



Gudina Tumsa

"Deriving from the poor, the Church rededicates itself to living for others, serving the whole human person, meeting his spiritual and physical needs."

Gudina Tumsa (1929-1979) was a person of extraordinary faith and courage. Tumsa was born to the Oromo people of Ethiopia, one of the oldest and largest cultures of Africa. As a youth, Tumsa converted to Christianity while attending grade school and soon spread the faith to his family and friends. His passion and academic talents were such that he was encouraged in his theological studies, and he became a pastor in 1958. In order to further his education, he traveled to the United States to study for several years before returning to Ethiopia in 1966. At that point, Tumsa became a powerful voice on the continent for following the example of Jesus in caring for the physical and spiritual needs of the poor and marginalized. His work was essential in both inspiring a grassroots Christian revival in Ethiopia and transforming the ways in which Western Christians thought about missionary work. However, this was a turbulent time in Ethiopian history due to the rise of the Communist dictator Mengistu. Tumsa took a stand opposing the crimes against humanity being perpetrated by the regime and argued for the independence of churches in Ethiopia. Now an enemy of the state for speaking out against the government, Tumsa's friends created an opportunity for him to escape the country safely, but Tumsa refused to "leave my flock at this moment of trial." On July 28, 1979, Tumsa was kidnapped and murdered via strangulation on the orders of Mengistu. It was not until 1992 that his body was recovered from its secret burial place and a memorial built for his grave.

Reverend Tumsa is known today as the "Dietrich Bonhoeffer of Africa" for the many parallels between their lives. In addition to his courageous stand against tyranny and martyrdom for the faith, Tumsa was a gifted theologian whose insightful writings continue to influence church leaders around the world. In honor of his life and work, his family and friends founded the Gudina Tumsa Foundation in 1992 to carry on his work of tending to the material and spiritual needs of the people of Ethiopia. Although Reverend Tumsa is generally unknown in America, his influence today is enormous as the church body in which he was prominent is the largest and fastest growing Lutheran denomination in the world.