
ECUMENICAL PEACE ORGANISATION “THE WORLD ALLIANCE FOR PROMOTING INTERNATIONAL FRIENDSHIP THROUGH THE CHURCHES” AND RESISTANCE TO TOTALITARIAN REGIMES IN THE INTERWAR PERIOD¹

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this article is to describe and analyse the activities of one of the ecumenical organisations that emerged in the beginning of the 20th century and established the basis for the ecumenical movement as we know it today. More specifically, our intention is to focus on the resistance of the ecumenical movement to totalitarian regimes between the First and the Second World War, and particularly on the peace organisation “The World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches” (The World Alliance).

Resistance can be armed, unarmed, spiritual, active or passive. In order to conduct further analysis, one must define resistance in a specific context, i.e. how narrowly or broadly the term should be understood. In the case of the ecumenical movement, a broad definition can be adopted. According to the broad concept defined by Hans Adolf Jacobsen, resistance comprises all that was done despite the terror and persecution of a totalitarian regime for the sake of humanity in aid of the persecuted.²

¹ The research on which this article is based was supported by the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research, targeted financing project SF0180026s11 and the European Union through the European Regional Development Fund (Centre of Excellence CECT).

² Hans Adolf **Jacobsen**, *Germans against Hitler. July 20, 1944* (Wiesbaden: Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung, 1969), 11–13.

The concept of resistance has most commonly been analysed in connection with National Socialist Germany. Ian Kershaw has stated that even over 50 years after the Second World War and despite much scholarly work, historians are still unable to define 'resistance'. There is even a lack of consensus regarding whether a precise definition should be sought.³ Based on a broad definition, less dramatic types of activity against a regime have also been valued as forms of resistance. Martin Broszat has claimed that these forms of resistance, which were "often neglected in the traditional histories of resistance (*Widerstand*), were in fact types of subversion more capable of undermining the totalitarian dictatorship than efforts at fundamental opposition."⁴

In describing the resistance organised by the World Alliance, a three-level program can be constructed: on the broadest level it was resistance to totalitarian regimes based on ideological confrontation. The World Alliance offered totalitarian regimes an alternative and opposing ideology of Christian internationalism and peace. In describing that alternative ideology, one must assess the question of active and passive resistance and its response, i.e. how did the Alliance confront totalitarian regimes and how successful was the organisation in carrying its message to countries ruled by totalitarian regimes. The second level embodies the spiritual resistance that demanded basic human and religious rights in countries ruled by totalitarian regimes. At the third level, resistance among the representatives of the World Alliance living in countries ruled by totalitarian regimes should be analysed in greater detail.

At all three levels, the World Alliance and its members resisted the ideologies of totalitarian regimes and the persecution of minorities, believers, etc. The fact that the resistance was organised by an international organisation on an international level is an exceptional aspect of the resistance organised by the World Alliance. At the first two levels, the resistance included resistance from both outside and inside countries ruled by totalitarian regimes, while at the third level it was resistance that was based on an ideology of the Alliance but came from representatives inside countries

³ Ian **Kershaw**, *The Nazi Dictatorship. Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2000), 183.

⁴ Martyn **Housden**, *Resistance and Conformity in the Third Reich*. Routledge Sources in History. (London: Routledge, 1997), 162.

ruled by totalitarian regimes. The main focus of this article is on two of the most influential regimes of the 20th century – National Socialism in Germany and Communism in the Soviet Union. In Germany all three levels of resistance can be perceived, whereas in the case of Communist Russia resistance at the first two levels can be observed and described.

THE STRUCTURE, WORKING METHODS, AIMS AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE WORLD ALLIANCE

One must first briefly examine the structure and main objectives of the World Alliance in order to understand the organisation's possibilities and means of organising its activities against the regimes that shaped the history of the 20th century. Secondly, the ideology of the World Alliance as the basis for resistance should be analysed.

The World Alliance was established in 1914 as a successor to an Anglo-German organisation founded after mutual visits by British and German church leaders in 1908 and 1909 to promote friendly relations between the two nations.⁵ The aim of the World Alliance was not only to develop friendly relations between churches and denominations in different countries – this was of course a precondition – but to promote peace in their respective societies with the help of the churches, i.e. *through* the churches, as declared in the official name of the World Alliance, which was first and foremost a peace organisation established to promote peace. In the context of the first decades of the 20th century this meant the desire to overcome the national interests and prejudices of different nations. The Alliance valued nations and national culture, but opposed nationalism. Nations were regarded as historical phases of collective consciousness, and although nations of course possessed rights and were in principle not criticised, the loyalty of a citizen to his national community should not be placed above the individual's moral welfare. The organisation promoted Christian values and ethics, recognising the freedom of individuals as well as international and Christian society. This principle has been called

⁵ Keith Clements, "The Anglo-German Churches' Exchange Visits of 1908–1909. A Notable Anniversary" – *Ecumenical Review*, 2/3/59 (2007), 257–283.

“ecumenical internationalism”.⁶ The organisation was less concerned with the theological interpretation of the church as peacemaker.

As an instrument for the promotion of peace and friendship, The World Alliance was interested in general problems involving global political order. Among ecumenical organisations, it was certainly the most political and politically orientated organisation. There was an understanding among the representatives of the Alliance that the organisation was the spiritual equivalent and soul of the League of Nations. As Lord Willoughby Dickinson, General Secretary (later President and Honorary Secretary) and one of the leaders of the World Alliance, stated in 1920, the League of Nations was based on the principles of international Christian fellowship whose recognition the World Alliance was formed to encourage.⁷ The League of Nations was seen as a valuable piece of machinery for the peaceful resolution of international disputes. As the Alliance stated, however, popular will was needed to help the machinery to function peacefully. Only a spirit of Christian friendship could ensure its ultimate success.⁸

The World Alliance focused on political issues, which promised to become problematic and might therefore have influenced the international political balance. Most of these problems were connected with the outcomes of the First World War and the Treaty of Versailles. At the forefront lay the question of disarmament. As a representative of Christian and humanistic values and principles, the Alliance emphasised the defence of national minorities and refugees, opposition to religious persecution and the struggle for religious freedom.⁹ In its criticism of totalitarian regimes, the World Alliance focused on the violation of human rights. Hence, although the Alliance itself was quite political and possessed political ambitions, it mainly engaged in one form of unified resistance,

⁶ Daniel **Gorman**, “Ecumenical Internationalism: Willoughby Dickinson, the League of Nations and the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches” – *Journal of Contemporary History*, 1/45 (2010), 51–52.

⁷ *The World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches. Handbook of the World Alliance 1920* (London: The World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches, 1920), 12–13.

⁸ *The World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches. Annual Report and Handbook 1932* (Geneva: Central International Office, 1932), 15.

⁹ Darill **Hudson**, *The Ecumenical Movement in World Affairs. The Church as an International Pressure Group* (Washington D.C: The National Press Inc, 1969), 67–69.

namely the resistance to state manipulation of religious affairs in particular and human rights in general. In discussing political matters, the World Alliance usually expressed its support for the League of Nations.

According to historian John S. Conway, the methods of the World Alliance were generally similar to those of nineteenth-century campaigns for such causes as the abolition of slavery. The aim was to influence public opinion on key issues to the extent that governments could no longer ignore the voice of the people. To gain such support, debates were initiated in which declarations, petitions and appeals were passed. One cornerstone of the Alliance was the organising of events promoting peace, such as Peace Sundays. In addition to these events, material on peace work was printed. Another working method included the establishing of relations between representatives of churches and politicians. As the representatives of the Alliance were often leading clergymen, these relations were established in practice. Several leading members of the Alliance were themselves politicians. Over the years, work with young people, seen as the future leaders of public opinion, gained more and more attention.¹⁰ Financially the Alliance was supported by the Church Peace Union, established after the initiators of the Alliance met industrialist and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie, who donated two million dollars to promote peace through cooperation between all Christian churches.¹¹

The most significant positive outcome of the Alliance's activity, which is also its most oft-mentioned episode, is related to the strained relations between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. The conflict between the two countries was resolved with the help of the Alliance, after two Orthodox Church leaders, Archbishop Stefan of Sofia and Bishop Irenei of Novi Sad, had exchanged visits, and government leaders and heads of state – King Alexander of Yugoslavia and King Boris of Bulgaria, soon followed.¹²

The ideological basis, especially the lack of theological discussion, was criticised by some members of the World Alliance. A statement by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, an active representative of the Alliance's youth work,

¹⁰ *The World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches. Annual Report and Handbook 1931* (London: Central International Office, 1931), 13.

¹¹ Hudson, *The Ecumenical Movement in World Affairs*, 31.

¹² Ruth **Rouse** and Stephen Charles **Neill** (eds.), *A History of the Ecumenical Movement. Volume I. 1517–1948* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2004), 562.

is worth mentioning here. In 1932, after presenting a paper in Czechoslovakia and trying to outline the Alliance's theological underpinnings, he criticised the absence of theology in the ecumenical movement, and argued that without it the "movement risked being at the whim of political trends".¹³

The criticism presented by Bonhoeffer was accurate and justified. For ten years after the First World War the methods of the Alliance seemed to work, but firstly due to the financial crisis beginning from 1929 and the increasingly tense international political situation, namely the World Disarmament Conference from 1932 to 1933, at which no agreement was reached between the leading military forces, the Alliance began to lose its clarity of vision and enthusiasm for its activities. The same kind of confusion was characteristic of the League of Nations. Although by the end of the 1930s the World Alliance had in practice lost its significance, it was only dissolved in 1948, after the Second World War.

The first head of the Alliance was Randall Davidson, the Archbishop of Canterbury, at that time Lord Dickinson, followed by Bishop Valdemar Ammundsen from Denmark and William P. Merrill, a Presbyterian reverend from the United States. The clergy who took part in the Alliance also played a leading role in the Life and Work movement. In 1931 Henry Louis Henriod became the general secretary of the World Alliance, simultaneously serving as the general secretary of the Universal Council for Life and Work. The two organisations had a common periodical entitled "Churches in Action".¹⁴

The World Alliance united seven evangelical communions and the Orthodox community, apart from the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), although some exiled members of the ROC participated in the work of the Alliance. The organisation had international, management, executive and national committees. The conferences of its largest body, the international committee, took place every three years, and the management and the executive committee met at least once a year. At the beginning of the 1930s, during the peak of the Alliance, there were nearly 40

¹³ Stephen **Plant**, "The Sacrament of Ethical Reality: Dietrich Bonhoeffer on Ethics for Christian Citizens" – *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 3/18 (2005), 76–77.

¹⁴ *The World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches. Handbook 1935* (Geneva: International Office, 1935), 9–10.

national committees, so that in practice the Alliance had the largest network of working committees of the ecumenical organisations. In 1932 the Alliance's central office was moved from London to Geneva, which at that time was the most important international centre.¹⁵ The League of Nations reached its zenith in 1935, when it had 58 member states.¹⁶ Especially in smaller states, for example in Eastern Europe and in the Baltic States, the committee was considered to be the most important ecumenical body in the country and usually brought together the leading churchmen. In some countries, for example Britain, the national committee was the official representative of the local member churches. The Alliance was not as popular in Germany and several other influential European states as in Eastern Europe. As the Catholic Church did not take part in its activities, the Alliance's position in Catholic countries, e.g. Spain and Italy, was considerably weaker. Some individual Catholics maintained links to the ecumenical movement that had been established before the First World War.¹⁷

The fact that the World Alliance distanced itself from establishing official relations with churches and implemented the policy of integrating clergy in a more private and individual manner, i.e. through national committees, proved to be a drawback in the long run. Even though other ecumenical organisations, e.g. the Life and Work or Faith and Order movements, also faced difficulties in the 1930s, when totalitarian regimes became increasingly aggressive, the decision to unite the churches on an official level proved to be a more successful strategy to carry their message and survive during the Second World War.¹⁸ At the same time, the World Alliance, as a promoter of relations between different denominations, made a significant contribution to the ecumenical movement. An example from Eastern Europe, namely from Estonia, can be offered here. As the Free Churches (Methodists, Baptists etc.) became active in Estonia

¹⁵ *The World Alliance for International Friendship through the Churches. Handbook 1938* (Geneva: International Office, 1938), 9, 29.

¹⁶ *Essential Facts about the League of Nations*. Eighth Edition (Geneva: Information Section, 1937), 35–36.

¹⁷ Gorman, "Ecumenical Internationalism", 57.

¹⁸ Julian **Jenkins**, "A Forgotten Challenge to German Nationalism: The World Alliance for International Friendship through the Churches" – *Australian Journal of Politics & History*, 2/37 (1991), 287.

at the end of 19th century, there was a considerable tension between the majority Lutheran Church and the Free Churches. The influence and the experience of cooperation in the World Alliance proved to be one of the reasons for the progress in the cooperation between religious communities and their leaders. In the 1930s an amendment was made to invite a representative of the Free Churches to the Estonian national committee of the World Alliance.¹⁹

The working methods and objectives of the World Alliance naturally applied to its attitude and policy towards two of the most dangerous totalitarian regimes of the 20th century. As mentioned above, the focus of the Alliance was on demanding basic human rights and rights for believers and religious minorities. The Alliance represented and advocated an ideology that was in opposition with national socialist or communist ideologies.

In addition to international conferences, the Alliance organised regular regional conferences to discuss each area's minority problems and issues of religious freedom in the hope that rational men would agree. The Alliance's delegates usually did; their statesmen, however, did not. The Alliance's activities in connection with totalitarian regimes did not only include resolutions in defence of human rights and peace, but many practical questions were also raised, e.g. the training of clergy to satisfy the future need in countries ruled by totalitarian regimes, and the issue of refugees and the financial support that was extended to them.

The circumstances involved with the organising of work connected with the Soviet Union and Germany differed. Firstly, although the Alliance was not extremely popular in Germany, and even during the 1920s it had to fight to be recognised by the country's churches, the German national committee was nevertheless one of the founders of the World Alliance. No national committee was established in Russia. Secondly, although in both countries the ruling system tried its best to force the churches under its control, the amount of force used differed – in Germany the attitude was not as hostile as in Soviet Russia. The attitude towards international movements and the Alliance's ideology was, however, common to both

¹⁹ Priit **Rohtmets** and Veiko **Vihuri**, "The Ecumenical Relations of the Lutheran Church" – *History of Estonian Ecumenism* (Tartu, Tallinn: Tartu Ülikool, Eesti Kirikute Nõukogu, 2009), 53.

regimes. International organisations were regarded as a means to protect and promote regimes' political, cultural and national interests at the international level. It is significant that neither of the two regimes considered it important enough to protect and promote their views in the Alliance. After 1933 the Alliance continued to exist in Germany, but its activities were curtailed and to some extent even overlooked.²⁰ The Soviet Union at the time distanced itself from almost any kind of international ecumenical cooperation between churches. This policy only changed after the Second World War.

Although the following conclusion is not entirely accurate and inclusive, it is nevertheless fair to say that the political and social ambitions of the ecumenical movement during the inter-war period were shaped by the pragmatic and sometimes even cruel reality of international politics, which mostly rested upon national interests. Therefore one might safely conclude that the initiative of the ecumenical movement was meant to fail. This is, however, a retrospective view of the World Alliance and the ecumenical movement. A contextual analysis gives a more diverse and fluid picture of the Alliance, and the political environment in the inter-war period. It is fair to say that although idealists by nature, the representatives of the Alliance had a realistic understanding of the problems the world faced and the limits to their own actions. Together with the League of Nations, the Alliance was established to prevent war and develop an ideology based on mutual understanding between different nations. After failing to do so, the two organisations were dissolved after the Second World War and soon forgotten. At the same time, it should be remembered that the contacts established in the 1920s and 1930s formed the basis for cooperation after the Second World War. In this way the Alliance contributed to the establishment of the World Council of Churches in 1948. Considering the message the ecumenical movement promoted after the Second World War and post-war ecumenical relations, e.g. between international ecumenical organisations and the Soviet Union, the ideology of the World Alliance and its resistance to totalitarian regimes between the two world wars should be thoroughly analysed and assessed.

²⁰ Jenkins, "A Forgotten Challenge to German Nationalism", 296.

THE WORLD ALLIANCE AND RESISTANCE TO SOVIET RUSSIA AND NATIONAL SOCIALIST GERMANY

The inclusion of Russia in the World Alliance was already topical in 1914, when a representative of the Alliance, a Quaker by the name of Benjamin Battin, visited Russia in order to spread the idea of the Alliance.²¹ After the Bolshevik revolution and the end of the First World War, several other attempts were made. The question arose after the Orthodox delegation, consisting mostly of delegates from South-Eastern Europe, participated in the Alliance meeting in 1920 and decided to join. The question of establishing a committee in Russia was on the agenda of the management committee meetings in 1921, where it was decided to trust Russia's neighbours, i.e. the Estonian and Latvian delegates, and a representative of the Swedish Lutheran Church, to find a way of making contact with the Russians.²² At the beginning of the 1920s the Alliance sincerely hoped that it would be possible to promote the Alliance's ideals in Russia through unofficial channels. This would have led to the establishment of a national committee in Soviet Russia. In reality, this would have enabled the committee to take a stand against human rights violations. In August 1921 Swedish Archbishop Nathan Söderblom wrote to Willoughby Dickinson and claimed that the Minister for Cults in Ukraine had promised him permission to establish a national committee in Ukraine. A representative was even appointed to take part in the Alliance's meeting in 1922.²³

By 1922 contacts had been established between the representatives of the Alliance and Russian clerics. Eduard Tennmann, the secretary of the Estonian national committee, wrote to Archbishop Conrad Freifeldt, a senior Baltic German reverend responsible for Lutheran congregations in Soviet Russia, who like most Lutheran clerics working in Russia had

²¹ Harjam **Dam**, *Der Weltbund für Freundschaftsarbeit der Kirchen 1914–1948. Eine ökumenische Friedensorganisation* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Otto Lembeck, 2001), 83.

²² WCCA (World Council of Churches Archives), 212.001, World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches. Minutes, documents, reports and correspondence. Minutes of various committees: August 2, 1914–April 16, 1923. Minutes of the Management Committee, April 14–15, 1921; September 14–15, 1921.

²³ UUB NSB (Uppsala Universitetsbibliothek. Nathan Söderbloms brevsamling), Söderblom to Dickinson, 6.8.1921.

studied at the University of Tartu (Dorpat), where Eduard Tennmann now worked as an assistant professor of comparative religion. According to Tennmann, Freifeldt had welcomed the ecumenical initiative and in principle expressed his readiness to work with the World Alliance. In a letter to Knut Bernhard Westman, Archbishop Söderblom's secretary for international affairs, Tennmann remained cautious when describing the possibilities for cooperation with religious communities in Russia. He declared that in practice it was highly unlikely that the Russian delegation would participate in the next international conference of the World Alliance. Based on the description presented by Freifeldt, the participation of the Russian Orthodox Church was also considered improbable.²⁴ Soviet authorities gradually began to set ever more rigid restraints on religious communities. In 1922 the churches were forced to hand over all of the precious items possessed by their congregations. Patriarch Tikhon of the Russian Orthodox Church, who strongly opposed the authorities' actions, was forced to settle in Donskoy Monastery, and died there in 1925. The lack of priests in Protestant churches left congregations in a state of uncertainty. The situation became even worse when the campaign to close down congregations began at the end of 1920. Many priests and their families were arrested in that period.²⁵

The situation in Russia led to the decision made in 1924 by the management committee of the World Alliance to postpone the establishment of a national committee to facilitate the work of the Alliance in Russia.²⁶ In practice, the establishment of a national committee as a platform for resistance proved to be impossible, and the idea was abandoned. This did not, however, mean that contacts ceased to exist between the members of the Alliance and Russian clergy, but it did mean that resistance to Communist rule was inevitably forced beyond the borders of the Soviet Union. The plan to establish a committee in Ukraine also failed. The desire to establish a national committee in Soviet Russia as well as in Ukraine was

²⁴ UUB NSB, Tennmann to Westman, 15.3.1922.

²⁵ Mihhail Škarovskij, "Vähetuntud fakte Eesti luterlike koguduste ajaloost Nõukogude Venemaal 1917–1945" – *Usuteaduslik Ajakiri*, 1/50 (2002), 75.

²⁶ WCCA, 212.002. World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches. Minutes, documents, reports and correspondence. Minutes of various committees: April 16, 1923–April 29, 1930. Minutes of the Management Committee, April 2–4, 1924.

replaced by resolutions that were presented at regular intervals over the following years by different Alliance committees. The Alliance usually expressed its deepest sympathy with those who suffered in the Soviet Union. Most importantly, these messages were spread by all of the Alliance's national committees to influence public opinion in their resident countries in demanding religious freedom in the Soviet Union.

In addition to drafting resolutions, the World Alliance focused on practical issues. For example in 1927 it initiated a campaign and applied for financial help from the Central Bureau for European Relief and the Rockefeller Institute, in order to offer 12 students (9 Lutheran, 3 Reformed) scholarships to be trained for the Protestant Churches in Russia. The plan specified that the training should take place in countries neighbouring Russia, namely Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. These young men were to become priests in the Baltic countries, but would later have to be prepared to begin their service in the Soviet Union.²⁷ In 1922 the congress of Estonian Lutherans in Soviet Russia discussed the possibility of training clergy in either Estonia or Finland. The plan was unrealistic, because in practice it was impossible for clergy to successfully apply for a permit to leave the country.²⁸ In 1928 the conference of the international committee of the World Alliance held in Prague decided to include the training of Orthodox students as well.²⁹ The latter became a priority – the Alliance initiated a campaign to support the Russian Orthodox Institute in Paris. The Alliance also began to support exiled Russians.³⁰ The plan to train protestant ministers was later dropped. To promote the ideas of the Alliance among Russians, in 1929 the Alliance decided to publish its Handbook in Russian.³¹

Although the question of demanding religious freedom in Soviet Russia was on the agenda of nearly every meeting of the World Alliance in the 1920s, the campaign intensified considerably in the early 1930s, when

²⁷ WCCA, 212.002, Minutes of the Management Committee, July 29, 1927.

²⁸ Škarovskij, "Vähetuntud fakte Eesti luterlike koguduste ajaloost Nõukogude Venemaal 1917–1945", 66.

²⁹ *Minutes of the International Committee held at Prague, Czechoslovakia August 25, 28 & 30, 1928* (London: The World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches, 1928), 36.

³⁰ WCCA, 212.002, Minutes of the Management Committee, September, 19–21, 1929.

³¹ *Ibid.*

the Soviet Union was in the process of being accepted as a full permanent member of the League of Nations. The Alliance, together with the Life and Work movement, sent a resolution to the League requesting that “it be made clear to the Soviet Union that League membership involved an undertaking of freedom of conscience and worship”.³² The Alliance also requested firmer action from its national committees to influence public opinion in countries all over the world. In 1931 it was proposed that radio be used for spreading the principles of the World Alliance amongst the peoples of the Soviet Union.³³ The resolutions of the ecumenical movement were acknowledged, and several delegates at the League who were opposed to the Soviet Union being accepted as a permanent member mentioned the problem in their speeches. Despite the criticism and the resolutions, however, not a single official statement was made, and in September 1934 the Soviet Union was accepted as a permanent member of the League.³⁴ The demand for religious freedom in Russia clearly was not an important criterion for the League of Nations in deciding whether or not to admit Russia as a member of the League.

This proved to be the moment of truth for the Alliance in the organising of its activities. At the management committee’s 1935 meeting it was decided that, in addition to declarations about the violation of religious freedom, a different kind of action was needed. Based on international experience, the Alliance proposed establishing a delegation and organising a visit to the Soviet Union to meet and negotiate with the Soviet authorities, to observe the situation in the USSR and to demand religious freedom to spread its message of peace. Archbishop Söderblom had already presented the same proposal to Henry Atkinson, the General Secretary of the Church Peace Union, in March 1930.³⁵ Söderblom died the following year, and the visit he had proposed never took place.

³² WCCA, 212.004. World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches. Minutes, documents, reports and correspondence. Minutes of various committees: January 10, 1934–September 4, 1937. Minutes of the Management Committee, August 24–29, 1934.

³³ WCCA, 212.003, World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches. Minutes, documents, reports and correspondence. Minutes of various committees: August 22, 1930–November 3, 1933. Minutes of the Management Committee, September 4–5, 1931.

³⁴ Hudson, *The Ecumenical Movement in World Affairs*, 143.

³⁵ UUB NSB, Söderblom to Atkinson, 19.3.1930.

In 1935 the situation in Russia was thoroughly discussed at the Alliance's Baltic regional conference, with delegates from Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Finland and Sweden. The central office of the Alliance was represented by its international secretary, Friedrich Siegmund-Schultze. In addition to the suggestions to demand freedom of conscience and human rights through diplomatic channels, and the description of the strategy of organising a public campaign against human rights violations, the delegates proposed a visit to the Soviet Union.³⁶

In 1936 more thorough discussions concerning the visit took place at meetings of the World Alliance. Some members of the Alliance praised the idea, while more pragmatic members expressed their doubts. They claimed that the Soviet authorities would not welcome the delegation, and even if the group of clergy and Christian politicians had been welcomed, the only winners would have been the Soviet authorities themselves. The committee was aware that they would have been taken to carefully selected places, and the same applied to clergy they would have met. It was even feared that the visit might cause trouble for churches in the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, the committee decided to go ahead with the preparations for the visit.³⁷ The priority was to establish some sort of contact with the Soviet authorities, and with the international public eye focused on the Soviet Union, to take a stand against its human rights violations.

Bishop Ammundsen had been suggested the idea of addressing Maxim Litvinov, the Soviet foreign secretary, on this issue during the latter's visit to Denmark. Litvinov refused to negotiate with Ammundsen or other representatives of the Alliance. The same response was given by the ambassadors in London and Paris. As the Russian authorities had no desire to accept the delegation, no visit took place, and the question was removed from the agenda in 1938.³⁸ At the end of the 1930s the Alliance once again turned to its main activity and suggested the Soviet authorities

³⁶ EELKKA, (Eesti Evangeelse Luterliku Kiriku Konsistooriumi arhiiv), Maailma Liit Rahvusvahelise sõpruse edendamiseks kirikute kaudu 1921–1936. Die Baltische Regionalkonferenz, I. Die kirchliche Lage in Russland.

³⁷ WCCA, 212.004. World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches. Minutes, documents, reports and correspondence. Minutes of various committees: January 10, 1934–September 4, 1937. Minutes of the Management Committee, August 1936.

³⁸ Dam, *Der Weltbund für Freundschaftsarbeit der Kirchen 1914–1948*, 311.

and the international community be addressed through national councils regarding the human rights violations being perpetrated in the Soviet Union. In 1938 a declaration was passed by the Alliance calling upon the national councils to influence the public and governments to publicly condemn rights violations in the Soviet Union.³⁹

In 1933 the question of forming a delegation and organising a visit was also raised in connection with Germany. The leading representatives of the World Alliance had coincidentally gathered for a meeting in Berlin, at the time Adolf Hitler was appointed the new Chancellor by President Paul von Hindenburg on 30 January 1933. Three days earlier Henry Louis Henriod, the secretary of the Alliance, had given a lecture at the University of Berlin, in which he referred to National Socialism not only as a new form of nationalism but also as a religion. Although the statement by Henriod was farsighted and left very little doubt regarding the character the new rule would take, the meeting decided to wait for further steps by the new government.⁴⁰

The work of the Alliance in Germany had already faced some difficulties and opposition during the Weimar Republic period. The German National Council only received support from the German churches in matters that offered a prospect of furthering the German national cause, e.g. war guilt, the revision of the treaty of Versailles, etc. In addition to the lack of support from churches, there was a struggle for power inside the German national committee. In 1929 Friedrich Spiecker, and Friedrich Siegmund-Schultze, leaders of the German Council, were removed from the group's leadership.⁴¹ Siegmund-Schultze had been one of the Alliance's founders, leaders and ideologists. The struggle was for power as much as for ideology and principles. In 1931 theologians Paul Althaus and Emanuel Hirsch publicly attacked the World Alliance and the Life and Work movement and accused other nations of imposing unfair restrictions on Germany.⁴²

³⁹ WCCA, 212.010. World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches. Minutes, documents, reports and correspondence. Conference: 1938. – 1. Larvik (International Council), August 23–29, 1938. For the Russian Christians.

⁴⁰ Dam, *Der Weltbund für Freundschaftsarbeit der Kirchen 1914–1948*, 272.

⁴¹ Jenkins, "A Forgotten Challenge to German Nationalism", 296.

⁴² Wolfram Weisse, *Praktisches Christentum und Reich Gottes. Die ökumenische Bewegung Life and Work 1919–1937* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), 477.

In May 1933 the Alliance's management committee discussed a request from the Dutch national council concerning anti-Semitism in Germany, and decided to contact the German national committee regarding the matter, but made no decision concerning the situation in Germany.⁴³ The question of whether to send a delegation to Germany or to present a statement demanding religious freedom and human rights as well as opposing the implementation of the Aryan Paragraph was on the agenda of all of the meetings of the Alliance that took place in 1933. In September Bishop Ammundsen reported conversations with German colleagues and, describing a recent speech made by Hitler on the topic of higher and lower races, stated that he considered the situation in Germany to be very serious.⁴⁴ In November, during a joint meeting with the representatives of the Universal Council of Life and Work, George Bell, Bishop of Chichester, gave an overview of his actions, namely a letter addressed to Bishop Ludwig Müller of the German Evangelical Church, an ally of the new regime. After a discussion, it was agreed not to send a formal delegation to Germany until definite and new elements arose from the existing situation.⁴⁵ It seemed as if the Alliance was waiting for some sort of conformation that religious and human rights had in fact been violated.

The situation in Germany was complex. One can be critical of the Alliance's ability to act, when it was still possible to make a difference with resolutions. The Alliance, however, decided to stay humble in its actions, applied a wait-and-see policy, and declared that it would not interfere in church-state relations in Germany. No resolution was passed concerning the implementation of the Aryan paragraph either. The same kind of passive attitude was characteristic of the German national committee of the World Alliance. This shaped the policy of the World Alliance in addition to the behaviour of the Evangelical Church in Germany.

In spring 1933, after visiting Germany, Henry Louis Henriod claimed that the work of the Alliance was not considered friendly and necessary by the new regime. That was probably the reason why the Alliance did not implement a strategy to actively oppose the new order, but instead

⁴³ WCCA, 212.003, Minutes of the Management Committee, May 8–9 1933.

⁴⁴ WCCA, 212.003. Minutes of the Officers' meeting, September 5–6 1933.

⁴⁵ WCCA, 212.003. Minutes of the First Meeting of the "consultative group" of the World Alliance and Life and Work, November 3, 1933.

focused on supporting the preservation of the Alliance's national committee in Germany, emphasising the need to stay in contact with the committee.⁴⁶ The committee survived and continued its work, but Siegmund-Schultze, the former head of the German committee, who had been publicly critical about the new German regime, was already forced by the Gestapo to emigrate from Germany in 1933.⁴⁷ At the same time, it must be mentioned that even Siegmund-Schultze and Adolf Deissmann, both senior ecumenical figures, had recommended that the Bishop of Chichester remain quiet about the Church's internal matters in Germany. Bell, a close friend of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, had held conversations with Bonhoeffer after he moved to London in October 1933. Bell was said to have been made aware of Germany's prospects under National Socialist rule.⁴⁸ At the same time, it has been mentioned that the clergy, in opposition to the National Socialist regime, had already informed Bishop Ammundsen in September 1933 that it would be regarded as a calamity if the relations between the Alliance and the German Evangelical Church, i.e. that ruled by the German Christian Movement, were to be severed.⁴⁹

With the rise of the German Confessional Church (*Die Bekennende Kirche*) uniting the opposition to the German Christian Movement (*Die Deutsche Christen*) in the Lutheran Church, as well as National Socialist rule in Germany, the World Alliance would in theory have gained a supporter to its cause, but in practice relations between the two remained distant. The representatives of the Confessional Church, e.g. Karl Koch, Martin Niemöller and Karl Barth, had previously had almost no relations with the ecumenical movement, because they did not value the latter highly.⁵⁰

As the World Alliance and the Confessional Church shared the same attitude towards National Socialist rule, Dietrich Bonhoeffer raised the question of inviting the representatives of the Confessional Church to the Alliance meeting in 1934. After negotiating with Niemöller and Koch,

⁴⁶ WCCA, 212.004. Minutes of the Executive Committee, January 25–26 1934.

⁴⁷ Jens **Wietschorke**, "Friedrich Siegmund-Schultze – ein biographisch-bibliographischer Abriss" – *Friedrich Siegmund-Schultze (1885–1969). Ein Leben für Kirche, Wissenschaft und soziale Arbeit*, Ed. Jens Wietschorke (Stuttgart, Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 2007), 148.

⁴⁸ Dam, *Der Weltbund für Freundschaftsarbeit der Kirchen 1914–1948*, 276–277, 293–294.

⁴⁹ WCCA, 212.003, Minutes of the Officers' Meeting, September 5, 1933.

⁵⁰ Dam, *Der Weltbund für Freundschaftsarbeit der Kirchen 1914–1948*, 295.

who had agreed to participate in the Alliance's August 1934 conference if they received an official invitation from the Alliance, he addressed the Alliance's General Secretary. Louis Henriod unfortunately took the position of not recognizing the Confessional Church, and claimed that there was still only one official church in Germany, which is why the representatives of the Confessional Church were not invited to the conference. Bonhoeffer himself was present and gave a passionate speech at the youth commission meeting. Theodor Haeckel, a representative of the ecumenical and foreign affairs department of the German Evangelical Church, was also present but refused to take part in the discussion of church matters in Germany, which was on the conference's agenda. Eventually the Alliance passed a resolution affirming the demand for freedom, and although in reality the Alliance supported the Confessional Church, the conference distanced itself from passing a political statement concerning the National Socialist order or its support for the Confessional Church.⁵¹

As a result of these statements, the management and executive committees of the Alliance in reality placed themselves in almost the same position as opposing the communist regime in the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, in Germany the national committee of the Alliance continued its work. In a report presented in July 1937 at the meeting of the management committee of the Alliance, a representative of the German committee claimed that regardless of the hindrances to freedom of speech, intensive work had been done in connection with the conference in Oxford entitled "Church, Community and State". Even the German media had published articles on international ecumenical work.⁵² The German committee held its meetings regularly, i.e. once a month. In 1938 a representative of the committee, describing the work of the national committee, emphasised the theological efforts that at the time were characteristic of the Alliance and the ecumenical movement in general. The report suggested that the work of the Alliance not only needed courage and enthusiasm, but also personal experience and contacts. In this respect the death of several leading members of the German committee, e.g. Adolf Deismann and Prof Wilhelm Lütgert, had hampered the work of the Alliance in the late 1930s. To intensify the work of the German national committee, the members of

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 296.

⁵² WCCA, 212.004. Minutes of the Management Committee, July 31–August 2, 1937.

the committee suggested organising a regional conference, and in order to consolidate the relations between the central board and the national committee, it was suggested that visits of the leading representatives of the Alliance should be organised. That meant that relations between the Alliance and the national committee in Germany which were not as close as they had been before the 1930s, needed to be revived. The national committee was essentially working on his own. Some leading members of the Alliance had nonetheless managed to visit Germany. For example, W. H. Drummond, a member of the Executive Committee, visited Germany in 1937 and met with Dr Adolf Deismann just shortly before his death.⁵³ Siegmund Schultze, the international secretary of the Alliance, had also visited Germany, but had been forced to cut his visit short after a couple of days.⁵⁴

In connection with Germany, from 1934 the central office and bodies of the Alliance mostly dealt with the issue of organising schools for non-Aryan children from Germany and organising financial support for German refugees. The Alliance managed to organise fundraising among the national committees.⁵⁵ The relations between the Confessional Church and the Alliance remained distant in subsequent years. Relations with the German Lutheran Church were non-existent.⁵⁶

The fact that the national committee in Germany carried on with its work and even at some level managed to publicly promote the ideology of the Alliance and bring its message to society was as important as the influence National Socialism in Germany had on the Alliance and the ecumenical movement at large. It is fair to say that during the last years of the 1930s the totalitarian regimes and the international political situation began to influence the Alliance more than the latter could affect society, including resistance to totalitarian regimes. The confrontation with totalitarian regimes required a different set of methods, which neither the Alliance nor the League of Nations possessed. The international situation

⁵³ *Handbook of the World Alliance for International Friendship through the Churches 1935–1938* (Geneva: International Office, 1938), 85.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 95, 127–128.

⁵⁵ WCCA, 212.004, Minutes of the Executive Committee, August 12–17, 1935; Minutes of a Consultative Group meeting of the World Alliance, February 16, 1937; Dam, *Der Weltbund für Freundschaftsarbeit der Kirchen 1914–1948*, 399.

⁵⁶ Dam, *Der Weltbund für Freundschaftsarbeit der Kirchen 1914–1948*, 302–303.

had a profound effect on the Alliance's identity. The Alliance's power to oppose totalitarian regimes and organise its work to promote the ideals and principles the Alliance represented was in fact paralysed. More specifically, the downfall of the German national council has been regarded as the precursor of the collapse of the World Alliance as a whole.⁵⁷

The central question raised in the late 1930s concerned the relationship between the church, the people and the state. The churches increasingly identified themselves as churches. This development naturally raised the question of whether the churches were themselves the best promoters of peace. One clear sign of change was the fact that even the national committees, e.g. in Scandinavia and United Kingdom in the 1930s, had established closer relationships with the Churches. Although the Alliance began to place increasing emphasis on the theological meaning of peace in the late 1930s and adjusted its activities in order to match those of the society, it did not establish formal relations with churches.

In 1938, looking back on its 24 years of work, the Alliance declared that it should secure the closest possible cooperation with the World Council of Churches, facilitate exchange visits of individuals and groups from different national councils, and promote youth cooperation. In a report presented in 1938, Henry Louis Henriod mentioned that faith and courage would be required in order to achieve understanding and peace. According to Henriod, the activities of the most important part of the Alliance – the national committees – had been brought to a standstill. Only a few councils mention communicating with their governments. There were also financial problems that had an impact on the publication of printed material.⁵⁸

The leading position in the ecumenical movement was seized by the Life and Work movement, which together with the Faith and Order movement, announced in 1938 a plan to establish a World Council of Churches. In its member states, the Alliance slowly lost its position and the ability to fulfil its objectives. Although after the Second World War the message of the Alliance was once again promoted, the Alliance itself

⁵⁷ Jenkins, "A Forgotten Challenge to German Nationalism", 296.

⁵⁸ WCCA, 212.010. World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches. Minutes, documents, reports and correspondence. Conference: 1938. – 1. Larvik (International Council), August 23–29, 1938. The World Alliance and its Task.

was overshadowed by the World Council of Churches, and was therefore dissolved in 1948, the same year the Council of Churches was officially established.⁵⁹

CONCLUSION

The World Alliance for Promoting Friendship through the Churches was established with the aim of promoting peace among nations. The Alliance's ideological basis was the recognition of basic human rights and the acknowledgement of freedom of conscience and religion. The Alliance declared that Christianity made it possible to overcome hatred between different nations and guaranteed individual freedoms.

The ideology of the Alliance and its implementation were in opposition to the ideologies of the totalitarian regimes that existed in the period between the two world wars. Every step taken in demanding human rights and condemning the violation of those rights in countries ruled by totalitarian regimes was manifested as an act of resistance to those regimes. The Alliance's ideology lacked theological foundation and was therefore considerably weakened by totalitarian regimes.

Although the Alliance was an international ecumenical organisation, its success and achievements depended on work done at the national level. Nearly 40 national committees enabled the Alliance to promote its global activities. At the same time, the ideology was reinterpreted and discussed at international conferences and brought back to national committees.

Through personal contacts between the Russian clergy and the Alliance's representatives in countries neighbouring the Soviet Union, the Alliance sought to establish a national committee for Soviet Russia and Ukraine. These attempts coincided with international petitions and by national committees' calls for respect for the right of religious freedom in the Soviet Union. All attempts to establish a committee in the Soviet Union failed, and the Alliance was forced to organise its work related with the Communist regime at an international level outside the Soviet Union. The Alliance initiated campaigns and resolutions that were passed on to national committees to influence the public and politicians in member

⁵⁹ Dam, *Der Weltbund für Freundschaftsarbeit der Kirchen 1914–1948*, 397–398.

countries and to take a stand against the violation of human rights in the Soviet Union. To promote its ideology, counter Communist ideology and influence the policies of the Soviet Union, in the 1930s the Alliance attempted to organise a visit to Russia. It was thought that the international intervention of the leading clergy would have a positive effect. As with the establishment of the national committee, the attempt to organise a visit failed.

The German national committee of the Alliance was one of the founders of the Alliance. The committee had, however, already faced some opposition and criticism in the 1920s. The activities of the Alliance were interpreted by several German theologians as part of international politics. It was regarded as hostile to German national interests, which had suffered because of the First World War.

After 1933 the German committee continued its work, although some leading members of the committee left Germany. In the following years the work of the committee was hindered by the limitations on freedom of speech and action, as well as by the death of several members of the committee. Because of the situation in Germany, the relations between the national committee and the central bodies of the Alliance were weakened. Nevertheless, with limited resources the national committee managed to promote its ideology. Like the churches, the Alliance in Germany focused more on theological issues.

At the same time, National Socialism had a major effect on the efficiency of the Alliance's work, the aim of which was to influence the public to the extent that governments could not ignore the voice of the people. The Alliance's working methods required goodwill between nations and churches, as well as a more or less democratic society. Developments in Germany after 1933 paralysed the Alliance. It tightened its relationship with the nascent World Council of Churches, but decided to remain independent. Like the League of Nations, the Alliance did not possess the ability and methods to successfully counter the ideology, policy and national interests advanced by totalitarian regimes.