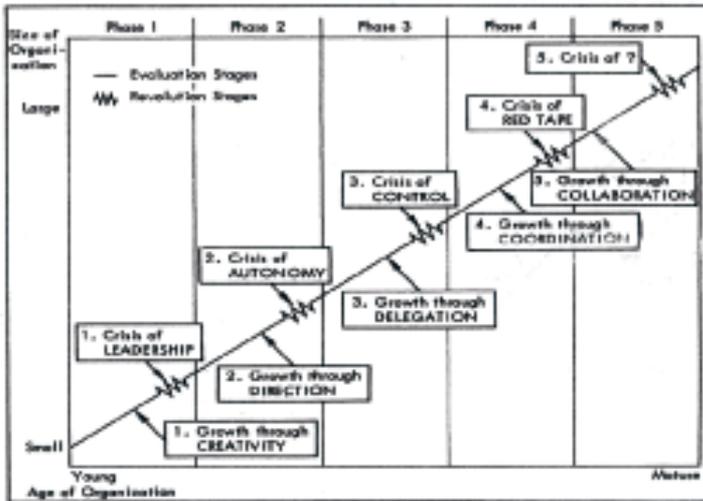
All the missions have so far served as an integrated partner of ELCK. That has served both the church and missions well over the years in the different ministries that have developed. But could there be other ways of forming a relationship? The church has come of age, it is mature and increasingly self-supporting in all ways. Would that now is the time to reformulate the relationship to reflect more the equal status between the two, e.g. a partnership or parallel model? Each model, be it integrated, partnership, or parallel has strengths and weaknesses that need to be looked into.

It turns out that e.g. in ministry to Muslims one has to pay particular attention to how an activity is perceived in the eyes of the community. It pays off to keep a low profile. One has to be honest and transparent without causing unnecessary provocation. A formal church body is likely to have more difficulty gaining access to a Muslim community, while a help ministry of some kind might well be accepted. Could be that when considering future ministry challenges ELCK should explore several different ways of church-mission relationships.

The issue of administration and leadership style

Based on studies of a number of organizations Larry Greiner has developed a theoretical perspective on organizational growth that is quite helpful (see figure).⁴¹ It can provide valuable insights into interpreting what has happened in ELCK as well as provide guidance to what must be looked into in the years to come.

Greiner will argue that growing organizations can be seen to move through five periods of *evolution*, each of which ends with a period of crisis and revolution. He points out that "... each evolutionary period is characterized by the dominant *management style* used to achieve growth, while each revolutionary period is characterized by the dominant *management problem* that must be solved before growth will continue."⁴²



It should be kept in mind that this model concerns itself with *management style* and *management problems*. In terms of analysis of the past, the chart can offer interesting insights if we do not see ELCK as a monolithic institution. Sections of ELCK are in stage 2, others in stage 3 or 4. Problems of leadership, autonomy, control, and red tape can be shown to have surfaced at different stages in the history of ELCK. One can also definitely point out periods of great creativity, direction and delegation. According to this model ELCK will do well paying attention to issues of coordination and collaboration in order to experience organizational growth.

Key words like coordination and collaboration works against a centralistic, domineering management style. It encourages leadership that shares information freely, facilitates cooperation, encourages and fosters local ownership of ministry and projects. These honourable goals will be a challenge to ELCK leaders on all levels.

New evangelistic strategies for the future

So far we have focused on the many difficulties that ELCK have faced in the period. But despite these troubles the church has grown significantly both numerically and geographically⁴³. ELCK

used to be the church of the Kisii and Luo, but it is now a truly national Kenyan church with congregations all over the country and gathering together many different ethnic groups. Some of the growth has been spontaneous, without much consideration whether if the church is able to sustain the evangelistic effort with long-term pastoral support. What is needed now is leadership and church strategies to answer the evangelistic and diaconal challenges that are ahead. Let us briefly mention some of them:

- There are still unevangelized areas in Kenya and neighbouring countries, especially Muslim groups. They will most likely not be reached unless specifically targeted.
- The many victims of HIV/Aids in villages and cities present a formidable challenge already and will increasingly do so for many years to come. The church can hardly limit itself to information and counselling without initiating diaconal projects to alleviate material needs.
- Many children of HIV/Aids victims end up in the street, but there are other reasons as well, e.g. ethnic clashes, broken homes, and general poverty. Already the church is sponsoring projects in Kisumu, Nakuru and Kapenguria. But this ministry needs competence, close coordination and long-term follow-up in order to be effective.
- Increased focus on Bible teaching and leadership training – on all levels. The growth experienced cannot be sustained unless we train and help new Christians to grow in faith and maturity. Up till 1990 the church was running a flourishing Theological Education by Extension-program. This ought to come alive again together with focused professional training that takes into account higher levels of general education in Kenya.
- The church needs to direct more attention to its members' spiritual welfare. There is an urgent need for counselling and guidance of children, youth, families, elderly people, confirmation groups, and marriage counselling.
- In an initial stage the church was running extensive community development projects, schools and clinics. As society and the economy becomes more developed and diverse, the church can pull out of some of these institutions. But there is still need for smaller projects that do not demand too much administration and finance. The church has a lot of local competence and should utilize it, but there is a need for coordination and pooling of resources.

Conclusion

In the period 1990-2005 ELCK went through quite dramatic changes. There was plenty of disturbing news – but also good news. Many gained precious experience during times of great difficulty. Some pastors and leaders were party to the difficulties. Most evangelists and pastors showed a moving loyalty and continued to serve in spite of no pay and little support. They stayed with their congregations and even new congregations were started. On the local level life and church work continued despite of the turbulence at the top.

Hopefully, now that the structural changes are practically in place ELCK will be able to concentrate more of its efforts on its primary goal – serving the local community with the Gospel. But it is of vital importance that ELCK can formulate for itself goals and strategies that extend beyond the local leader, pastor or bishop. In secular society many politicians are in permanent campaign mode. They seek power and keep it – but hardly know what to use it for. The church mandate and agenda is wider and more extensive than the careers, short or long, of pastors and leaders. That mandate is clearly spelled out in the Bible, and ELCK has an increasingly important role to play in building His Kingdom and caring for His people in various places in Kenya.

List of abbreviations:

CMS – Church Missionary Society

ELCK – Evangelical Lutheran Church of Kenya

KELC – Kenia Evangelical Lutheran Church

LCMS – Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod

LEAF – Lutheran Evangelical Association of Finland

LHF – Lutheran Heritage Foundation

LWF – Lutheran World Federation

MLTC – Matongo Lutheran Theological College

NLM – Norwegian Lutheran Mission

SLEAF – Swedish-Lutheran Evangelical Association of Finland

SLM – Swedish Lutheran Mission (aka Missionssällskapet Bibel-trogna Vänner, MBV)

WMPL – World Mission Prayer League

Noter:

- ¹ Brief English-language introductions to ELCK history is found in Lounela, Jaakko (1989): "An old mission and a young church: Lutheran work in Kenya from Scandinavian and Kenyan viewpoints." *Mission Studies* 12, vol. 6, nr. 2, pp. 68-76 and Bachmann, E.T.(1989): *Lutheran churches in the world. A handbook*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, p. 69-70.
- ² A standard introduction to Kenyan church history and church life up to 1973 is Barrett, David (1973): *Kenya churches handbook. The development of Kenyan Christianity 1498-1973*. Nairobi: Evangel Publishing House.
- ³ Baur, John (1994): *2000 years of Christianity in Africa. An African history 62-1992*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications, p. 88-91.
- ⁴ To this section see e.g. Anderson, W.B. (1977): *The church in East Africa, 1840-1974*. Dodoma: Central Tanganyika Press. Nthamburi, Zablon (1991): "The beginning and development of Christianity in Kenya: a general survey." In Nthamburi, Z. (ed.): *From mission to church. A handbook of Christianity in East Africa*. Nairobi: Uzima Press, 1991, pp. 1-36.
- ⁵ See e.g. Anderson 1977:105ff. The political issue was particularly burning during the Emergency, 1952-1960. The different rôles that missions and missionaries played comes out clearly in Elkins, Caroline (2005): *Britain's Gulag. The brutal end of empire in Kenya*. London: Pimlico, pp. 91-94, 298-303 et.al.
- ⁶ Barrett's estimate is that Kenya has 79% Christians, see Barrett, Kurian and Johnson, eds. (2001): *World Christian Encyclopedia. A comparative study of churches and religions in the modern world. 2nd ed., vol. 1*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 426.
- ⁷ Anderson 1977:111 refers to *Kusoma* Christianity, i.e. Christian faith with a strong emphasis on literacy - sometimes with less emphasis on Christian conversion and new life.
- ⁸ In this article we shall only deal with ELCK, leaving out Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church. The parallel story of KELC is briefly touched upon in Lundebj, Erling (2006): "Vekst og modning – tilbakeslag og kriser. Luthersk kirkeliv i Kenya 1990-2005." In Grandhagen, Egil and Myksvoll, Aage (eds.): Budskap 2006. *Årsskrift for Fjellbaug Misjonshøgskole (FMH)*. Oslo: Studiebibliotek for Bibel og Misjon, no. 13, pp. 44-47.
- ⁹ Richter, Julius (1922): *Geschichte Evangelische Mission in Afrika*. Gütersloh: Verlag von G. Bertelsmann, pp. 612-615.
- ¹⁰ "Agreement between Great Britain and Germany for the partition of East Africa into British and German spheres, 1886". British and Foreign State Papers, LXXVII, (London, 1893), 1130-1132. Quoted in Mungeam, G.H. (ed.)(1978): Kenya. *Select historical documents 1884-1923*. Nairobi; East African Publishing House, p. 6-7.
- ¹¹ Richter 1922:615. Interestingly, in 1893 The Scandinavian Alliance Mission tried to establish a mission in the same area, led by the Finnish Emil Hedenström, previously Swedish Evangelical Mission in Ethiopia. On the expedition was the Norwegian Ole Alme who wrote numerous letters home before he died in 1896, cf. Alme, Bjarte (1976): *Lang safari på Herrens vegar. Sunnmøre – Amerika – Afrika – misjonæren Ole Alme 1867-1896*. Oslo: Det Norske Samlaget, s. 72ff, 159. This mission work was cared for by the Neukir-

- chener Mission until their missionaries were deported to India at the outbreak of WW1.
- ¹² aka Evangeliska Fosterlands-Stiftelsen (EFS).
- ¹³ Imberg, Rune (1995a): "Och Guds ord hade framgång... Den Evangelisk-Lutherska Kyrkan i Kenya (ELCK) – historik och källinventering." Uppsats framlagd vid seminarierna i kyrkohistoria resp. missionsvetenskap, Lunds Universitet, torsdagen den 18 maj 1995, p. 9ff. This document has an extensive list of written sources in Kenya, Scandinavia as well as USA.
- ¹⁴ Bibeltrogna Vänner (BV), or Swedish Lutheran Mission - <http://www.elmbv.se/sida.asp?s=1>
- ¹⁵ Imberg, Rune (1995b): "Och Guds ord hade framgång. Luthersk mission i Kenya under 1900-talet." *Bibeltrogna Vänners Julkalender 1995*, Stockholm, Bibeltrogna Vänners förlag, 1995, ss. 128-141. Imberg, Rune (1998): "MBV:s missionsarbete i Kenya 1948-1998. Anförande vid Kenya-seminarium" på Strandhem, 14 mars 1998." Unpublished manuscript, 6 pages. See also Lounela, Jaakko (1989): "An old mission and a young church: Lutheran work in Kenya from Scandinavian and Kenyan viewpoints." *Mission Studies 12, vol. 6*, nr. 2 (1989), pp. 68-76, and Lundström, Martin (1982): *En öppen dörr i Kenya*. Stockholm, BVs Förlag.
- ¹⁶ The development towards the formation of an independent church is fully described in Imberg 1995a.
- ¹⁷ See <http://www.slef.fi/>
- ¹⁸ This splinter church was never able to attract many members, probably due to its controversial start and somewhat private family-member character. The story of ELCK's relationship to patriarch, rabbi, bishop Elam Angali Masinde and Independent Lutheran Church is at one time comical and tragic. The dispute about the church plot was finalized in court in 1994! See the entry on ILC in Barratt, D. (red.) (1973): *Kenya Churches Handbook. The Development of Kenyan Christianity 1498-1973*. Nairobi, Evangel Publishing House, p. 244.
- ¹⁹ <http://www.wmpl.org/>
- ²⁰ See Ward, Robert (1999): *Messengers of love*. Kearney, NE: Morris Publishing.
- ²¹ <http://www.sley.fi/w/Sley/English>
- ²² <http://nlm.no/index.php?pid=596>
- ²³ The start and development of the NLM work in Pokot, Borana and among the Digo is covered in Lundeby, E., Mæstad, Å., Valen, K. (eds.)(1984): *Ferdiglagte gjerninger. Glimt fra misjonsarbeidet i Kenya*. Oslo, Lunde, and Lundeby, Erling (2002): "Kenya." I Tolo, Arne (ed.): *Såtid, vekst og modning. Historien om Norsk Luthersk Misjonssambands arbeid i Asia, Afrika og Sør-Amerika*, pp. 189-206. Oslo, Lunde.
- ²⁴ Scripture Mission (SM).
- ⁵ <http://www.lcms.org/>
- ²⁶ <http://www.lcms.org/pages/internal.asp?NavID=6268>
- ⁷ <http://www.lhfmissions.org/>
- ²⁸ The problems were surfacing especially in the health centres and church schools where cases of obvious discipline were handled rather inconsistently. Rumours had it that friends in Head Office allowed errant members of staff in various institutions to continue.

- ²⁹ Two cases were publicly known and caused particular concern and consternation. A man divorced his wife on charges of witchcraft and started to court another woman. When he broke that off in favour of a second lady, the offended party hit back by performing publicly a traditional shaming exercise seldom seen – a most embarrassing situation. The second case involved a widower who irregularly took a young woman into his home, was married privately to the girl, but later sent the girl back home.
- ³⁰ Head Office intervened and forced the seminary to take the student back. After pressuring the college principal out of office and forcing the seminary to close, he was expelled again. Encouraged by support previously offered him, he took the seminary to court seeking to be readmitted. He lost that case in 2004, but has later sued ELCK for damages – a case that is not yet finished.
- ³¹ See the commentary of Mwangi, Paul (2007): “Why the double-standard? Tribalism is painful to all.” *Nation Mediacom, Daily Nation, July 4th, 2007*. http://www.nationmedia.com/dailynation/nmgcontententry.asp?category_id=25&newsid=101586 (accessed July 5th, 2007, at 12:08 p.m.)
- ³² The pastor resigned from both church and mission because of persistent problems in relationships with coworkers.
- ³³ E.g. Rev. Josef Imberg wrote numerous booklets and handbooks for Matongo Bible School still in use – on most theological subjects.
- ³⁴ Several Lutheran confessional conferences have been arranged at Matongo, see Arkkila, Reijo og Olak, Richard O. (eds.)(1992): *We believe, teach and confess. International Lutheran confessional conference 21-24.4.1992 Matongo, Kenya*. Helsinki: SLEY-Kirjat Oy. Arkkila, Reijo og Olak, Richard O. (eds.) (1994): *The Theology of the Cross : Second International Lutheran conference 14.-18.3.1994 Matongo, Kenya*. Helsinki: SLEY.
- ³⁵ ELCK needs more of context-sensitive theology, e.g. Omolo, Joseph Ochola (1997): *Grieving with hope: presentation, analysis and Christian alternatives to burial rites and ancestor relations among the Southern Luo*. Thesis presented for the degree of Th.M. at Fjellhaug Mission Seminary, Oslo.
- ³⁶ “The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod accepts the Scriptures as the inspired and inerrant Word of God, and subscribes unconditionally to all the symbolical books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God. We accept the Confessions because they are drawn from the Word of God and on that account regard their doctrinal content as a true and binding exposition of Holy Scripture and as authoritative for all pastors, congregations and other rostered church workers of The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod.” <http://www.lcms.org/pages/internal.asp?NavID=522> , accessed July 5th, 2007, 12:25 pm.
- ³⁷ The present constitution is formally dated 2002, but several parts are not functioning. The Annual General Meeting of both 2006 and 2007 suspended e.g. the clauses on election to allow room for the present officers to continue.
- ³⁸ Bishop Walter Obare can at times appear rather controversial. He has e.g. consecrated bishops in *Missionsprovinser* in Sweden against the wishes of the Swedish archbishop, and he was removed as LWF theological advisor

because of his strong theological stand. In these matters, however, he has the support of the Executive Committee of ELCK.

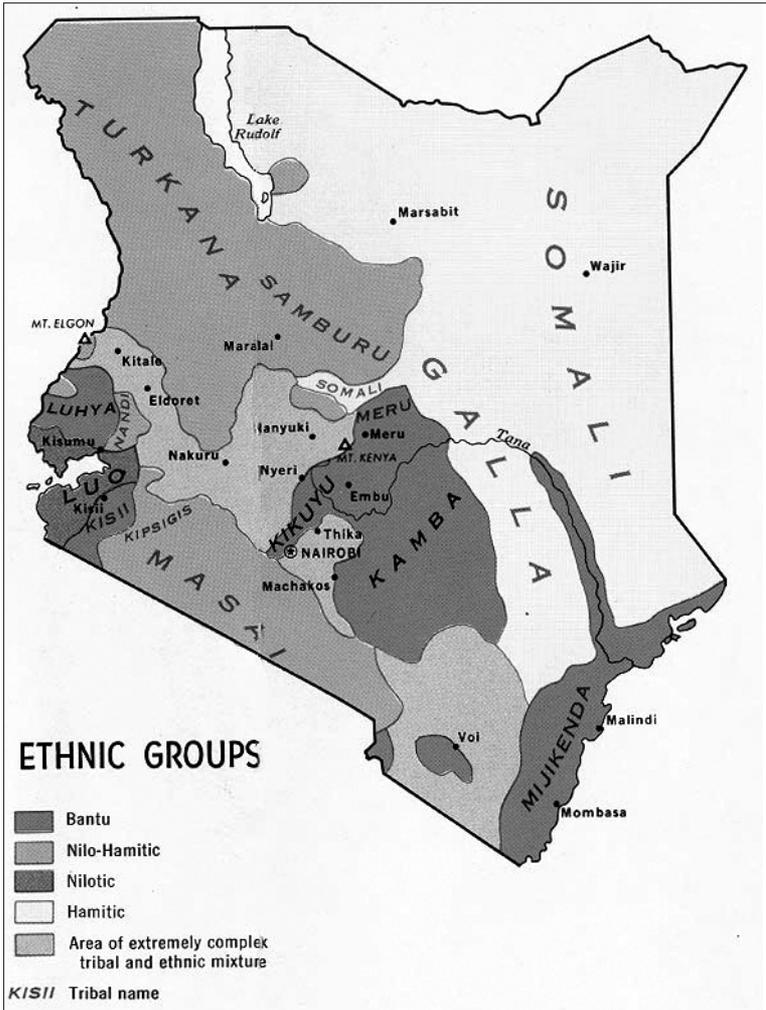
³⁹ See Oftestad, Bernt (2001): *Tro og politikk. En reformasjonshistorie*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, s. 115ff.

⁴⁰ Some Lutheran churches in Africa have bishops, some not, Lutheran archbishops are hard to find. Lutherans in America, in particular, have had lengthy discussions on church order and ministry, but none of them have ever opted for the office of archbishop. See Pragman, James H: (1983): *Traditions of ministry*. St. Louis: Concordia, p. 142ff. Nichol, Todd (1990): "Ministry and oversight in American Lutheranism." In Nichol, T. and Kolden, M. (eds.) (1990): *Called and ordained. Lutheran perspectives on the office of the ministry*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, p. 93-116.

⁴¹ Hersey and Blanchard (1988): *Management of organizational behaviour: utilizing human resources*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, pp. 356-358.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 356.

⁴³ ELCK now has congregations in all provinces, except North-Eastern, and is estimated to have ca. 75.000 members.



http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/africa/kenya_ethnic_1974.jpg