

Exchange of Letters Between
Aleksi Lehtonen, Bishop of Tampere, Finland, and Lord Halifax,
Foreign Secretary of Great Britain
April, 1940

Aleksi Lehtonen, on April 1, 1940:

TAMPEREEN HIIPPAKUNNAN

PIISPA

Bishop of Tampere

Tampere, April 1st, 1940.

My Lord,

May I thank you for your impressive message to Finland on Easter Day. Your kind sympathy was warmly appreciated and your encouraging words were listened to by very many people in our country and broadcast all over Finland on the following day.

There is no doubt that Finland stands on the same side as you, fighting for liberty and independence. We know that we are guarding our common Christian heritage against the great danger threatening Europe from the East.

It has been painful to see how the Bolshevist dictatorship has once more triumphed over Christian civilization in Karelia, now abandoned to Soviet Russia. In this part of Finland the Christian Church had worked since the 13th century. The sworn enemies of Christianity have, however, now moved westwards, in spite of the unique chance of gaining victory over them.

We are all faced by the great question: will the powers threatening Europe succeed, or will the Western nations be able to defend the freedom of our continent? The most dangerous enemy seems to be atheistic Bolshevism now allied with German Nazism, because its whole system is founded on tyranny, lies, espionage and militant atheism. An appalling fate has recently befallen the Christian Church in Eastern Poland. We are told that more than 3600 Polish Roman Catholic priests have been transported to Siberia, and that the Lutheran Church has been completely destroyed. No permanent peace is possible so long as the Bolshevist system is allowed to threaten freedom. If we fall in this struggle the coming generations may find that atheistic Bolshevism has become a far more dangerous counter-religion than Islam has ever been, because it is very aggressive and furnished with bombing planes and tanks of the latest type.

This year has shown how little Soviet Russia can be trusted. The future will bring new bitter disappointments if we build our policy on illusions concerning this dark power which has brought the Russians themselves into a state of benighted slavery. Halfheartedness cannot help here. We have to put power behind the highest ideals of our Western life. May God guide and help the British nation to which many small countries have long been looking to defend their freedom.

I am sending you the illustrated work "Suomen Kirkko Kuvissa" - "The Church of Finland In Pictures" as a greeting from our Church. It might perhaps interest you, as the Churches of England and Finland agreed some years ago on intercommunion. We have been glad to see

that the Christian faith has been the deepest source of power in our severe struggle during recent months.

I have the honour to remain, My Lord,
Your obedient servant,
[signature: Aleksi Lehtonen]
Bishop of Tampere.

To The Right Hon.
Viscount Halifax, K.G.
Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs,
Dorchester Hotel,
London, W.1.

Lord Halifax, on April 10, 1940:

10th April, 1940

My dear Lord,

I am writing to thank you most warmly for your letter of April 1st, which Monsieur Gripenberg was good enough to hand to me yesterday, together with the beautiful book on the Church of Finland which you so kindly sent me.

I deeply appreciate your gift, and your generous words about my message to Finland. I can assure you that in Great Britain as in many other countries, there is but one feeling, that of deep admiration, for the gallantry of the Finnish army and people against incredible odds, and of profound regret that it was not possible for others to give Finland the help which she required to bring her heroic efforts to success. But I am sure that your country can feel that the magnificent account which she has given of herself in her fight for the defence of Christian ideals and civilisation, has not been wasted on the minds of those who direct policy in many countries. The admiration and sympathy of the world go out to Finland.

(Signed) HALIFAX

Right Reverend
The Lord Bishop of Tampere

Source: British National Archives. Soviet-Finnish conflict H/XIII/267,443-445; H/XIII/268,446-447.