

The Evangelical Lutheran Ovambokavango Church (ELOC) has a new bishop. He is the Rt. Rev. Kleopas Dumeni (Due-may-nee), who was consecrated on 17 June 1979. Bishop Dumeni succeeds Bishop Leonard Auala, now 70, who retired last year. Dumeni is 49 years old, a former assistant to Bishop Auala and youth leader. He is married to Aino (Eye-no). They have seven children; the whereabouts of their oldest, a son, is unknown. He has been missing (originally reported killed) since a raid by the South African army on a refugee camp in May 1978 when almost 1000 men, women and children were massacred.

Lutherans of the United States were represented at the consecration by the Rev. Dr. Paul Wee, General Secretary of Lutheran World Ministries (LWM), who spent eight days in Namibia, almost the limit of his visa which arrived two days before his scheduled departure. Dr. Wee's report is a sobering one. It indicates that Bishop Dumeni's task will be difficult and dangerous. His diocese covers Owamboland, Kavanago, and Caprivi territories along the Angola border where about half the people of Namibia dwell. More than half of them in turn are Lutherans. Here are the words of Dr. Wee.

# NAMIBIA UPDATE

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EDWARD MAY

## The Ecstasy and Agony of Namibia

The place was Engela, mission outpost of the ELOC on the war-ravaged border between Namibia and Angola. Walking between the brilliant red of the cascading Bougainvillea and the harsh, thick bouquets of daggerlike needles of the thorn trees you cannot help but think of the strange mixture of ecstasy and agony, celebration and suffering, which is the life of Namibia today.

The teacher at Engela domestic science school who walks beside me says, "We are really suffering now. But we know that Jesus Christ knows about our suffering and that other Christians stand with us in the struggle." The evidence for the suffering is on every hand--the shattered wrecks of cars and trucks blown to pieces by land mines, the graves of many victims, usually innocent farmers and children, caught in the middle of the conflict between soldiers and the South West Africa Peoples Organization (SWAPO) partisans--as well as the hundreds of stories I have heard these days of intimidation, torture, detainment and death, primarily at the hands of South African army units. But the evidence for the depth of the life of faith in Jesus Christ is also to be found at every turn--not only in the words of and the style of the church's patriarch, retiring Bishop Leonard Auala, or in the strong spiritual leadership already demonstrated by

the new Bishop of the ELOC, Kleopas Dumeni, who was consecrated yesterday in the town of Ongwediva as 4000 from many tribes sang and prayed, listened and celebrated for six hours under the hot Owambo sun--but in the quiet conversation and in the style of life of those who have been broken, psychologically and bodily, during times of detainment.

After eight days among the people of Namibia, including students, families, church leaders, SWAPO members, South African soldiers and government officials, I can only concede that the people of Namibia, both black and white, are on the threshold of a new wave of conflict and suffering which will test the integrity of the churches, challenge the meaning of solidarity among the churches of the world, and determine whether the people of the country, scarcely a million, will be able to survive.

*After this disquieting introduction, Dr. Wee, conscious of the fact that his time and contacts were limited, made the following personal observations.*

The constant element in the present situation is fear. This is not only in evidence in the villages and kraals of the northern areas or in the Tsumeb countryside where the heaviest fighting takes place, but among the common people, the church leaders, school teachers and hospital personnel, especially in Owamboland.

Similarly the polarization of whites in Windhoek from the blacks of the outlying "locations" of Katatura and Khomasdal, intensified by the recently proposed "Abolition of Racial Discrimination Bill" which would make discrimination in hotels and restaurants punishable by fine or imprisonment, has created an intense climate of fear on both sides.

There is no longer any semblance of order and the rule of law in Owamboland. The 350,000 people are totally at the mercy of the arbitrary power of the South African army and the units of the Home Guard, comprised of young, black dropouts from Owambo society who are uneducated, unemployed and lured by good pay and excitement. These armed bands, often undisciplined, are known for committing atrocities against their own people. South Africa now appears to be replacing some of its own units with Home Guards assembled from all parts of the country and from various tribes.

#### Who are the Terrorists?

Although Namibia has been experiencing a gradual escalation of terror activities over the past two decades, creating a vicious circle which can only be broken by a political settlement, there is no doubt that the primary source of this escalation is the South African army. Evidence of South African army brutality among all segments of the population is so overwhelming, pervasive and capable of documentation it makes a mockery of the South African government's claim to be "responding to the request of the Owambo people for protection."

Some farmers, both black and white, have been subjected to violence by SWAPO units, causing a massive build-up of armaments in the homes of whites in Windhoek, Tsumeb and the other towns, but such activities are dwarfed by the constant, daily violence of the army. It is the South African army together with units of the Home Guard which detain and beat the students, hospital personnel and pastors, applying sand and electric shock torture to those accused of aiding SWAPO. It is these who are responsible for harrasing, intimidating, blackmailing and bribing the population. It is these units which steal anything of value from homes they raid. In the first instance it is they who deserve the name "terrorists".

#### Army Occupation

The South African army occupies nearly every

village and controls nearly every road in Owamboland. For the first time temporary camps are being fortified with permanent buildings, underground living quarters and heavier defenses. All towns, like Ondangwa and Oshakati, but even small communities like Ongwediva, Oshigambo, Oniipa and Otjimbingwe where the church institutions are located, are presently being surrounded by barbed wire fences with sentries from the Home Guard and the South African army standing at the single entrance. In addition tanks, armoured personnel carriers and army troops are everywhere, and in great numbers. Twice during my brief trip I had a gun pushed into my stomach and many times guns aimed at me during searches of our car and our suitcases.

#### A Fading Hope for U.N. Involvement

The people have only a glimmer of hope that elections will be carried out under United Nations supervision. Likewise there is hardly any hope that the Western Five will be able to present an acceptable plan for Namibian independence. The optimism created by the visit of the U.N. Commissioner for Namibia, Martti Ahtisaari, a year ago, has faded completely. Mr. Ahtisaari sent an encouraging telegram to Bishop Dumeni on the occasion of the consecration, but it was understood strictly as a sign of personal support.

Even recent news of a high level attempt to revive U.N. Security Council Resolution 435 is greeted with cynicism. Where some blame the failure of the U.N. plan on "new conditions" set by SWAPO and U.N. Secretary General Waldheim, others believe that South Africa, fearing a SWAPO victory under U.N. supervised elections, has intentionally sabotaged the implementation of the plan during the past year.

#### Mass Arrests

The South African government, through the Administrator General of South West Africa, is determined to annihilate SWAPO as an internal political movement. Though not a banned organization, over a hundred of its leaders have been detained since the end of April under AG-26 (a proclamation of the Administrator General) which allows no right of habeas corpus, no access to legal counsel and no statement of charges against those taken prisoner. During the week of 17 June a group of young students, most of whom have only slight connections to the legal organization of SWAPO, were quietly

arrested. In an interview I was granted with the Deputy Administrator General, Mr. John Vial, for the purpose of presenting the views of the LWF member churches in the United States, I was informed that "an emergency situation unfortunately necessitates the abrogation of certain legal procedures."

#### "Zimbabwe-Rhodesia" Connection

Among the black population there is fear that a Rhodesia-like "solution" will be imposed on Namibia, that under the guise of ostensibly "fair" elections a solution will be found which only appears to be democratic. Hope was expressed that certain Western countries like the United States would continue to maintain economic sanctions and withhold formal diplomatic recognition of Zimbabwe-Rhodesia in order to pressure for negotiations among representation of all segments of the population.

#### Faith--Hope--Love Abide

The spiritual depth in the life of these churches is the single most potent force in keeping hope alive. The people who came to the consecration of Bishop Dumeni sang many songs relating the present situation to the major themes of biblical history. There is an oral tradition alive, especially in the North, that recounts the blessings of God in the face of adversity. When in detention spoken Bible verses are a source of mutual support. The exceptional work of the Finnish Missionary Society has had a profound influence combining a depth of spirituality with actions and solidarity.

Where one might expect a preoccupation with internal problems there is a growing concern to bring the Gospel message to others: missionaries are sent by the ELOC to Angola and Senegal; consideration is being given to help with mission work among the Fulani in Western Central Africa and perhaps to send a pastor to Surinam; collection of over 2000 Rand (about \$2200) was recently made as an expression of love to aid Indochinese refugees.

In the midst of a situation of intense occupation, suffering and fear, there are surprising signs of vibrant faith, creativity and hope.

#### Comments

*Dr. Wee's observations lead one to think that he listened only to SWAPO supporters--that he*

*was "taken in" by a propaganda campaign--but that was not the case. He met with leading members of other political parties, had experiences (largely negative) with the South African army and the police, consulted with the manager of the leading industrial operation, the Tsumeb mine, and associated with a variety of individuals in his travels, among them a supporter of the neo-Nazi movement in Namibia, who observes Hitler's birthday as a holiday. Wee leaves no doubt that a war is in progress and that while innocent people are being hurt by both sides in the conflict, the greater responsibility lies with the South African government which has turned Namibia into one large military camp.*

*The Lutheran Churches in Namibia (and elsewhere) have affirmed that political structures must be based on the rule of law. Shortly after Dr. Wee left Namibia, the Washington Post reported that 1500 more persons were detained, and reports out of Lusaka added another 3500. It is understood that at least 1500, and up to 5000, people are being held in barbed wire prison compounds, many of them arrested during political rallies. Temperatures in Namibia during this season sink into the 40's at night. It is reported that five have died and many more are sick from exposure. The church leaders have taken no position as to the guilt or innocence of these people, but have challenged the justice of a law that permits detention without charges being filed or denies the right of trial. These church leaders warn that such actions on the part of what purports to be a "Christian government upholding the ideals of Western civilization" fan the flames of dissension creating conditions which lead to increased violence and bloodshed.*

*In the same block with the office of the Lutheran Center is the Appellate Division of the New York State Supreme Court.*

*Two statues grace the entrance of that building, one a Socratic type with the words inscribed on the base: "Any law not based on wisdom is a menace to the state;" the other, a Trojan type, with the words: "We should not use force until just laws have been defied." From all reports, such reasonable dicta have meant nothing to the administrators of the Namibian territory either throughout its history or currently. Laws not based on wisdom are provoking the people to rebellion. Their defiance is against the injustice which permeates the laws, their manner of enforcement and the*

*judicial system itself.*

*The authorities have concentrated their hostility on their perceived enemy, SWAPO, carrying out mass arrests at the slightest provocation, but indulging the violence of white resistance groups without comparable action, to wit:*

*On 26 June, a pharmacist of Windhoek was murdered when a hand grenade was thrown into a Masonic Hall where a meeting was being held. Four others were injured, one critically. Pamphlets had been distributed by the White Resistance Movement (WRM) accusing Freemasonry of being equivalent to communism and stating that it should be eradicated. The WRM is also against Jews and Rotarians whom they identify as communists, and as late as 29 June was threatening to bomb their halls as well.*

*Even the conservative Windhoek Advertiser has begun to draw some discomfiting conclusions.*

*...We find the handling of this affair by the authorities as extremely disturbing; there seem to be deliberate blind spots and hamhandedness.*

*Police Chief Attie Drotsche has declined to draw conclusions about who might be responsible and he has apparently declined to use the powers at his disposal to hasten action against the guilt-ridden.*

*We deplore this line.*

*The writing has been on the wall long enough. Newspapermen have personally warned Colonel Drotsche. Rightwing elements have taken it upon themselves during the past year to beat up newspapermen and innocent people on the streets; they almost drowned a pregnant woman in a city pond; they have damaged property and have dispatched poisonous letters.*

*Not least of these letters have been addressed to Freemasons, an organization which is semi-religious, unpolitical and harmless. It is an avid contributor to charity. One of these letters has been made available to The Advertiser.*

Following the bomb blasts in Windhoek and Swakopmund last year, the Police rapidly concluded that SWAPO was responsible, swoops were made throughout the country and tens of people were detained without trial.

Why didn't we see or hear about this sort of action in the early hours of yesterday morning? No clues? No suspects? Col. Drotsche told one of our reporters yesterday afternoon: "It could have been anyone, it could even have been me."

A South African manufactured grenade was used. A white man was seen to be running away from the scene. The police are surely not that naive that a SWAPO terrorist would risk blowing up an organization that is no immediate threat to it.

*By 2 July, some whites had been held for questioning. The contrast should help a person far removed from Namibia understand why the black population feels the way it does, and why Bishop Dumeni, church leaders of all denominations and all Namibians who yearn for justice, peace and reconciliation have their work cut out for them. Our intercessions in their behalf for a growing measure of faith, hope and love are crucial.*

*Equally crucial are persistent and frequent letters to representatives in the Congress urging strong action by the U.S. government to limit the violence by supporting United Nations intervention. The current U.N. Security Council resolution which has been frustrated by the South African government is number 435. It calls for the U.N. to supervise and control elections in Namibia through a combination peace keeping force and civilian corps of about 7500 personnel. The Secretary General's recommendations for implementation have the support of practically everyone including the major church bodies in Namibia, the liberation movements and the Frontline African states (Angola, Zambia, Botswana, Mozambique and Tanzania). The only opposition comes from South Africa itself. Lutheran World Ministries is on record as supporting "whatever sanctions may become necessary" to bring about South Africa's compliance.*