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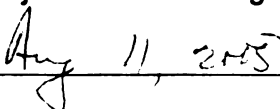
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**GROWING THROUGH THE STORMS: THE HISTORY OF THE EVANGELICAL  
MOVEMENT IN ETHIOPIA, 1941-1991**

**Volume I**

**By**

**Tibebe Eshete**

**A DISSERTATION**

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## ABSTRACT

### GROWING THROUGH THE STORMS: THE HISTORY OF THE EVANGELICAL MOVEMENT IN ETHIOPIA: 1941-1991

By

Tibebe Eshete

This dissertation presents the history of the evangelical Christian movement as a dynamic faith movement that developed outside the structure of the established Ethiopian Orthodox Church and thereby highlights the historicity of the new dimension of Christianity by offering a contextual examination of its surprising expansion over the last 50 years.

Principally, the dissertation provides historical explanations as to how a faith movement that half a century ago was associated with the people of peripheral regions of south and southwestern Ethiopia has grown to national prominence. By addressing this question, I reconstruct the history of the evangelical movement in Ethiopia by telling the story from a "holistic" perspective. Such an approach helps to recognize both the local and national dynamics that have shaped considerably the character and changing faces of the evangelical movement as well as identify the key factors contributing to the rapidity of its expansion. By spelling out the significant role the native agency has played in the crucial years of its development, I argue that the primary impetus for the remarkable growth of evangelical Christianity came from local actors (insiders) rather than from Western missionaries.

I make the case that what has facilitated the growth of the evangelical faith in Ethiopia is the long presence of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and its rich fund of experience, which has served as an indigenous resource base for the modern day evangelical enterprise. I also show that the encounters of the established forms of the Christian faith and the newer dimension, albeit conflictual, have a transformational influence that shaped their identity and animated their religious commitment to build strength from within and expand.

Encounters with Marxism under military rule have also reinforced this situation. Subject to hostile environment yet benefiting from the disorienting state of affairs that derived from the failed experiment of socialism, evangelical Christians embarked on spreading an even more militant faith that stood as a countervailing force against the Marxist ideology. The absence of hierarchical structures that allowed agility in deploying timely responsive systems and the creation of vast underground networks were crucial elements that helped the faith to survive as well as thrive in those challenging times.

Evangelical Christians have long been considered religious outsiders and their faith as *mete haymanot*, foreign religion viewed as a cult. The lack of proper understanding of the essential characteristics of the faith and the conditions of its rise and development in Ethiopia is a major contributing factor.

By bringing out the newer dimension of Christianity into scholarly focus, the work fills not only a crucial gap in the national historiography, but provides fresh illuminations in our grasp of a poorly understood yet highly expansive religious movement with enormous social, demographic, and political implications.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

From the outset, I would like to state that undertaking this work was a challenging exercise. Yet, it was also a rewarding experience. The dissertation has been in the making since 1999 and along the way I have received invaluable help from several people. First and foremost, I must acknowledge the contribution of the late Professor Harold Marcus, my mentor, friend and advisor who has inspired and challenged me to embark on a subject that appears to be quaint and “untouchable” to many. When I made my decision to make a shift in my research project from the political history of the Ogaden to the study of the history of the evangelical movement in Ethiopia, Professor Harold Marcus gave his blessings to me by saying, “it is a blessed project.” Whatever his understanding of the term blessing, out of the great respect I have for him, the term gave me an added meaning and a new layer of significance and reinforced my commitment to seriously study a religious movement on which Ethiopian scholarship is virtually silent. As a perceptive scholar who could distinctly see and appreciate historical events from the longer and larger perspective, he keenly recognized the value of the study and encouraged me to rise to the challenge of writing a dissertation on a difficult yet very important topic. Professor Harold Marcus was very quick to notice the Pentecostal movement of the 60’s in light of cultural changes and social transformation and indicated noted to me that it was the religious side of the radicalism of the student movement. One of the most important leads he gave me was to see the Pentecostal movement in Ethiopia beyond its religious dimension at the starting point of my project. Professor Marcus, who knew my background very well, including my past political involvement as a youth as well as my current evangelical convictions, never gave up telling me that no one was as

well placed as I to write the history of the evangelical movement. This remark has served as a constant reminder in my mind to stay on course and is something that has sustained me through the travails of doing research on a faith-related subject from an objective historical point of view. I have benefited tremendously from his unwavering moral and scholarly support. I wish he could see the end of my research journey. I hope I lived up to his expectations.

Second, I would like to express my profound gratitude to Professor David Robinson. Ever since the time I expressed my new interest in this subject, he has unstintingly stood behind me. I have drawn invaluable insights through the independent courses I have taken and the inter-personal interactions I have had with him over the last five years. He ushered me into the rich literature in the history of Christianity in Africa and kept telling me that my study of the new dimension of Christianity in Ethiopia is an original and big contribution to the religious studies both in Ethiopia and Africa. After the passing away of Professor Harold Marcus, he stepped in the gap and offered academically and socially-sound advices in the tradition of his dear colleague. Professor Robinson affirmed my continued efforts toward the goal of completing this study sooner rather than later. He also helped me pursue the investigation in a critical and self-critical way. I have benefited from his thought-provoking insights and invaluable suggestions.

Third, a special note of gratitude must be given to Professor James McCann who also stood in for Professor Marcus' gap and offered valuable assistance through his careful and wise advice and guidance. Professor James McCann made important contributions, which significantly shaped the presentation of the dissertation through his insightful and critical remarks. I have benefited from his insistence to flesh out issues by

casting my eyes on the broader socio-cultural and political contexts of religious movements and his diligent and gracious editorial input, though I must accept responsibility for my own style of writing and its remaining flaws and imperfections.

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I have no words to express my indebtedness to Professor Ray Silverman and his wife Mary Duffet Silverman because of the many-ness of their input to the progress of my program. I have continually received their “*ayzoh*” (keep on) voice expressed in multiple ways. Apart from their generous intellectual and technical backup, their inspirational company and steady encouragements have provided considerable emotional support to the family and me and to the success of my dissertation project.

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There are other friends, colleagues and scholars whom I have the privilege of knowing or working with whose expertise, heartening conversations, kind assistance and companionship have been very helpful towards enriching and refining my project. Since they are too numerous to mention, I can only cite a few of them: Professor John Hinnant, Professor McKinley, Dr. Joel Lauer, Dr. Peter Limb, Dr. Rose Beach, Dr. Norm Bell, Professor Melbourne E. Holstein, Chick and Linda Fox, Professor Joel Carpenter, Chris and Andrea, Jim and Karen Getz, Don and Ellen, my long time friend Getahun Mesfin, Mary Mwiandi, and last but not least Balcha Deneged who has faithfully been sending all the relevant material I needed for my project from Addis Ababa whenever requested.

I owe special debt to several institutions whose assistances have been of considerable importance. I would first of all like to extend my heartfelt appreciations to the Compton Fellowship, which has generously granted me the much-needed funds that have allowed me to go to Ethiopia and Kenya to conduct my field research. This dissertation would have missed a lot and would have been incomplete without the generous grant that enabled me to tap information from several locally based institutions and hundreds of oral informants. I hope the history of the evangelical movement in Ethiopia that peacefully challenged established mainline institutions and a Marxist authoritarian regime by building strength from within using faith as a force to stand against evil and eventually emerging as an influential and thriving public movement, partly meets their desire of promoting peace research in Africa.



I would also like to express my indebtedness to the History Department (including its faculty and administrative staff) for the unfailing support it has provided me ever since I joined the Department. The same goes to the College of Arts and Letters. I have received grants to support my research tours and occasional interventions on critical situations from the two offices. I also extend my special thanks to Herbert C. & Mary Jackson Foundation for the generous financial assistance that came at a critical phase of my research project by way of the Jackson Graduate Award. I would also like to express my heartfelt appreciation for World Vision Int/Ethiopia, especially Getachew W/Michael, its Country Director, for allowing me to use the resource centers and other facilities freely.

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I have interviewed hundreds of informants here in the US, Ethiopia and Kenya, all of them have been very kind to me to open their hearts and tell me the story of their lives and their experiences as Ethiopians. I remain grateful to all of them and wish to extend my sincere appreciation to all of them for their unfailing courtesy and courage to provide

me precious information. Their stories and life experiences form the building blocks of this dissertation. Since it is unfair to pin point some and leave out others, I have decided to thank all of them from the bottom of my heart. If I have not written their stories in the manner they would have wanted it, I know very well, that they appreciate my constraints. I want to assure them that I will translate this work into the language most of them understand with much more modifications.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	i
ACKNOWLEDGMENT.....	iv
CHAPTER I	
INTRODUCTION .....	1
The Need for the Study .....	1
Statement of Problem .....	9
Limitation of the Study.....	10
Scope of the Study .....	20
Approach and Research Perspectives.....	22
Definitions of Terms.....	25
Literature Review .....	32
Organization and Rationale of Chapters .....	52
CHAPTER II	
THE ETHIOPIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH: AREVEIV OF ITS LEGACY .....	56
Early History .....	56
The Expansion of Christianity: Church and State Relations in the Medieval Period .....	60
Christianity and State Expansions in the South (19 <sup>th</sup> -20 <sup>th</sup> centuries).....	77
The Church in the Modern Era: Challenges and Opportunities.....	85
Reform from Within.....	95
The Church and Its Encounter with Protestant Missions .....	101
Language, the Modern Temper and New Associational Spaces .....	110
Conclusion.....	121
CHAPTER III	
MODEREN EVANGELICAL ENTERPRISE IN ETHIOPIA: EXTERNAL AND INDIGENOUS DIMENSIONS (1850'-1950'S).....	139
Early Mission Efforts: Opportunities and Challenges .....	139
Local Converts, Evicted Priests and their Congregations .....	151
The Emergence of Local Evangelical Churches in South and Southwestern Ethiopia (1920's-1950) .....	154
Background Developments.....	154
The People's Movement in the South: an Indigenous Impulse.....	156
The Italian Interlude.....	165
Post War Events (1941-1950's).....	174
Ecumenical Initiatives (1941-1959) .....	177

The Emergence of Evangelical Churches: Formative Developments....	179
Emperor Haile Sellassie I: Post-Restoration Developments.....	185
The Mission Decree of 1944 and Its Contexts .....	185
The Advent of New Missionary Groups(1944-1966) .....	191
The Bible Churchmen's Missionary Society (BCMS).....	191
The Coming of the Mennonite: Urban Missions.....	196
Pulling Different Strings: The Synergetic Factors.....	223
The Translation of the Bible and its Significance.....	224
The Advent of University-Campus-Oriented Missionary Activities .....	231
The gathering momentum.....	243
Conclusion.....	250

#### CHAPTER IV

#### THE PENTECOSTAL MOVEMENT: A NEW NATIONAL STRAIN IN THE EVANGELICAL ENTERPRISE IN ETHIOPIA .....

Origins (1964/1965).....	274
External Influences .....	276
Internal Dynamics .....	284
The Rise of an Independent Pentecostal Church .....	298
Routinization and Its Contexts.....	298
Forming of Mulu Wengel Church .....	308
The Pentecostals and their Persecution Experience .....	316
Situating the Pentecostal Movement .....	338
Conclusion.....	354

#### CHAPTER V

#### THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH AND THE STATE (1974-1991).....

Behind the Scene: The 1974 Revolution .....	385
Modern Education and Its Discontents .....	394
The coming of the <i>Derg</i> .....	399
State and Church Encounter .....	404
The <i>Derg</i> and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.....	404
The <i>Derg</i> and the Evangelical Church .....	407
Survival Strategies: Selective Case Studies.....	430
The Case of the Evangelical Church of Mekane Yesus.....	431
The Case of Qale Heywet Church .....	446
The Case of Meserete Krestos Church .....	461
The Case of the Mule Wengel Church.....	475
Issues of Growth and Contexts .....	488
Conscientious Objectors and Non-Violent Resistance .....	496
Factors Promoting Growth .....	503
Evangelical Christianity and the Legacy of the Revolution.....	528
Conclusion.....	534

CHAPTER VI	
CONCLUSION .....	555
LIST OF INFORMANTS.....	578
PROFILE OF INFORMANTS.....	584
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	618

# **Chapter I**

## **Introduction**

### ***The need for the study:***

Religion has always constituted a vital part of Ethiopian society. Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religions have invariably shaped the culture, value systems and social organizations of diverse communities in Ethiopia. Yet, religious studies is a field of investigation that has received limited attention by Ethiopian and expatriate scholars alike. Scholars who have been publishing their views on Ethiopia have failed to examine seriously religious developments, one of the most crucial determinants of the character of Ethiopian society. As a result, studies of religious movements are left out of the principal currents of social studies thinking. The few scholarly studies we have on the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and Islam can hardly deserve to be considered substantial historical works, given the two religions long-running history and enduring impacts. This dissertation is partly intended to redress this historiographic imbalance by studying the history of the evangelical movement, which forms the foundational force behind the new Christian faith movements in Ethiopia.

This is even truer of faith related movements that lie outside the ambit of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the established church in Ethiopia. A typical example is the prophetic movement led by Sheik Zakaria, a Muslim cleric that brought thousands of Muslims into the Christian faith in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Despite the availability of numerous materials in various local and external sources, resulting from the attention it drew as an intriguing religious phenomenon, there is virtually no scholarly work written on the subject. We have no mention of this movement in any Ethiopian studies except

Donald Crummy's reference in a brief article in the *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* in 1972.

Ethiopia has experienced a notable upsurge of religious innovations in its recent history. The Evangelical Christians, which constituted less than one percent of the Ethiopian population in the early 60's, grew rapidly to millions over the last three decades alone. The 1994 government Census records the number of Evangelical Christians close to six millions.<sup>1</sup> Mission agencies, which base their data on figures obtained from various local denominations, estimate the number of Evangelical Christians over 12 million constituting 19.7 % of the Ethiopian population.<sup>2</sup> The exponential growth of evangelical Christianity is largely hidden from the purviews of Ethiopian scholars. New religious movements are also becoming increasingly conspicuous in most urban areas and are increasingly attracting the youth. Despite their public notoriety, sociological and demographic significance, virtually no scholarship has been invested to study the transformation of religious ideas critically. Accordingly, there is still very little to scholars and various interested readers on the nature of evangelicalism in Ethiopia.

No wonder then that we have very little understanding of how these religious movements are faring in a non-Western society, what causes their unfolding, the dynamics of their expansion, the varieties of organizational expressions they have assumed, their social and religious significance and the conditions allowing their proliferation in bewildering varieties. This is equally true of the evangelical and Pentecostal movement that preceded the new religious movements. We know very little concerning the evangelical Christian faith and the various local vocabularies and

nuances it has taken in Ethiopia because of the absence of a comprehensive contextual examination elucidating its rise and development. Overall, new religious movements have largely remained outside the purview of academic research.

The history of the evangelical movement, as presented here, has not been attempted before. This research is the first comprehensive treatment of the subject and the first attempt to use the term as a unit of analysis and study. There has so far been no study that directly deals with the evangelical movement in Ethiopia that seeks to situate its spectacular expansion in the socio-cultural, socio-economic and political contexts of Ethiopia. There have been works that deal with certain aspects of the Protestant missionary enterprise in Ethiopia, mainly those written by former missionaries. These works, by and large, tend to concentrate on certain regions or peoples group and present their materials based on the framework of the mission organization from which they came. Moreover, most of them focus on issues of theology, missiology, and denominational or local church history with little attention to broader contexts.

Students of various seminaries have also produced a significant amount of literature on the different dimensions of the evangelical movement in Ethiopia, mainly through their studies of the history of local churches. No doubt, these studies form the building blocks of the larger picture of the evangelical movement in Ethiopia. They suffer, however, from the lack of in-depth research and an inclusive perspective that places the religious phenomenon in the wider socio-cultural national settings and time perspective.

Enjoying relative respite from the historic challenge of persecution, some evangelical churches are now seizing this unprecedented opportunity to engage in



writing their history, and as a result, a number of works have come into existence over the last few years. These works are not written by historians but by members of their respective churches out of personal interest or commissioned by the church leadership. The fact that they are written by Ethiopians is significant in that they present a native perspective to the material. A major limitation concerning their wider use and readership is that they are all written in Amharic, the official language of Ethiopia.

With respect to the Pentecostal movement in Ethiopia, the only document that we have is a preliminary study produced in 1975 by a Norwegian missionary from the Lutheran Mekane Yesus Church and a senior essay paper that came a year later in Haile Sellassie I University (now Addis Ababa University). The Mulu Wengel church, the first indigenous Pentecostal church in Ethiopia that had a remarkable influence over the spread of Pentecostalism, has never published solid material on its history except the daring initiatives of Bekele Wolde Mariam, who recently wrote an insightful book outlining the broader contours of the Pentecostal movement in Ethiopia.

This being the domestic situation of the historiography of Christianity, no wonder that standard works dealing with African Christianity are mute concerning Evangelical and the Pentecostal movements in Ethiopia. The Ethiopian experience is conspicuous by its absence even in the burgeoning literature on the New Religious Movements (NRM) in Africa.

Accounting for the neglect and a level of reticence on the part of Ethiopian historians is partly the continued public perception in Ethiopia of evangelical Christianity as a fringe religious phenomenon professed by some marginal people somewhere in the peripheral lands and the association of its presence with foreign

elements. Since the Orthodox Christian faith has been the established religion in Ethiopia with popular claims that trace its advent to the Apostolic times, any other affirmation of alternative forms of the Christian faith, has not received an open welcome. From the point of view of the established church that considers itself as the surviving remnant of the classical model of Christianity, all other non-Orthodox variants of the faith are viewed as invasive species that threaten its existence. Overshadowed by such mainstream religious narrative that automatically bares other alternative discourses, the level of existing scholarship on the evangelical movement is extremely small. The evangelical Christian movement has not registered on the screen of the religious history of Ethiopia, despite its public notoriety and the astonishing pace of its expansion and the new militant and nationalist trend it is assuming. Contributing to the lack of serious historical studies is the recency of the movement and the concentration of its quick and invisible growth in the last couple of decades. Another important factor to consider is the lack of historical consciousness exhibited among Ethiopian evangelical Christians as reflected in the lack of interest to document their history. This is even more true of the Pentecostals, who despite their high profile educational constituency, paid little attention to record their movement's history, much less to interpret and explain it in academic terms.

Ethiopia offers a somewhat unique situation for the study of evangelical Christianity in Africa because of the absence of the colonial factor and the existence of a long established indigenous church with state support. Unlike other African counties, wherein Evangelical Christianity encountered African Traditional Religions, in Ethiopia, the encounter was mainly between the established forms of Christianity with

the one introduced by Western missionaries. The history of evangelical Christianity in Ethiopia has not proceeded evenly, but by challenges and reactions by lulls and revivals but steadily growing. Consequently, the type of religion with which the western variant of Christianity interfaced and interacted in other African societies is largely missing from the picture. This situation has considerably shaped the character of the evangelical movement in Ethiopia. Additionally, the conditions that gave occasion to the rise of the African Independent Churches are also, by and large, absent in the Ethiopian situation. Studying the origin and dynamics of new religious movements in Ethiopia with radical messages and orientations offers a new insight and dimension of African Instituted Churches and contributes a page to the ongoing discussions of the independent faith movements.

There are several reasons to explain my interest in the study of the evangelical movement in Ethiopia. One of the reasons why I undertook this research project is the high degree of confusion and misunderstanding that prevails among the public and scholars alike regarding Ethiopian evangelicals and the faith they represent. Evangelical Christianity has always been viewed by mainline religious thinking as outlandish, and as a result, it has never been understood by what it is and for what it stands, hence, its popular portrayal as anti-culture, anti-nationalistic, atypical, and anti- Mary, when the characterization assumes a theological slant. Compounding the confusion and misconception is its association with externality, the assumption that it is a foreign religion introduced by foreigners. Hence, the pervasive notion of *mete haymanot*, a religion of alien import, an exclusionary tool that has been used to relegate the evangelical faith into the shadow, push it out of public discourse and de-legitimize its

existence. The communist leaders, in particular used this notion of *mete*, to isolate and target Evangelical Christians by linking them with the CIA. But this secularized religious version of religious thinking mainly comes from an old nationalistic paradigm stemming from mainstream thinking strongly influenced by the Orthodox Church. Evangelical Christians have not tried to counter this challenge through apologetics or other forms of expressive discourses. Rather, their putative response has been aggressive soul winning and multiplication, which only contributed to the heightened suspicion that someone else from the outside was behind them. Whatever the circumstances that have given rise to the misapprehensions, it is vitally important to have a critical study of the new dimension of Christianity in Ethiopia that seeks to situate its history in the larger Ethiopian socio-religious context to see its development from a local (national) perspective.

Several factors justify this research. For instance, the sheer growth of the evangelical movements demands explanation. The evangelical Christian faith, in all its forms, presents one of the most extraordinary developments in modern Ethiopia with its rapid spread across all regions, unnoticed by scholars and with very few people being aware of its expansion. The growth of the evangelical faith in Ethiopia, a country widely considered as solidly Orthodox, is a startlingly dramatic. Beginning from a relatively obscure origin, not only has it attracted millions of followers but it has also become an influential religious and social phenomenon with growing impacts. This intriguing development in itself requires a critical investigation that takes the contexts into account and tries to explain the movement's dynamics and character. The evangelical movement has come to the fore by contesting the ground held by an already

established national Church enjoying state support for the most part of its existence. The conditions in which the faith successfully withstood the challenges and the manner in which the faith has sustained itself require serious study and documentation. Furthermore, there is the need to capture the various trends and trajectories the evangelical movement has taken especially over the last four decades in order to understand it more fully in all its national dimensions. On the global level, Christianity has made a radical historical, geographical and ideational shift as it moves from its original Western enlightenment oriented matrix and unfolds in societies characterized by changes and suffering arising from poverty and various forms of oppressions. Undertaking such studies helps to capture the local idioms and articulations of a global movement.

In this study, I examine the major defining contours of the history of the evangelical movement in Ethiopia by paying especial attention to the period of its rapid expansion and development. This dissertation investigates the birth and the historical evolution of a religious movement, which had its original roots in the fringe peripheral communities but later grew into a large-scale movement that has now assumed a national magnitude. It is a faith movement that evolved from a religion of *yadar agar* (peripheral land) to the religion of *ye mahal agar* (the land of the center). As with all historical developments and traditions, evangelical Christianity has been shaped and refined to its present form by diverse historical events. The central question to which this dissertation seeks to find an answer is: How has the evangelical Christian movement with an inconsequential number of followers in the early 1960's risen to such national visibility garnering members in millions and thus becoming a significant

element in the religious landscape of the Ethiopian society? Subsidiary questions are: What are the dynamics and factors accounting for its remarkable expansion? What have been the crucial events, defining moments, shaping contexts and key agents, which played out in the growth processes?

This dissertation offers explanations to these and related questions by outlining the crucial features of the development of the evangelical faith as well as capturing its key points of transition and transformation in a continuum.

***Statement of the Problem:***

The evangelical movement in Ethiopia is a subject that is poorly understood and even less studied in Ethiopia. The evangelical movement is a rubric which embraces diverse strands of religious stirrings appearing in the non –Orthodox and non-Catholic variants of the Christian faith. Uniquely, the movement has received the standard designation of *Pente*, a shortened reference to Pentecostalism, an Ethiopian popular conception not found elsewhere. In the Ethiopian situation, the Pentecostal movement is an aspect of the larger evangelical movement that unfolded in the 1960's and greatly contributed to its advance. But subsuming the whole movement under the rubric *Pente* is a misrepresentation of the historical evolution, dynamics and character of the evangelical movement in Ethiopia. The lack of sound understanding, and the marginalization of the new dimension of Christianity in Ethiopia by mainstream religious thinking that resists innovations, accounts for persisting misconceptions of the historical evolution and development of the faith.

### ***Limitations of the study:***

The following are some of the things that I consider to be limitations of the study. For one thing evangelical Christians have lived in constant tension with the established National Church and hence suffered covert and overt persecution. This was true chiefly true of the period of the Ethiopian Revolution where evangelical Christians were particularly harassed because of their alleged connections with the West as their origins is linked with Protestant missionaries. As a result, the leadership of the various churches and their individual members has not been able to keep documents by way of records, memoirs or diaries that could have been utilized for the purpose of this research. The available documents were destroyed when the military regime either demolished or confiscated church property and dumped files. The problem of documentation becomes a vital concern when it comes to substantive information regarding identification of membership profiles, size of various churches and measuring their numerical growth across time. In general, there is a lack of tradition of keeping records of members on the part of local churches, hence the problem that this creates for documenting church growth in Ethiopia. I have explored other options to mitigate the problem of providing substantive data by using additional venues such as oral information from church and long time participants, accounts, reports, and observations of missionaries and travelers, and to a degree, government records.

Second, this work covers many domains because of the importance it gives in highlighting the main contours of the evangelical movement at the macro and micro historical level. My own approach of choosing to study the new dimension of Christianity as a movement from an ecumenical perspective, rather than focusing on a

single denomination, has not allowed closer scrutiny into the socio –political contexts (sociological analysis), theological or missiological considerations (creeds, dogmas, etc.) of specific denominations, or to engage in the study of institutional history of various churches.

Third, I have to mention the challenge of studying movements based on faith with claims of supernatural or epiphanal experiences, which are difficult to authenticate, although such experiences constitute transforming moments for those claiming them as true. Although I have not sought to take a dismissive position on personal experiences attributed to religion, I take the view that putatively divine or sublime forces can only be communicated through cultural media, human agency and situational contexts and hence form part of the complex variables of human experience in a given historical context. Whatever constitutes religion, it is a social and cultural phenomenon, and it is expressed through human ideas, symbols, feelings, practices, movements, and organizations. These expressions are the products of social interactions, processes and structures and as such are historically traceable and can be investigated. The study of religious phenomenon needs to take stock of the poly-contextual environment in which it has its being, moves and continues to interact as the human side of religion.

In general, believers and non-believers approach religious experience differently. Non-believers or people with secular orientation tend to formulate diverse sociological, psychological and existential theories to explain a religious situation. For them, the religious experience the believers claim might appear to be illusions or mis-recognitions or else, perceived truth. Believers, by contrast, have a different perception



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of religious experiences and how people conceive relating to a supernatural reality, which for them constitutes the primary element on which every thing hinges and from which other things, such as social ties, services, institutions and structures emanate. In short, believers assert that there are supernatural factors at work in human drama that directly impinge upon human affairs and cause turning points to transpire. Such claimed religious experiences have given passion, visions, commitment, zeal and the power to make consequential decisions affecting their lives. The claims also stir up on the part of the believers strong convictions to develop a sense of calling to become agents of transmission of their belief and to face daunting trials unflinchingly. The historian does not have the methodological tools or the prerogative either to affirm or dismiss such claims.

I want to provide few examples to illustrate my case. Dr Samson Ayana was a former officer from the Ethiopian Air Force who later became a prominent member of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia. He got his Ph. D from the University of Moscow and wrote his dissertation on strategies of inculcating secular philosophy (communism) in the thoughts of religious minded Ethiopians under the title: "Factors that Form Scientific World Outlook." He worked as a chief propagandist agent for the Marxist regime in Ethiopia. Following the collapse of the regime, he took flight to Kenya and became a refugee. At some point in his life, he became a convert to the evangelical Christian faith. He came back to Ethiopia, worked for a company, managed to save money and opened a successful business firm called, "EL SAM Impex." He became an itinerant evangelist relying on his personal resources. Not only that, he established his own organization to provide financial backing for many evangelists that could work as

rural missionaries in Ethiopia. His religious experience transformed his life and also brought social conversion, reorientation of life's commitment and purpose.

The other example has to do with a medical doctor, Doctor Tibebe Haile Sellassie, who was a convert from the Orthodox Church into the evangelical faith. Dr Tibebe chose to serve as a medical doctor in the predominantly Somali-inhabited area of the Ogaden in order to get a chance to communicate his faith to the local people. While serving as a medical doctor, Dr. Tibebe was taken by the Somali forces from the Ogaden during the 1977 Ethio-Somali war, together with thousands of Ethiopians, and thrown to a Hawe prison camp in Somalia, where he was kept for eleven years. During his prison life he was engaged in teaching, helping the sick and doing other merciful works and witnessing his faith to hundreds. He was released from prison and found a job in an international organization and is still involved in sharing his faith to many Ethiopians at home and abroad on how his faith helped him to endure pain and difficulties and keep on doing good works.

There are also ordinary men, men without titles, people like Mehari Chorka, a farmer from Wolayta, southern Ethiopia who was converted to the evangelical Christian faith and chose to be an evangelist in order to share his testimony and what he believed was the "good news" to others by traveling across all regions of southern Ethiopia beginning from the 1940's and continuing to this day, even in his old age. Mehari suffered imprisonment several times under both the imperial and the military regimes, and he is still willing to endure more. There is also the story of Tesfaye Gabiso, a young man from Yirgalem who embraced the evangelical faith in the late 60's and soon became a renowned gospel singer. His gospel songs, especially the ones he composed

during the Marxist regime, were heard by millions of Ethiopians. He was imprisoned for seven years just because he refused to renounce his faith and declined the invitation presented by the local cadres to join their ranks. These men and many like them emphasize the conviction shared by many evangelical Christians in Ethiopia, whose faith journey has been guided by the motto: “Reason takes you to the shore and faith takes you across.”

Accounting, or to be specific, historicizing the actions and steps taken by individuals based on faith is a difficult task, but, I try to acknowledge it as part of the informing milieu of people in their existential situations without discounting the diversity of human motives and the rational and pragmatic choices people make. The vocation of the historian is to write about what actually happened and historical excursions into the past seek to provide causative explanations to the affairs of the concrete happenings in publicly accessible terms. Impacts of religious experiences as reflected in peoples’ attitudinal changes and actions they accomplish, as resultant developments are accessible data not subjectively interiorized phenomena. Whatever language seem to represent the views of the evangelicals, I present as theirs. Since I am studying the history of people who take their faith seriously and who order their life experiences based on that faith, I cannot avoid using religious vocabularies and other forms of expressions of their faith in discussing their experiences and their encounters. I put what they consider to be authentic experiences in quotes.

Admittedly, I am somewhat limited in presenting the arena of faith as it relates to the individuals experiencing it and to those embracing the faith and those contributing to its expansion by paraphrasing their narratives as fit to the study of

history. My approach, as a student of history, is to write about a faith-related subject as objectively as possible. Informing my perspective is: religious studies examine the various media by which people make, find and improvise religious idioms in their varied existential contexts. I have chosen to study religious phenomena as part of a popular movement across time and in changing contexts, rather than focusing on specific instances or cases. I have not adopted the theological elements as a frame of reference to a movement that claims to be Christian. I consider this too present its own limitation in fully grasping the deeper spiritual aspects of the evangelical movement in Ethiopia.

The selected cases are indicative of the questionability of the assumption that when choosing religious affiliation and commitment, people will simply weigh rewards against cost and they will try to get the most for their investment. The above stories, to a degree, render problematic nature of assigning functionalist character to religious experiences. Such a cost-benefit approach does not seem to be a beneficial model to apply to the Ethiopian situation without ruling out the instrumentality role religion plays. The early Pentecostals were members of a promising elite and today most of the pioneers of the movement have distinguished careers while actively pursuing their faith. In their youth, however, they accepted suffering, ostracization from society and brutal treatment from some officials of Haile Sellassie's government and during the military regime. They paid a dear price to hold on and keep the faith. None of those I have interviewed attributed their endurance to their own strength and commitment. Instead, they insisted that it was the power of God through prayer that enabled them to carry on and overcome difficult challenges. I do not consider after having interviewed

and interacted with hundreds of informants, the faith appropriated by evangelical Christians as a mere interstitial force with fleeting importance serving only the moment. It is something deep-seated, investing people with enduring convictions and ideals that form bedrocks of their beliefs and commitment from which flows resolute actions. Cost benefit analysis can hardly explain their situation even if one allows other variables involved and the complex nature of human motives.

I gave extensive treatment to this aspect of the study's limitation because of the enormity of the importance of an inquiry dealing with faith-oriented subjects and its problematic nature when exclusive attention is given to social and psychological aspects to the neglect of beliefs and other spiritual considerations.

Fourth, a study that seeks to outline the historical evolution of a faith movement by tracking its locus and significant moments and key players in various arenas, also misses a lot in terms of capturing important aspects of the faith it studies. For instance, one could focus more on the interaction between evangelical Christianity and local culture, particularly as they relate to the rural population. This encounter has not been investigated, and likewise, the differential dynamic of the faith in rural and urban settings has not been considered.

The last aspect of the limitation that I seek to point out is the issue of proximity, that is to say proximity of the unfolding of the story to the present. This is particularly true of the new faith movements and charismatic renewals within and outside of the mainline churches whose stories are in the process of becoming. Except providing lead ideas and general remarks, I have avoided making conclusive statements. I did, however, raise questions for future research in my conclusion section.

My own background has also to a great extent, helped me to balance out things. I was born and raised in an Orthodox Christian family. I turned to Marxism by leaving behind my given parental faith when I got deeply involved in the radicalism of the student movement in the 1970's in the former Haile Sellassi I University. Like most of my generation who sought to be change agents and committed their lives to the cause of the people, the failed socialist experience and the social disasters wrought about by a brutal military rule had a crushing influence. Later in my life I embraced the evangelical faith following a curious encounter with a colleague in the Addis Ababa University. In 1987, I became a member of a local Baptist church in Addis Ababa. My involvement in leadership positions both in my local Baptist church and at the national level, in the larger umbrella of the Fellowship of Ethiopian Evangelical Christians, gave me the opportunity to understand the faith closely and establish connections with some of the key people who have played active role in the growth of the evangelical movement in the past. The contacts I had in the past with many influential evangelists and church leaders provided open venues to identify my informants from various denominations and establish good rapport with them during interview sessions. This was an added advantage that enabled me to interact with them in an atmosphere of cordiality and mutual trust. I acknowledge the possible danger of my relative position of being an insider. Nevertheless, I equally recognize the advantages of being a participant observer. I view my self as an insider invested with the benefit of past/lived experience and hindsight that place on me some sort of reality checks and balances cautioning against the excess of an emic approach to my study, though I find the emic approach to be extremely valuable, for it adds insight and perspective that become

relatively more available and accessible as a participant. The emic position does not provide a privileged position for the researcher to hold unqualified knowledge substituting subjectivity for evidential objective statement. Etic concerns, considering things from an outside as outsider, are also crucial, but I am in favor of recognizing a continuum of concerns that embraces the “insiders” perspective and the “outsiders” point of view as epistemologically and phenomenological beneficial. Accordingly, my approach combines both methodological positions.

***Thesis:***

The general thesis I seek to forward in this dissertation is: though Protestant missionaries have introduced evangelical Christianity to Ethiopia from the West, its growth and expansion results mainly from contributions of native agencies. This is true given the legal and cultural restrictions under which the Western Protestant missionaries operated and granted the remarkable expansion of the movement occurred during the times of the Ethiopian Revolution in the conspicuously absence of the external agencies.

I extend my thesis further by making the claim that this is notably linked to the rise of a radical Pentecostal movement in the 1960's. The growth of Pentecostalism, which is largely an independent initiative pioneered by young Ethiopians, occupies center stage in the expansion of the evangelical Christian movement. Pentecostalism in the Ethiopian context is a re-appropriation and practical expression of new religious ideas in the veins of pre-existing spiritual values and consciousness gaining newer emphasis and vitality occasioned by social and cultural changes. The Pentecostal



movement, whose followers came mainly from the Ethiopian Orthodox background, provided strong impetus for the rise of a stalwart missionary project that has sustained itself because of its indigenous roots, voluntaristic nature, an enthusiastic embarkation on evangelization programs of national import.

***Elaborating the thesis:***

The Pentecostal movement in Ethiopia owes its success to the capacity of its members to create networks and new associational spaces to effectively communicate their faith to others. The Ethiopian Pentecostals focussed entirely on the agenda of soul winning with the virtual neglect of issues of social and economic developments. The new national religious strain whose members were young Ethiopians with modern educations introduced a flamboyant and salvation centered experiential faith, which symbolized the fulfillment of the long spiritual quest of many Ethiopians. The Ethiopian Pentecostals considerably advanced the expansion of the evangelical movement using networks of friendly associations, (relationships family and friends) the organizations of chapels and revival meetings, and the production of gospel songs combining meditative and oral theology appealing to a wide sections of the Ethiopian society.

Witnessing, testifying to one's conversion experience and winning souls to the same effect, has been the most critical and key ingredient accounting for the dissemination of the evangelical faith amongst many Ethiopian. Witnessing, a key element of the evangelical tradition in the past, was thrown into bold relief by the Pentecostals and effectively used for their evangelistic enterprises. Building on an

already existing rich Christian resource base, like their Jewish parallel, where Christianity developed in the context of Jewish monotheism, the Pentecostals redoubled their efforts to reach what they considered were their Christian brethren. The Pentecostals' persecution, their organizing skills and their prior encounters and contestation with radical Marxists constituted significant experiences to help the church survive and thrive when it came under fire during the Marxist regime through the period of the Ethiopian Revolution (1974-1991). This thesis does neither deny the missionary factor, nor negate the contribution of the Orthodox Church. It simply seeks to spell out the critical role the development of Pentecostalism has played in the growth and expansion of the Evangelical faith in Ethiopia.

***Scope of the study:***

Although I try to situate the evangelical movement within the larger perspective of its rise and development by going back as far as the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the main thrust and focus of the dissertation is the period 1941-1991. It is in this phase of evangelical movement that one sees remarkable quantitative as well as qualitative changes. Evangelical Christianity took an appreciable leap in these years in the size of its followers, underwent a high degree of indigenization and assumed national visibility by moving out of its rural traditional mission base. The year 1941 is selected because it was the year that marked the beginning of the restoration of independence. Following his exile experience, Emperor Haile Sellassie became more open to the West, whose development path he wanted to emulate. The restoration period, in a way, also marked a new beginning for Ethiopia as the discontinuity and the disruptive influence of the

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Italian interlude forced the Emperor to rethink and envision a new Ethiopia. His openness to the West is one of the conditions that made the missionary factor in Ethiopia remarkably different than it had been under his predecessors. The 1944 Mission Decree not only legalized the missionary enterprise in Ethiopia but also gave new opportunities for numerous mission organizations to enter and operate in Ethiopia. The choice for the 1991 as ending date is associated with the fall of the Marxist regime under which, paradoxically, the church grew by millions and became more pentecostalized. The Revolution not only created unprecedented momentum for church growth in Ethiopia, but it also provided the context for the emergence of an indigenous church with its own national distinctive. Following the collapse of the Marxist military regime, evangelical Christianity in Ethiopian has entered a new phase shaped by the ramifications of another de-centering political development, relative freedom prevailing, and increasing global influences.

***Approach and Research perspective:***

Although I am constructing the historical evolution of the evangelical movement, I seek to maintain a “centrist” (integrationist/integrative) approach. I use the word “centrist” not in its binary center-periphery sense, but to mean holistic, seeing things in their totality. I view the movement within the context and history of larger developments in Ethiopia. For instance, one cannot talk of Evangelical Christianity in Ethiopia without paying attention to the Orthodox Christian tradition that had pre-existed it. That is why I have placed the legacy of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church as my first chapter. My approach is also holistic in the sense that I situate my studies in

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their historical, regional, and political and time contexts, identifying key issues and points of departures in tracing the diverse contours of the evangelical movement. This approach also helps to examine the role of all actors and key players in the development of the evangelical movement across denominations. It also allows capturing the contributions of both external and local actors in the evangelical enterprise in Ethiopia, though the indigenous dimension receives greater stress. I base my investigation on key concepts like agency, local or external; contexts local, national or international; and trends that show the changing faces of the movement. These concepts allow me to move in multiple directions through time and space and engage in diverse issues relating to evangelicalism, which helps me see the movement from many sides.

Informing my research perspective is my conviction that the historian can study the religious history of a given society as an important component of the constituencies that make up its totality. The historian selects aspects of a society and studies them. Hence, to what he selects he assigns names, and his selection forms his focal point and basic texts. In the same manner, the religious historian takes religious phenomena as aspects of the totality of human experience; hence he makes them the principal focal point of his study text. I seek to stress the fact that religion should not be reduced to its sociological, psychological or economic dimensions, although it is true that these factors may impinge on the forms of a given religion and the direction and dynamics of its growth. Religious experiences are expressions of human affairs, and as such, they can be understood, examined and analyzed in their own terms as well as in association with other dimensions of human experiences, and they can be subjected to the same rules of historical investigation. For many Ethiopians who have been involved in

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promoting the evangelical faith, religion has been the central occupation and shaping influence of their lives and activities. Religion has no separate location in human experience or in human history for there are so many things in human experience intersecting and shading into each other's realm. Thus, I want to place due emphasis on contexts and on the interconnectedness of social existence. Context helps to clarify and add meaning to the behavioral alternative to which a particular individual or group of people might be disposed in a particular situation and setting. It also helps to integrate and consider the macroscopic (the larger) and microscopic (the individual/ volitional) scene to determine what accounts for the range of responses an individual or a group of people make in encountering religious and changes.

Context becomes important in considering mass conversions and the people's movement in southern Ethiopia that transpired during the Italian occupation and the remarkable growth of the evangelical faith during the Marxist era. Concerning the latter, the clash between an intrusive state imposing atheism upon a society with a deeply religious tradition, the despair and the gloom obtained, particularly during the Red terror, form important conditions to understand the context of church growth during the period of the revolution.

This observation posits the view that the individual is a choice and decision maker, but not a totally autonomous or isolated actor or a passive participant moving and acting alone. In other words, rational choices do not occur in vacuous socio-political contexts. My guiding idea is that while it certainly is true that individuals seek to establish meaning and order in their lives, they do so within the context of a



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particular set of cultural constructs, intellectual climate, social conditions, social relations and new situations encountering them.

I also expand the concept of context to include three important notions, namely, moments, locale, and the story. Moments refer to specific situations where an individual appears to have experienced new ideas or revelations to his life, new religious insights whose encounter with them become vehicles to make a new start. Locale simply refers to the seedbed or the circumstances that underlie the moments themselves; it could be a crisis situation (refugee, prison houses) but not necessarily so. The story refers to the new insights that the individual comes to receive through certain agents, friend, evangelist, TV broadcast, books, Biblical passages, etc. The last one mainly seeks to highlight a forgotten dimension in the equation of radical spiritual transformation: the power of the messages encountered, or simply, the potency of religious ideas to produce effects, or the person's faith in internalizing those ideas at a certain existential moment from which he constructs meaning and space opening venues to a new path in life and creating the conditions for new associational spaces to interact with others.

Religious movements depend on the active works of human beings through existential means, that is, the medium of institutions, organizations, promoters of new movements and groups. The process of constructing a movement may involve moral suasion, appeal, philosophical or theological argument, legal determination, political imposition, and to some degree, violence, or countering violence through proactive or reactive responses. Thus the due stress I give to the issue of agency. In the Ethiopian situation the agents who have used various media such as personal contacts or tract

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distribution or itinerant preaching elude the historians search because in most cases they represent unorganized individual actions in places and times hard to trace altogether. In most cases, the human agents refer to proximate means, namely, those who operate from a familiar circle of influence, be it based on friendship or kinship or collegial relations. As much as possible I made effort to identify the key players among the living, hear their tales and map out the broader picture of the story using their information. Whatever was religious truth conceived to be, it must be communicated to be believed. It is most effective in the context of people's relations in which a certain degree of rapport and trust already exists. Thus, the significance of the notion of the social analysis network.

#### ***Definition of terms:***

The term evangelical is not an easy one to define since it is used in so many different ways and meant different things to the Western Christian traditions in Europe and America from which it originated. It is almost always the case that the local or regional context that defines it. The appellation has its root in the Greek word, evangelion, the Gospel, derived from its etymological meaning of “good news.”

A central element of Evangelical Christians is their stress on the need for a personal relationship with God through faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ. From this point of view, accepting this truth and becoming a Christian involves going through a conversion experience followed by a radical transformation in the way one views the world and in the manner he runs and organizes day-to-day life. Arising from this commitment, evangelicals affirm the necessity of being “born again” by the spirit of

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God and living a sanctified and regenerated life that stands in marked contrast to the past mode of existence and to the world that surrounds them. Evangelical Christians are missionary minded for they take witnessing to others as serious calling of their lives, and hence, are committed to evangelizing the world.

According to Mark Noll, its key ingredients are: Biblicism, reliance on the Bible as the ultimate religious authority, Conversionism, an emphasis on the new birth as a life changing experience of becoming a Christian, Activism, a concern for sharing and witnessing the faith to others, and Crucicism, as a focus on Christ's redeeming work on the Cross as the only way of salvation.<sup>3</sup> The term is mostly associated with Christians of Reformation roots that place less stress on creeds, sacraments and liturgies.

I shall use the term "Evangelical" as an umbrella term or a short hand reference to designate the various strands of Christian communities, which directly or indirectly emanate from Western Protestant missionary activities in Ethiopia. I use the term as an abbreviation to subsume under one generic term virtually all Christian groups that lie outside the Ethiopian Orthodox and the Catholic Churches. It is an inclusive term which embraces a myriad of denominations which originated from the activities of missionaries who came from the revivalist tradition of the West which stressed conversion, "born again" experience, sanctification and inerrancy of the Bible, and belief in the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures. I have included the Pentecostals and the various renewal movements, which are generically referred to as Charismatics, in the same category as evangelicals because they share fundamentally the above attributes except the emphasis they place on the power and applications of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Conversion is primary for both the Evangelicals and Pentecostals,

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while for the latter the quest for the Spirit and healing may be as significant. By and large, both groups tend to adopt behavioral norms that draw lines between them and “the world” expressed in conventions, attitudes and languages that reflect strict morality and holiness, especially in the area of sexual fidelity and the use of alcohol.

In the context of Ethiopia what might complicate the scenario is the fact that many of the various missionaries who worked in the country came with different conceptions of the term evangelical. For instance, for the Lutheran groups from Sweden and Germany, the term simply implies a further emphasis of the Protestant faith highlighting salvation and the Sola Scriptura aspects and the missionary spirit. For those missionaries who came from the revivalistic tradition, mainly from US, such as the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM), in addition to the above elements, the notion of sanctification as exemplified by living a separate and holy life, is strongly stressed. The Pentecostals stressed the latter aspect even more emphatically especially during the revolution as a sign of showing extreme distance from and distaste for the order of the day.

Although many Ethiopians sharing these essential characterizations refer to themselves as simply Christians, since they have formed distinctive Christian communities revealing the above-shared elements, I have classified them as evangelicals. Ethiopian Christians whom I have labeled as evangelicals, all share elements of the evangelical faith as identified above, but strongly exhibit the zeal to evangelize and make new converts, have avowed belief and commitment to the authority of the Holy Scripture, and demonstrate sanctified life by abstaining from practices such as smoking and drinking and avoiding mixing with what they consider is



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a worldly culture. These are the major distinguishing traits of Ethiopian evangelicals that outwardly set them apart from other Ethiopians confessing the same faith.

There are also other legitimate reasons why I opted to use the term evangelical as a conceptual tool to aggregate various faith communities sharing critical common grounds. First of all, the first Christian communities who formed a separate congregation being forced to leave the Orthodox Church in Southwestern Ethiopia used the Amharic term, *wengelawian*, literally evangelicals, to describe themselves. Moreover, when the group grew in size and officially registered in 1959, the name they gave to their religious association bore the designation the Ethiopian Evangelical Church of Mekane Yesus. In the same manner, the various Christian groups that sprang out of the activities of the SIM missionaries, which from the very beginning formed separate and distinct faith communities in southern Ethiopia, also adopted the name *Ya-wengel amagnoch andenet hebret* when they were trying to form a single association that would bring together the scattered congregations. Second, beginning from the period of the Italian occupation, in the 1930's, there was a wide-spread movement in southern, southwestern and the central parts of Ethiopia, including the capital city, Addis Ababa, that sought to unite the various Christian groups from mission background with the intent of forming a united church under the rubric of "evangelical" *Ya-Itypia wegelawian abyate krestiyanat hebret*. Third, the official name of the existing umbrella organization representing all non-Orthodox and non-Catholic Christians in Ethiopia contains the term evangelical (*Ya-Itypia wengelawian abyate krestianat hebret*), the Evangelical Church Fellowship of Ethiopia). The above are clearly indicative of the level and type of consciousness the various Christian groups

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had developed towards their distinctive faith and its central emphasis on personal salvation by faith and the born again experience as a normative tradition.

For the purpose of this dissertation, I use the term Pentecostal in reference to those Christian whose doctrines incorporate the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which most believe to happen following rebirth, immediate or after words, at some stage, glossolalia (speaking in tongues, evidence of the baptism), glossographia (visions and dreams), prophesy (revelatory knowledge, invoking revealed truth) as manifestations. Spiritual practices such as healing and exorcism assume theological as well as practical significance. Pentecostals embrace the gifts of the Holy Spirit, Charisma, as outlined in I Corinthians Chapter 12: 4-12, and encourage their members to exercise them in public squares rather than merely acknowledging them as creedal truth. Ethiopian Pentecostals like their counterparts elsewhere, affirm as well as invoke the enabling power of the Holy Spirit for a victorious Christian life and for “witnessing” their faith to others according to the Book of Acts 1:6-9, 2:1-13.

I use the term Charismatic to identify those who embrace the demonstrative characteristics of Pentecostalism but without incorporating them in their doctrines. Like the Pentecostals, Charismatics also stress healing, exorcism and utterances of prophesy openly in their regular services. The charismatic movement is a world –wide phenomenon that has hit established churches including the Catholic and Orthodox churches since the 1960’s. With the spread of the influence of Pentecostalism, churches considered to be mainline are increasingly becoming charismatic, a phenomenon that *has began* to have a bearing on the traditional Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

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I use the terms mainline or mainstream, interchangeably to those kinds of churches which have tended to be traditional in the sense that they have had longstanding presence in the religious scene, have large followings and tend to exert a measure of social and cultural influence in the society. In the West, particularly, the US, the term mainline largely refers to the Presbyterian, Episcopal, and Methodist churches. In the Ethiopian contexts the line between evangelicals and mainline churches has been blurred due to the spread of Pentecostalism across denominations and the closer ecumenical ties that the Ethiopian Revolution has dictated. Hence, the reference is mainly restricted to the long established National Church.

Throughout the dissertation, I use the term “evangelical church” to refer to the various denominational groups falling within the evangelical category as defined above as a generic term to stand for all of them. The reason for that is, my dissertation studies and reconstructs the history of the evangelical movement in its broader and inclusive dimension rather than focusing on a single denomination. However, when I mention a local church by its specific local name, I apply the capital letter. I employ the term Church with capital letter to apply to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

Historically, the evangelical Christian groups in Ethiopia have also been defined by others, especially by adherents of the mainline national Orthodox Church invariably as *katolic*, (Catholic, meaning betrayers), *tsere mariam* (anti-Mary), *ye mission lijoch*, sons of missionaries, *ye-jesus sewoch*, the people of Jesus, *menafican* (heretics), *mete* (foreign origin), and in later days with the rise of the Pentecostal movement, *pente*, (a derisive shortened reference to Pentecostalism). It is this term, which was originally coined by others with pejorative meaning, that has currently become a commonplace

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popular designation for all evangelicals in Ethiopia and which ironically has been accepted by evangelicals despite its negative original connotations. After the fall of the *Derg*, the term also assumed the added meaning of referring to some one who stands firmly for his religious convictions, and is isolationist or sectarian and un-mixing in his social life, ascriptive attributes with less theological underpinnings. Evangelical Christians have also tried to designate names for themselves in the past. The most common and safest name they have adopted was *amagniyen*, meaning believers, a neutral and non-offending term to those who do not welcome the new faith.

***Theoretical framework:***

In general, I have eschewed adopting a specific overarching theoretical framework to canvas my entire project, though I have read a number of materials to acquaint my self with theories dealing with religious movements (for instance, the works of Peter Berger, Anthony Wallace, Rodney Stark, Everett Rogers, and Luther P. Gerlach, etc.). I have consulted with various theories of religion, which view religion as: a mask for class consciousness (Marxists); as a moral restraint or social glue (Functionalist approach), as means of amelioration of crisis (social anomies), and as a compensation of personal grief and loss (deprivation theory). In some sections of this dissertation, I have made references to some of these theories to put religious developments in their proper socio –cultural perspectives.

This position comes from my conviction that primary research like mine, where the subject is not sufficiently studied and debated, theorizing should wait until detailed and comparative historical reconstructions are conducted on a given subject along many disciplinary fronts. Moreover, I am dealing with diverse issues that took place at



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### ***Literature review and commentary on sources***

#### ***Published sources and relevant literature:***

Although there are no scholarly materials that have directly to do with my research project, there are many works that in one way or another have provided some vital information to construct the history of the evangelical movement in Ethiopia. I will provide a brief outline of their significance by selecting a few works that have some general relevance to the study of the evangelical faith in Ethiopia. This also helps to situate my work in its wider scholarly context.

#### ***Ethiopian/local:***

Enjoying the relative freedom that exists in the country and with the feeling that the evangelical church is coming of age in Ethiopia, some Ethiopians have taken the initiative of writing the history of their respective local churches. Among such works that deserve mention are: Bekele Wolde Kidan's, *Rivival Ityopia ena Ya-Mechereshaw Mecheresha* (2003), which documents aspects of the Pentecostal movement in Ethiopia from a *Mulu Wengel* perspective and Tilahun Beyene's, *Ya- Meserete Krestos Tarik* ( 2002), which presents the history of works of the Mennonite missions and the story of the national church that was born out of their activities. They are both written from an insider perspective and provide valuable insights regarding the contributions and roles of indigenous actors in the development of the evangelical faith, especially in its modern phase. Both works are written by prominent church leaders who have been in

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the evangelical movement for several years and who have first hand knowledge of the material they are writing about. Both wrote their books out of personal interest and initiative, without being commissioned to document the history of the institutions of which they are members. Though both authors try to maintain a balanced approach to their studies, they definitely exhibit a nationalist perspective out of their desire to redress mission history in Ethiopia.

The *Qale Heywet* Church has published its history in three volumes in Amharic, namely Wondiye Ali's, *Bemekera Wust Yabebech Bete Krestyian*, (1998), which contains the life stories of several individuals who were key players in the people's movement of the South during the Italian period and later became important figures in the establishment of the *Qale Heywet* Church. Getachew Belete's , *Ya-Ekule Lelit Wegegta* (2000) and *Elohe Ena Hale Luya* (2000), both in Amharic, provide valuable information on the dynamics of church growth in the South, mission- church and mission state relations. The latter book contains useful documents on church-state relations during the period of the Ethiopian Revolution and the way the *Qale Heywet* church responded to the challenges of Marxism. It provides well-documented information on religious persecution in Ethiopia with substantive information gained from individual testimonies. Though the authors tried to maintain a somewhat ecumenical approach by making occasional reference to the experience of other evangelical churches, by and large, their main concern and focus is the *Qale Heywet* church. If not entirely, the last volume makes some criticism of the position taken by the missionaries in their quick flight out of Ethiopia in the initial years of the Revolution.

Feqadu Gurmeissa's book, *Ye Wangel Emenet Enqisqase ba- Ityopia* (literally evangelical faith movement in Ethiopia, 1999), presents a comprehensive history of the formation and growth of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church of Mekane Yesus in Amharic. This book is a result of a well-researched work that integrates primary data, oral accounts and relevant secondary sources and is useful because it pays attention to the native factor in the spread of the evangelical movement in the southwestern part of Ethiopia. In general the locally produced books though written for popular audience provide new source of information for the scholars as they are written by those who have been participants in the events they describe and richly utilize oral information obtained from key actors and players.

Emmanuel Abraham, *Reminiscence of My Life* (1995), though not a scholarly book, is written by one of the foremost leaders of the Ethiopian Evangelical Mekane Yesus Church, who had also served it as its President. Emmanuel had been a man who had a distinguished public service even rising to a ministerial position in Haile Sellassie's Government. This book is based on personal memoirs, rich experience and meticulously collected information. It provides useful insider's insights at the world of the evangelical church in Ethiopia, its relation with the Ethiopian State and the National Church and the problems evangelical Christians experienced. Its major shortcoming is its sole focus on the Mekane Yesus Church.

Getachew Haile et al, *The Missionary Factor in Ethiopia* (1998), is an outcome of a symposium held in Lund in 1996 on the impact of European missions on the Ethiopian society. The essays examine the historical and functional interplay between the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and European missionaries in a broad sweep. This is

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the first book that I know of where the “missionary factor” has been applied as a conceptual tool in Ethiopian history. Its main emphasis on the Catholic and Scandinavian missionaries shadows the impacts made by modern missionaries from the US and leaves one unaware of the existence of the Pentecostals. It is a more or less critical approach to foreign mission. It contains collections of articles by distinguished Ethiopian and expatriate scholars with mission experience in Ethiopia. A major weakness of this work is its defensive nature and the lack of insights concerning the multiple dynamics and contexts of the missionary enterprise in Ethiopia. This is more of true of the Ethiopian scholars who mainly approach the missionary factor from a centrist perspective. The omission of the indigenous aspect of the missionary enterprise in the whole conceptual package of the missionary factor is a major drawback of the collection.

Debela Birri, “History of the Evangelical Church Bethel, 1919 to 1947 (Presbyterian Ethiopia)” (1995), was the product of a Ph. D. dissertation at the Lutheran School of Theology in the US. The work is a reconstruction of the history of a local church beginning from its foundation with the advent of an American missionary, Dr. T. Lambie in 1919, and ending with the birth of a local church in 1947. Its importance lies in its stress on local actors and indigenous initiatives in the establishment of the Bethel Church in the absence of foreign missionaries during the Italian occupation period of 1936-1941. Though an important contribution of church history and mission studies, its attention on a single institution and its regional focus on southwestern Ethiopia limits its input for the study of the evangelical movement at the national level.

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***Works of missionaries related to mission:***

T. Engelsviken's *Molu Wongel: a documentary* (1975), which draws its accounts from first hand information obtained from pioneers of the Pentecostal movement in Ethiopia, provides fresh insight and understanding as to the rise and development of the new faith movements and its tensions with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. It is the first documentary account shading light on Pentecostalism in Ethiopia in its formative stage. The senior essay by Yoseph Kidane Wold on the history of the Pentecostal movement in Addis Ababa (1976), largely draws from insights in this document. A major limitation of Engelsviken's work is the fact that since it was written in the heat of the moment, with limited time to research and reflect, it is constrained by a contextual analysis of the movement's dynamics. It also contains some factual errors relating to names and places.

Briant Fargher, *The Origin of the New Church Movement in Southern Ethiopia 1927-1944(1996)*, documents and analyzes the development of the SIM related churches in Southern Ethiopia, mainly from a SIM missionary perspective. It lays out the history of the region and the social and political context in which the so-called "peoples movement" in the South originated and developed. Its concluding section provides some interesting insights of later developments and contemporary religious situation in Ethiopia. Though a thoroughly researched and well-documented material based on a Ph. D. dissertation, its exclusive focus on the SIM initiatives in the South limits its usefulness for broader understanding of the evangelical movement. It also suffers from lack of an inclusive study of religious movements from a poly-contextual perspective. Its principal thrust seems to be theological and missiological rather than

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socio-cultural. The work is mainly built on missionary sources and is very much focused on missionaries and their activities and as such leaves only a small room for indigenous actors.

Paul Baliksy's, *Wolaitta Evangelists: A Study of Religious Innovation in Ethiopia 1937-1975* (1997), is also a product of doctoral dissertation, which provides a rich and a well documented account of the spread of the evangelical faith in the area of Wolaitta in Southern part of Ethiopia. The work has to be credited for the significant attention it has given to the role and contribution of indigenous missionaries, particularly in the Southern parts of Ethiopia. The author has also situated his studies in the wider Ethiopian context by outlining the local history of the region that links it with mainline historical developments of the country. His particular stress on a certain peoples group in the south and his sympathetic positions towards them, which derive from his missionary experience, betrays a victim's perspective that at times taints his otherwise objective presentation. Though the native factor in the evangelization of the South has been clearly spelled out in this work, the dynamics of the Walayta factor in the mission enterprise of southern Ethiopia, in particular and in Ethiopia in general, has not been explained in its social, demographic and political contexts.

Gustav Aren's pioneering works, which he presented in two books, *Evangelical Pioneers in Ethiopia* (1978) and *Envoys of the Gospel in Ethiopia* (1999) provide solid presentation on the origin and historical development of the evangelical movement in Ethiopia and the shaping events of the formation of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church of Mekane Yesus (EECMY). *Evangelical Pioneers* is a groundbreaking book of great importance that came out of a meticulous research based on primary documents that the

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author effectively tapped for his dissertation work from the rich archival investigation mainly from Swedish sources. The book covers the period from 1860's to 1916 and contains a fascinating account of the role of Eritrean priests with evangelical orientations in the pre-history of the EECMY. His second book highlights the work of missionary activities, local and foreigners alike, in the southwestern part of Ethiopia. It contains invaluable materials concerning the efforts of Ethiopian evangelical Christians to form a united evangelical church in Ethiopia and the challenges they faced. It is one of the first major works that provides room for local entrepreneurs and their initiatives in the process of the expansion of the evangelical faith in Ethiopia. Though Aren seeks to include the experience of other missionary endeavors in Ethiopia, like the SIM and the Presbyterian Church, the work largely emphasizes denominational history, for the major thrust is the works of the Lutheran Mission and its offspring in Ethiopia. No doubt, its regional emphasis, the southwestern part of Ethiopia, mainly Wellega and to a degree, Addis Ababa, is also a minor drawback of Aren's works. Aren's works have significantly influenced mission studies in Ethiopia because of their seminal significance.

O. Saevrass's, *On Church and Mission Relations in Ethiopia 1944-1969* (1974) and Johnny Bakke's *Christian Ministry* (1987), both products of Ph. D. dissertations, mainly deal with ecclesiastical, administrative and institutional dimension of the EECMY, important components of mission and church history that have been explored in great detail for the first time. *Christian Ministry* in particular pays attention to the roles and function of elders and pastors of local churches and the contexts that

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determine varieties of leadership exercises demonstrated in the various synods of the EECMY.

Viveca Norberg's *Swedes in Haile Sellassie's Ethiopia, 1924-1952* (1977), is a work of major significance concerning the origin and development of Ethio-Swedish relations. It is particularly important for understanding emperor Haile Sellassie's motivations for having a relatively open attitude toward western missionaries and how this openness has contributed to the expansion of the evangelical faith in Ethiopia.

O. Eide's recent contribution, *Revolution and Religion* (2000), examines state and church relations pertaining to the EECMY during the period of the Ethiopian Revolution. The work encompasses the relationship of a minority evangelical Christian community identified with the Oromo of southern Ethiopia with a dominant national church and its encounter with a Marxist state for the most part of the period of the Ethiopian Revolution. A product of a Ph. D. dissertation, it is a well-researched and well documented work based on primary material, extensive oral sources and relevant secondary materials. The conceptual tool on which he sought to analyze the existential challenges of the church under the military regime is a center-periphery approach, which has helped him to situate the particular challenge the EECMY faced mainly in Wellega where most of its Oromo constituencies come from. The model he has used could not be applied as a working analytical tool to examine the situation of the evangelical churches, for instance in the southern parts of Ethiopia, where a more or less parallel historico-political conditions existed but did not lead to the same kind of developments as was the case in southwestern Ethiopia. Its rigid application has made the model to be too simplistic and general. Eide makes occasional reference to the other

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denominations with respect to the issues of persecution and the challenges of Marxism to the evangelical churches, but its principal focus is EECMY, which leaves out much needed discussion on the general situation of the church in Ethiopia. The book's important contribution lies in its highlighting of the contribution of the late Gudina Tumsa to provide leadership and direction to the evangelical churches in Ethiopia during the Revolution and his daring challenges for which he had to pay with his life.

Seppo Vaisanen's dissertation work, *The Challenge of Marxism to Evangelical Christianity with Special Reference to Ethiopia* (1981), is another contribution to church and state relations during the Marxist rule. It gives an extensive coverage of the encounter of Marxism and evangelical Christianity in other countries and how evangelical churches responded and existed in tension amidst the challenges of a hostile philosophy. His exclusive focus on one denomination, that is the EECMY, makes the work suffer from a lack of a broader perspective of church and state relations during this critical moment of the history of the evangelical churches in Ethiopia.

Arne Tolo's, *Sidama and Ethiopia* (1998), is a work that essentially investigates the developments that led to the rise and integration of the local Sidama evangelical Christian communities into the Evangelical Lutheran movement. It is an important book that contains important insights into the encounters between the evangelical faith and local culture and religious practices of southern Ethiopia. It also provides useful accounts on the tensions that existed between the new believers and the local governors who were northerners from an Orthodox Christian background and documents the persecution experiences of local evangelicals, in pre-Revolutionary Ethiopia. Though an important contribution shading light on the rise and growth of a local church and the

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shaping contexts of its trajectories, it is narrowly limited to a specific community of people in the South.

Staffan Grenstedt's new contribution, *Ambaricho and Shonkolla* ( 2000), examines the early works of the SIM in the Kambata Hadiya region and looks at the history of early attempts of leaders of the evangelical movement at forming consensus with the view of creating a united national evangelical church. The work, which is based on a Ph. D dissertation, discusses the whole issue of the African Independent Churches for the first time by taking as its focal point the transformation and integration of a group of Christian communities in the Kambatta-Hadyia region into an independent church and its joining of the Synod of the EECMY. It is an interesting study that sheds light on inter-mission tensions and the historical evolution of branch out local groups from the SIM mission and their quest for re-incorporation into another mission related church group. Though a work of great contribution, the concept of independent churches and its application in the Ethiopian situation has not been appropriately clarified and discussed to justify its usage.

Overall, what clouds the above works is the sympathetic position they demonstrated towards the people of the South and Southwestern Ethiopia whom they served as missionaries. Apparently, they, by and large, exhibit victim's perspectives with a sympathetic tendency to redress past imbalances by paying attention to the politically and socially disfranchised societies of Ethiopia. With due respect to their endeavor to allay the discrepancy in Ethiopian historiography concerning peripheral regions, the sensitivity displayed towards a southern point of view, seems to have

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precluded a detached analysis that would allow one see things from a holistic perspective.

***General works:***

Taddesse Tamrat's, *Church and State* (1972), is a book of seminal importance for understanding the development of church and state relations in Ethiopia for the medieval period. It also shades light on an obscure and poorly studied topic of methods and process of conversion and evangelization of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Steven Kaplan's, *The Monastic Holy Man and the Christianization of Early Solomonic Ethiopia* (1984), is also a classic work concerning the role of the monks in the process of evangelization and the expansion of the Orthodox Christian faith in frontier situations, particularly during the medieval times. It is an original contribution, which is based on the rich Geez manuscripts and other foreign sources. Calvin Shenk's, *The Development of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and its Relationship with the Ethiopian Government* (1972), is a well documented Ph. D. dissertation that throws significant light on the modern institutional history of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the challenge it faced encountering modernization that Emperor Haile Sellassie was promoting since his rise to power. What makes the work very important is his study and documentation of various reform-oriented movements and youth associations that arose within the Orthodox Church and their adaptive efforts in modern situations.

Donald Crummey's, *Priests and Politicians* (1972), is a work of great significance dealing with church-mission state relationship though its suffers from the

major limitation of focusing on a limited region in the northern part of Ethiopia and on developments relating to the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

John S. Trimingham's book, *The Christian Church and Mission in Ethiopia* (1950), is also a major contribution to the study of missionary enterprise in Ethiopia and mission church relations. It also contains some vital substantive information regarding the various missionaries operating in Ethiopia, mission related churches and their followings, including figures otherwise difficult to obtain. It is viewed as a general work that lacks any significant analysis of the religious situations in Ethiopia.

Donald Donham's, *Marxist Modern* (1999), is a work that also pertains to the period of the revolution. His study of how the Maale society came to embrace evangelical Christianity and how their Christian experience encountered first traditional religions and later Marxism is considerable contribution to the study of inter-contact situations and encounters. The Church's encounter with Marxism is an original presentation of the vernacular dimensions of the effects the revolution in Ethiopia. The concept of modernity, which he utilized as his key conceptual tool to situate his studies, suffers in its analysis as the concept itself is not examined taking the Ethiopian context into serious considerations. Overall, such works show the danger of applying certain conceptual tools and models without serious attention of their meaning in local situations. These general works briefly reviewed seem to be distantly related to the main pursuit of this dissertation. They are presented since they are majors works dealing with religious issues and contain some critical ideas that shed light on some aspects of the history of the evangelical enterprise in Ethiopia. They are also indicative, albeit indirectly, of the hiatus in the historiography of religious studies in Ethiopia.

***Local senior essays and dissertations:***

There have been quite a number of senior essays produced mainly in Addis Ababa Mekane Yesus Seminaries and the recently established Ethiopian Graduate School of Theology (EGST) and to a degree, the Addis Ababa University. The senior essays and dissertations at these institutions are of tremendous importance since students coming from different parts of Ethiopia wrote them with a focus on the church situations of their particular localities. Except for lack of depth in research, they are rich in contents and in providing substantive information for any work that has to do with mission studies, process of evangelization, indigenization, the role and enterprenuel skill of local actors, etc. The dissertations, which have been produced at EGST, show a higher depth and presentation in quality and a degree of diversity in the topics covered. Though still in their infancy, there are some works coming out of this young institution dealing with topics related to African Independent Churches, a subject that requires cautious treatment in the context of Ethiopia. These sources are extremely important for the study of new religious movements in Ethiopia.

Prevailing attitudes towards religion that have been reinforced by the legacies of the Ethiopian Revolution have caused neglect on the part of Ethiopian scholars to explore the rich mines existing in the seminaries for the study of religion in Ethiopia. The sizable material produced in the various seminaries relating to religious topics suggests that seminaries have in general filled the gap.

The Accredited Development Studies, the MA degree program of World Vision/International Ethiopia, of which I have been a part since its start and of which I

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was its program coordinator, has initiated new and original research on issues of theology and development. Though at the inception stage, there are already some interesting and promising materials produced by staff-students, which are of great contribution to new fields of studies in Ethiopia dealing with religion and development issues.

***General mission related works:***

There is a sizeable group of materials that have also been produced by former missionaries in Ethiopia, which are of immense significance to any aspect of the historical evolution and development of the evangelical faith in Ethiopia. They are too many to list but mention should be made of : Nathan Hege's *Beyond Our Prayers* (1998), a work which focuses on the history of the Meserete Krestos Church, a product of the Mennonite missionary activities in Ethiopia. John Cumber's two significant contributions, *Count It All Joy* ( 1995) and *Living With the Red Terror* ( 1996), deal with the experience of the evangelical churches under Marxism, mission church relations during the years of the Revolution with detailed first hand accounts of the persecution experience of the evangelical churches in Ethiopia. The latter book is written mainly from the SIM perspective. An equally important contribution is Albert Brant's *In the Wake of Martyrs*, (1992), which gives a rich account of church renewal and growth among the Gedeo people of southern Ethiopia during the period of the Revolution.

I have also consulted a number of magazines produced by local churches such as *Berhan* (of Mulu Wengel Church) and *Chora* (of Mahebere Bekuran), and official

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newspapers such *Addis Zemen* and the *Ethiopian Herald*, a few fugitive religious and other material produced during the revolution, materials produced by reform oriented groups within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, ( *Ya-Tegebere Meklit*, 2002, *Gedil Wayes Gedel*, 2003, *Gedle Abune Istifanos*, 2004), and externally published materials such as reports of Amnesty International, Newsweek, and magazines of a number of Christian organizations such as *Christianity Today*, *Lagos*, etc., as the case required to fill in some gaps here and there.

***Archival Material:***

I have also consulted a number of archival sources for the purpose of my dissertation. The SIM mission archives located in Charlotte, North Carolina and the Mennonite mission archives, located in Goshen, Indiana, deserve special mention. The SIM archive has rich collection for it represents one of the longest mission organizations operating in Ethiopia. I have been able to consult material mainly dealing with the pre-Revolutionary period, such as letters and correspondences, mission reports, notes, newsletters and other SIM publications. A major constraint of the SIM archives is policy restrictions placed on material pertaining to the last 40 years, a vital period for my project. I used the data obtained there largely for background materials. The Mennonite archives at Goshen, also has comparably rich materials related to their mission activities and the Meseret Krestos church in Ethiopia. I have been able to get reports of missionaries concerning church-state relations during the Revolution from those missionaries who worked in Ethiopia as development agencies. This was one of the mission strategies applied by the Mennonites to operate in Ethiopia in order to maintain links and provide indirect logistic backing to the struggling local church.

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For a limited time I also had the benefit of consulting material at the State Department archives in Park Town, Maryland, where I was able to get some useful documents on mission-state relations for the period of the 1940's and the 1950's.

I have also visited the Billy Graham's Center Archives (Wheaton, Illinois). It has some valuable works related to mission studies in Ethiopia with some rare collections of books produced by pioneer foreign missionaries in Ethiopia. Among the documents consulted were taped testimonies of accounts of former missionaries regarding their mission work and experiences in Ethiopia. The visit I had at Elim Bible Institute (Rochester), one of the oldest Pentecostal institutions in US, greatly helped to plough through some rare materials. The letters and reports of pioneers of Pentecostal missionaries, who had been to Ethiopia in the early 30, reveal interesting insights concerning their works about which other sources are virtually silent. The presence of American Pentecostal missionaries at that early period came as a surprise for the Ethiopian Pentecostals who instituted the movement in the 60's.

The conditions of archival situations in Ethiopia leave much to be desired. Linked to the change of policies after the collapse of the military regime and with the formation of the new ethnic based governments, important archival material of the past has been identified with the ancient regime and the defunct military rule and as a result, they are either lost or deplorably kept in shoddy rooms. My attempt to plow through heaps of old files dumped haphazardly in the provinces simply proved to be a futile exercise.

### ***Oral sources:***

I have as part of my investigation conducted extensive oral interviews involving over 250 individuals, coming from a range of socio-economic and educational backgrounds in order to diversify the basis of sources of my information. Though I have largely intentionally selected my sources prior to the interviews, some have come along the way as identified by my informants. I have succeeded in interviewing a variety of informants: former missionaries, informed members of the societies such as professionals, ex-officials and ex-party members of the Marxist Government, various denominational leaders, evangelists, pastors, youth leaders, congregation members, some members Ethiopian Orthodox Church, including leaders of breakaway groups operating both openly and clandestinely.

I conducted the interviews in Ethiopia, the US, Canada and Kenya. Though most of the constituencies of informants are from Ethiopia, I had the benefit of collecting substantial information from the Ethiopian Diaspora communities here in the United States and in Kenya. The interviews held in Kenya mostly dealt with former government officials who fled the country during the collapse of the military regime and Ethiopian refugees living in Kenya.

Ethiopians, in general, exhibit a tendency not to be open to oral interviews since this is associated mostly with interrogation. This is especially true when it comes to religion. Religion is not a favored subject for interviews because it is considered to be private, a matter of the heart and the spirit, in short a sacred topic not meant for academic consumptions. The negative experience of the Revolution and the general suspicion that ethnic politics has introduced has compounded the situation. I have

employed an extremely informal and benign style of interview, which encouraged interviewees to tell stories of their lives through reminiscing rather than throwing direct questions seeking immediate answers. I directed qualitative questions without framing my statement in the form of questions, but through benign intervention in the form of seeking clarifications or stressing points to demonstrate my appreciation. I found qualitative questions to be relevant because they, explicitly or implicitly, ask informants on how and why people think and act in certain ways. The method of appreciative inquiry has allowed ex-officials to be willing to share with me their former communist life, their attitude towards religions and government official's attitudes toward the evangelical Christians. I did not make use of tape recorders and even formal writing except small cards where I jotted some information like dates and other substantive information using my own shorthand. I had to quickly put the information gathered in this way into my own notes after the end of the interviews and convert them into my computer notes soon enough since there is the risk of failing memories. This kind of interview format created a milieu that allowed relatively freer and more neutral conversations to take place. I had to develop my own working strategy because of the sensitive nature of political and religious issues in Ethiopia. I also chose venues safe and conducive to my informants so as to set up the congenial ambience that would allow interpersonal chats.

I had to conduct extensive interviews using such a wide-profile of informants to obtain information, which could not have been possible to get elsewhere. Oral information collected through case histories where the individual shares concerning the journey of his Christian faith, helps a great deal to build a file from which one could

gain phenomenological insight into the experiences of individuals as they were drawn into and became committed participants of the Evangelical faith. The history of the evangelical movement in Ethiopia that highlights the native factor and its modern phase of its development is a subject for which documents are substantially lacking. For instance, during my visit in the Library of Congress, two years ago, I could not come across a single document on a subject having to do with Pentecostalism in Ethiopia. Most of the pioneers of the Pentecostal movement in Ethiopia are still alive. They live abroad, mainly in US as qualified professionals in various fields or as leaders and pastors of various churches of the Ethiopian Diasporic communities after they had left their country during the Revolution. It is literally impossible to write the history of the Pentecostal movement in Ethiopia without including the stories they had to tell. Oral sources lend more attention to the voices of evangelical Christians. Informants exhibit mixed feeling when a subject relating to their faith draws scholarly attention. On one hand, they express excitement that somebody from the academia is interested in their subject, and on the other hand, they are a bit apprehensive of the fact that someone is doing a research on a subject that falls within the purview of the sacred. For a work of this nature oral history is immensely important because of the recency of the major events the study seeks to capture and the emphasis it places on local actors on whom mission are virtually silent.

Over all, I conducted my interviews with the aim of identifying, exploring key historical events, phenomena and processes to construct the history of the evangelical faith and the modalities of its expansion in Ethiopia. The other purpose of my interview was to use the information derived from them for cross checking and cross-referencing



with information obtained from other secondary sources. Listening the stories of actors and participants of a national movement helped me not only to gather rich oral data but to understand better the phenomenon I have chosen to study, immerse my self into it and appreciate the interpretations and understanding of Ethiopian evangelicals regarding the events, actions and institutions to which they have been contributory forces. Interviewing a wide variety of informants representing all walks of life, age, gender, class, and profession enabled me to develop a broader national perspective that does not seek to commit allegiance to a particular sectarian group or denomination.

#### Songs:

I have also consulted a number of gospel songs, especially pertaining to the revolutionary period. Evangelical Christians composed and sang songs in which they told stories of their lives, experiences of persecution, encounters with Marxism, and how their hymns presented discursive challenges to the regime. The importance of songs as a source of information, as audio texts, just like visual texts, especially in the context of the orality of Ethiopian culture, has not been appreciated. Songs have served as venues for expressions of discontent for the weak, disfranchised and the voiceless. To my current knowledge, and as far as Ethiopia is concerned, I have not seen any scholarly work that has considered and utilized songs in general, and gospel songs in particular, as important source materials.

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### ***Organization of Chapters and rational:***

I have maintained the flow and integrity of my work mainly through thematic and topical presentations with due regard to chronology. In order to achieve the main purpose of the dissertation, the study is organized in six major chapters.

Chapter I provides the basic frame and foundation of the study. It seeks to outline the aims, scopes, research perspectives and commentaries on source materials. This section also clarifies key concepts used in the writing of the work.

Chapter II sets the backdrop to the evangelical enterprise in Ethiopia. It provides a brief history of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and makes an extensive examination of its contribution to laying the foundations of Christianity in Ethiopia and the rich fund of experience from which the evangelical movement has benefited. It thus highlights an ignored dimension of the context accounting for the expansion of the evangelical faith in Ethiopia by pointing to the pre-contact base line of spirituality.

Chapter III offers a historical review of the Protestant missionary enterprise in Ethiopia, with particular stress on the modern era. It seeks to situate the expansion of the evangelical faith in the south and southwestern parts of Ethiopia within the macro-historical and socio-political contexts of the country. This section extends the conversation on the missionary factor by underscoring the role and entrepreneurial initiatives of the local actors as critical components of the evangelistic enterprise. It also spells out the key role Western missionaries played as vernacularizing forces in translating the Bible in different local languages.

Chapter IV deals with the origin and development of Pentecostalism in Ethiopia. In this section, I try to locate the rise of Pentecostalism within the contexts and general

patterns of social and cultural changes in Ethiopia in the 1960's. By emphasizing its independent rise and its being the cutting edge of contemporary evangelical Christianity, the chapter sets the rational to view the Pentecostal movement as a homegrown adaptive religious initiative that sought to negotiate both modernity and established forms of religion.

Chapter V is devoted to examining the socio-political context under which the evangelical church has survived and experienced, paradoxical growth in the midst of a compelling military socialism during the period of the Ethiopia Revolution of 1974-1991. The main thrust of this chapter is to document and lay out the process by which evangelical Christians have sought to re-situate themselves by going underground to keep their faith alive and share it with others by capitalizing on the mood of despair precipitated by the Revolution. The study demonstrates Evangelical Christianity as one of the most important, though slighted, storm frontiers, in confronting Marxism using hidden yet effective arenas.

Chapter VI, which is the concluding section, provides a summary of the dissertation findings and lays some research agenda regarding the study of new religious movements in post-*Derg* Ethiopia.

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<sup>1</sup> The figure that is provided by the National Census is problematic. In the first place, it adopts the term "Protestant" with which not many Ethiopian Christians, outside the Ethiopian Orthodox and Catholic Churches associate. Also, a large number of Ethiopians falling with the evangelical category, identify themselves as merely Christians, this is especially true of those in the urban areas and the ones who embraced the faith from the Orthodox background. Secondly, it is not thorough enough as to capture members of all denominations including the Pentecostals not easy to track and identify as they appear in numerous varieties along several independent lines. The Census does not also take into account the diverse revival groups within the Orthodox Church who have embraced evangelical theological convictions while remaining in their Orthodox tradition.

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<sup>2</sup> Patrick Johnson, *Operation World* (2000), p.266. A recent study conducted by the Evangelical Churches Fellowship of Ethiopia, puts the figure close to 10.5 million, constituting roughly 15 % of the population. However, this figure does not include other Christian groups, such as the Seventh Day Adventist, Only Jesus, and Jehovah Witness. Ya Ityopia Wengelawiyen Abyate Krestiyen Hebert, *Ager Aqef Yewengel Teleko Tinat*, 2005, pp. 40-41.

<sup>3</sup> Mark A. Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), p. 12.

## **Chapter II**

### **The Ethiopian Orthodox Church: A review of its Legacies**

In this section, I will briefly examine the introduction and expansion of Christianity in Ethiopia, the problematic nature of church state relations, and aspects of the processes of evangelization of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. I will also be discussing the encounters of the Orthodox Church, Ethiopia's national Church, with modernity, Protestant Missions that came either with the aim of revitalizing the historic Church or with the intent of forming an alternative model of Christianity. Reform movements arising from within or without this vast institution and its position and responses to reform initiatives will be explored, particularly in view of the need to assess the role of the Church in the new Ethiopia that was in the making and the changing ethos of the society that accompanied Haile Sellassie's modernizing efforts. This chapter examines not only the role of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, one of the most powerful institutions that has exercised significant influence in the cultural, social and political life of the country, but it also sets the context within which to see the success and challenges of the missionary enterprise and the rise of the Pentecostal movement in Ethiopia. It makes the point that the Ethiopian Orthodox Church has sown the seeds of Christianity in most parts of the country through the missionary efforts of monastic holy men and state sponsored priests. The absence of vernacularized strategy of evangelization, the lack of educated cadres of missionaries, and the Church's close association with the State limited the capacity of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church to have a sustained religious impact in regions outside its core areas of the north. Though Protestant missionaries made new beginnings in some parts of Ethiopia, by and large,

they built upon what had been laid before by the national Church. The prime movers of the Pentecostal movement that arose in the 60's among the highly educated Ethiopian youth were former Orthodox Christians who had been disaffected by the Church's failure to adapt to changing conditions and their exposure to new ideas that led them to new habits of thinking and new ways of doing things.

### ***Early History of Christianity:***

Ethiopia is one of the most ancient nations to embrace Christianity amidst its dialogues with the Mediterranean world. When exactly Christianity was introduced in Ethiopia is hard to establish. What has been commonly accepted by most scholars is that the Aksumite kingdom adopted Christianity in the fourth decade of the fourth century AD. Emperor Ezana left some relics of his conversion in stone inscriptions and the coins he minted during his reign. The account he left on one of the stone inscriptions not only bears the cross, but also attributes his military exploits to the Christian God, the Lord of heaven and earth.<sup>1</sup> Ezana's conversion is usually associated with the fortuitous advent of Frumentius and Aedesius of Syrian brothers from Tyre. Tradition has it that, en route to India, their ship experienced difficulties and stopped at a Red Sea port. The local inhabitants rescued the young men and took them to the reigning Monarch in whose sight they found favor and were accepted as members of the royal court. The tradition also maintains the king offered the boys distinguished positions in his court impressed by their manner and sagacity. Aedesius was made the cupbearer and, his elder, Frumentius, assumed the rank of a treasurer. The two had

considerable influence upon Ezana, both when he was a minor, and following his assumption of the throne upon the death of his father.

Though political pragmatism cannot be discounted, Ezana's conversion to Christianity, was a result of his close associations with the Syrians brothers, particularly, Frumentius, who later became the first Bishop of Axum under the name of Abba Salama.<sup>2</sup> Frumentius was consecrated as the *Abuna*, (Father), by the Patriarch of Egypt, Bishop Athanasius, a tradition that had been maintained for centuries until 1959 when the Ethiopian Orthodox Church decided to become autocephalous.<sup>3</sup> The conversion of Ezana into the Christian faith in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, should by no means suggest that Christianity was introduced to Ethiopia during his reign. Because of Ethiopia's longstanding commercial and cultural contacts with the Greco-Roman world, there had been individual Christians who had come earlier by way of trade along the Red Sea. These Christian merchants transacted, settled and in the long -run, co-mingled with the local people, thereby forming small communities of believers in major urban sites, such as Axum and Adulis.<sup>4</sup> The 4<sup>th</sup> century, nonetheless, marks a watershed. Because Ethiopian society was highly patriarchal, the king's official acceptance of Christianity had serious implications for it greatly facilitated the expansion of the faith among the populace. Ezana collaborated with Frumentius in evangelizing the empire and its environs, so that by the time of his death, Christianity began to assume the status of the official religion in Ethiopia and was taking deep root in the society.<sup>5</sup>

The model that the situation of Ethiopia presents, in this connection, is a reversal of that of the Roman Empire. Unlike the situation in the Roman Empire, Christianity in Ethiopia spread from top to bottom, from royal court to the people,





albeit gradually. The church in Ethiopia, therefore, did not experience persecution from the state, unlike other countries. On the contrary, the support the Church garnered from the state contributed to the expansion of its influence across culturally and geographically diverse areas.<sup>6</sup> The Church's close connection with the state, of course, has its own downside as far as the Church's autonomy and free initiative is concerned. Shifting fortunes of the state, its strengths and weaknesses, its expansions and contractions, also affected the fate of the Church.

In the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, the country opened itself to monks, mostly from Syria, background, who fled their country facing persecution by the Romans because of their anti-Chalcedonian theological stance. This was a result of a major split that occurred between the Eastern Churches and the Romans following the Council of Chalcedon of 451 A.D.<sup>7</sup> The monks, called the "Nine Saints" in the Ethiopian tradition, engaged in vigorous evangelistic activities that took them to many parts of the empire, as a result of which, Christianity penetrated into the major parts of northern Ethiopia. The monks translated large portions of the Scriptures into *Geez*,<sup>8</sup> the vernacular language, planted churches and monasteries, and contributed to the development of the Ethiopic liturgy. Yared, who is remembered as the genius of Ethiopian Orthodox music for his lasting contributions of church hymns and liturgy, was a disciple of one of the nine saints.<sup>9</sup>

The monastic institutions they established in various parts of the empire not only served as springboards to extend the sphere of the new religion but also became the main infrastructure of Ethiopian Christianity. Their missionary enterprise was greatly assisted by grants of land from kings and the wealthy. This also established the tradition of the Church as a land owning institution as is expressed in *siso leqedah*, *siso*

*lenegash*, *siso leangeash* and its dependence upon the state, which in the long-run seriously handicapped its spiritual mission.

One cannot be certain of the method of evangelization used and the conversion process it entailed. Existing sources are vague, or at best, non-specific, in their descriptions. What they offer us are generalized ideas concerning the founding of monasteries in certain locations, the eradication of local cults, and the destruction of “pagan” temples.<sup>10</sup> Over all, it appears that the monks who served as local missionaries, followed a general pattern, which attempted to Christianize “pagan” temples and customs rather than completely eradicate them. Whatever the modality, it appears that the monks set the example for the forms of evangelization, which the Ethiopian Orthodox Church adopted throughout the medieval and the modern period.<sup>11</sup> Supported by the state, they recruited and trained monks and priests from the local population, where monasteries were set up, and made them carriers of a literary and liturgical movement, which gave the emerging church its style and strength. Undoubtedly, one of the greatest influences of the Nine Saints was their widespread teaching of the non-Chalcedonian Christology that became the bedrock of the theological position of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

The coalescence of the state and the church seems to have been firmly secured from the start. The overlapping agenda of the two institutions has been the constant refrain of Ethiopian history. Though the process reached its apogee in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, specifically, during the reign of Zara Yacob (1434-1468), the foundation was laid at the times of Caleb (510-58). Caleb was a devout king who took personal interest in the expansion of Christianity in Ethiopia and the Red Sea littoral. It is also believed that it

was during Caleb's reign that the Church assumed its present day organizational structure. During his reign, Christianity spread over much of the northeastern part of Ethiopia, reaching some of the lowlands of Eritrea, portions of the islands of the Red Sea, and northern Somali land. Today, except some old relics pointing to the existence of Christian communities in the past, there is virtually no remnant left. Instead, Islam has taken its place. Christianity also spread in the south and west, mainly along the lines of the trade routes and following the movement of some Christian families. Significantly, however, missionary activities were carried out through the monasteries and hermitages scattered around the northern regions.

***The Expansion of Christianity: Church and State Relations in the Medieval Period:***

Despite the political confusion, which arose with the decline of the Axumite kingdom, Christianity continued to expand. In the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, when power shifted further south with the rise of the Zagwe, the religion received a new impetus, as the new rulers got intensely involved in constructing churches as part of the legitimizing activities of their regime. King Lalibela (circa 1190-1225) is said to have been the key figure in the building of the rock-hewn churches at the site named after him, which, to this day, are living monuments of the architectural achievements of Ethiopians. Among other things, it is said that the king was motivated to construct the magnificent churches to create an Ethiopian version of Jerusalem, which could serve as a center of pilgrimage for Ethiopians, for whom the holy journey to the Holy City had become a risky venture.<sup>12</sup>

Overall, during the Axumite and Zagwe periods, areas deeply affected by the expansion of Christianity mostly lay in what is today Tigray, the region of Lasta,

Begemeder, and at best, Shoa. This picture was to change dramatically during the two centuries following the rise of the Christian State under the Solomonic Dynasty. The foundation of imperial authority in Ethiopia lay in the Emperor's claimed descent from the ancient line of the Queen of Shebe and King Solomon and the Jewish origin of the Ethiopian state. The *Kebre Negest*, which appeared in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, is an important document that colorfully enshrines the story of the Jewish origin of the Ethiopian state and puts the kings as champions of the Christian faith. The work recounts the story of how the Ark of the Covenant was brought from Jerusalem to Ethiopia and lent a sense of mission and mandate to Ethiopian ruler to do guard and expand the Christian faith. *Kebre Negest*, therefore, provided both the context and the ideological justifications for the politico-religious campaigns conducted by the rulers of the Solomonic Dynasty into the areas of central, southern Ethiopia and the today's Gojam, then inhabited by Kushitic speaking Agaw people.<sup>13</sup> The military success of the Solomonic kings brought the Church into the newly conquered regions, where again as in the past, the founding of monastic centers constituted the principal basis of evangelization.

Between the years 1270-1468, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church exerted considerable pressure on the non-Christian populations within the borders of the expanding empire. Gojjam, Damot, Muger, and a significant portion of the central and southern regions felt the impact of the monastic movements. The process of conversion and integration of these predominantly Cushitic areas of the north proceeded at a slow and uneven pace.<sup>14</sup>

The precise manner in which Christianity spread into these regions is far from clear. It appears that, perhaps, with the exception of Zara Yaqob, the leaders of the

church and the state did not develop a systematic program of mission and evangelization, and as a result, never methodically pursued proselytizing Yaqob.<sup>15</sup> Zara Yaqob adopted an aggressive policy of evangelization and advanced a number of measures that left a huge mark on the Church's theological positions and its praxis. For instance, he instituted rules for regular and ceremonial readings from the Book of Miracles of Mary in all churches and inaugurated a large number of holidays dedicated to various aspects of her life. The cross assumed centrality, both as a metaphor and power of efficacy to fight evil spirits, during his reign. He used such visual symbols as a pragmatic approach to address his illiterate largely un-Christian subjects with Christian messages. The king deemed visual symbols to transcend local rivalries and would appeal to diverse people as a habitual non-verbal pattern of religion.<sup>16</sup> He was even reported to have imposed upon his Christian subjects as well as new converts the branding of their right arms with words like, "I deny the devil," "I am the slave of Mary."<sup>17</sup> The custom of tattooing crosses on hands and over the foreheads also appears to have been inaugurated during his period. Zara Yaqob took steps towards the eradication of magical practices, though his motives seem to be contestable.<sup>18</sup> The Emperor was also instrumental for the publications of numerous hagiographical literatures dealing with Mary and miracles of Saints that have been incorporated into the theology of the Orthodox Church and affected its ritual practices.<sup>19</sup> These measures of the monarch left indelible marks on the religious traditions and spirituality of the Ethiopian society.

Zara Yaqob made vigorous attempts to bolster the missionary enterprise of the church. For instance, he consolidated the monastic institutions and placed them under

the umbrella of the *Echega* to lend their evangelistic activities some kind of structure and centrality. The improvement enhanced the zest of the holy monks to venture out and proselytize. Despite his aggressive evangelization and the success of the monks in converting many Ethiopians, it appears that neither the Emperor nor the monks developed an innovative approach of evangelization that took stock of the diversity of the Ethiopian people and the manner in which their arduous efforts could have sustained impacts. Overall, it appears that, apart from general frameworks and strong commitment to evangelize, the priests and monks did not have an elaborate philosophy of mission and conversion to guide their actions.<sup>20</sup>

Available information concerning the process of Christianization during the period simply highlight the exploits of monastic leaders who pioneered as missionaries, mostly following the footsteps and directions of the expanding state, and at time taking daring singular initiatives. Monastic figures undertook crusading evangelistic efforts by advancing in specific areas, often alone, driven, as they often claimed, by supernatural visions. The implication of such individualized missionary endeavors with such logistic constraints is obvious. The heroic ventures of disparate groups had amazing results in expanding the frontiers of the Christian faith among wide geographic and cultural areas. There were serious constraints, however, keeping the Christian faith from taking deep root in the lives and culture of the new converts.

Steven Kaplan captures the point when he states, “Frequently, we are reduced to describing the activities of an individual holy man largely isolated from its proper context.”<sup>21</sup> Regarding the effects of the missionary activities of the holy men that accompanied imperial march, Taddesse Tamrat remarks that, “the conversion of the

conquered people was always left for time to solve. As long as the military dominance of the Christians lasted, the inhabitants of the conquered areas were slowly and imperfectly absorbed into the new religious framework.”<sup>22</sup> The picture of the role of frontier monasteries is far from this. The monastic holy men scattered in wide areas, also limited in number, could only have lasting impacts in the vicinity of the monastic centers they erected.<sup>23</sup>

Examples of such prominent monks who also were founders of famous monasteries include Iyasus Mo’a(c, 1211- 1292), Abune Tekle Haymanot (1215-.1313), Ewostatewos (1273- 1352), and a number of their disciples who later took up their mantel and ventured into different parts of Ethiopia.<sup>24</sup> Whatever their drawbacks, the establishment of such monastic centers constituted a major landmark in the church’s history for it ushered in organized missionary efforts in most parts of Ethiopia. One major situation that considerably constrained their evangelistic effort was the virtual absence of support from the bishops (*abunas*) who were foreign to the country and were often apprehensive of large-scale evangelization in general.<sup>25</sup> The bishops, who were appointees of the Coptic Church of Egypt, neither envisaged a national mission program nor took steps to augment local initiatives through training, ordination of evangelists and priests or the provision of logistical and moral backing.<sup>26</sup>

Monastic establishment reached its zenith by the 16<sup>th</sup> century, as a series of monastic centers were founded from northern Hamasein<sup>27</sup> to Lake Zewai, in the south, and from the eastern rim of the western plateau to Lake Tana. In the succeeding centuries, the monastic movements spread in the other parts of the empire, speeding concurrently the process of “Christianization.”<sup>28</sup>



Given the paucity of information, it might be hard to have a clear insight as to what Christianization meant, what exactly people had to do and experience in order to become Christians and what the process entailed in the context of the period. We also have no idea of what the becoming a Christian convert meant from the point of view of those converted. Overall, it seemed that acceptance of the Christian faith involved embracing the new faith on the basis of what had been communicated through the priests or the monks and much so on the demonstrable display of power encounter and efficacy.<sup>29</sup> On a personal level the ritual that marks the transition begins with a verbalized expression of denials of previous allegiances and a public pronouncement of acceptance of the new faith. The pronouncement goes like, “I deny the power of satan, I believe in the power of God.” This could be followed by baptism and change of names and the wearing of the *mateb* (baptismal chord), the silk thread tied around the neck of a child usually around baptism, as a means of marking the person as a Christian.<sup>30</sup> According to some sources, the practice of wearing *mateb* dates back to the early phase of evangelization when monks involved in mission works found converts repeatedly come back for baptism without knowing its spiritual significance. The monks found it necessary to put the mark in order to distinguish those who had gone through baptismal rites prior from those who had not.<sup>31</sup> By extension, the same was applied to new adult converts, baptisands who would normally take new names and wear the *mateb* to symbolize their new identity. In the past, the *mateb* served as a badge and function of distinguishing a Christian from a Muslim, or follower of local traditional religions, and for all practical intents and purposes, at no time in the course of his life was the Christian to appear without it.<sup>32</sup>

Apart from embracing these symbolic representations of the faith, the new adherents were not required to make radical changes in their worldviews and daily lives. In other words, acceptance of Christianity did not necessarily demand an irreversible departure from their traditional religious convictions and practices.<sup>33</sup> For some of the evangelized people, Christian formulas and public rituals like the baptism in river during the month of January were absorbed within the matrix of the previously existing religious symbols and traditions. In some cases churches and monasteries were erected under pre-existing shrines.<sup>34</sup> This was partly done to easily attract local people and lead them to conversion and secondly it served the purpose of power display, for it symbolically demonstrated the victor's position against the subdued.

Kaplan points out that there is no evidence gleaned from any of the *Gedelat* (books of miracles) of attempts made by the monastic missionaries to reform the lives of the people whom they converted to Christianity. He points out that neither polygamy nor participation in traditional rites of passage appear to have been barriers to becoming members of the new Church. In an attempt to gain many "converts" among the local people the priests and the monks made concessions to established ways of life. The new converts were generally not wrenched from their established patterns of social norms, and intriguingly enough, Christianity itself does not seem to be encumbered by the admixtures of the old and the new, whether they are expressed through dress, festivities or behavioral patterns.<sup>35</sup> Harold Marcus also observes that the evangelists ignored for a time such folk practices as witchcraft, magic, or devotion to household spirits and as a result, "Over the long term, the people became more conventional Christians and the conquest zones were absorbed to a greater or lesser extent into the Solomonic

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heartland.”<sup>36</sup> This situation is not only true of the medieval period but lends itself relevant to the later days of the expansion process. In fact, one can say that the patterns of evangelization of the medieval period presaged the trend in the modern phase of the expansion of Christianity.<sup>37</sup> According to Tadesse Tamrat such accommodations trespassed into the more substantive tenets of the Christian worship and faith, which in the long run undermined the basic foundations on which the Christian Church rests and deprived much of the Christian content of the Ethiopian Church.<sup>38</sup>

We also do not know much about their preaching style, the content of their instructions or techniques of evangelization. Obviously, the claim of a supernatural calling in the case of monastic movements and the support of state power must have considerable influence in the way they delivered the message and drew recruits from the local population. The monks were both forceful and persuasive in using eschatological messages in pointing out that the doomsday was approaching and that people must steer away from false gods and submit their lives to the true God, if they wanted to avoid his wrath and eternal damnation. The monastic figures as well as priests confronted local diviners and demonstrated their impotence through a show of miraculous performance, which in today’ parlance is called “power encounter.”<sup>39</sup> In the eyes of the converts, the monks possessed supernatural powers due to their demonstrated ability to exorcise demonic spirits, to destroy mediums of traditional deities and for their being renowned healers. Such cures as were achieved resulted not from the holy men’s application of a special medical knowledge or training, but rather from their use of religious techniques involving prayer, the cross, the Eucharist, monastic garb and holy water. “This healing power was very efficacious in the monk’s

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missionary activities, reaching out to the un-reached peasant masses.”<sup>40</sup> Healing miracles and confronting demonic powers and the message of deliverance from satanic domination became powerful evangelistic tools, as is the case today among the Pentecostals to win over people into the Christian faith.

The deepest obstacle to the Christianization of the common man was that of language factor. There were a great many languages spoken in Ethiopia and most of the people in the newly added territories in the south were speakers of non- Semitic languages. We do not for sure know what kind of language both the itinerant monks and the priests who followed the rulers used. *Geez* being the language of liturgy for a long time and considered to be a sacred language to communicate the word of God to others, one is tempted to assume that it must have been the medium of transmission.<sup>41</sup> On top of all the logistic and other constraints, when the language factor is added, it becomes hard to gauge how the monks and priests must have conveyed their messages efficaciously in their crusading efforts and how their messages have been captured by those at the receiving end. Linguistic and cultural diversity of the Ethiopian region and the extensive nature of the areas involved seem to have placed a considerable limitation on the effectiveness of the evangelizing mission of the monks and the priests.

The monastic model of the missionary enterprise seems to have abated in the succeeding years. For one thing, religious controversies that rocked the Church in the succeeding centuries of the Jesuit interlude sapped their energy, and secondly the evangelistic zeal of many of the monastic centers abated as they started to receive land grants from kings and provincial chiefs.<sup>42</sup> The relative affluence obtained from this development weakened the passion for mission and evangelistic works. Disruptive

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influences such as the wars of Gagn and the migration of the Oromo may also have contributed to the gradual decline.

Indisputably, the monastic movement had in some ways weakened traditional religious structures in areas where their activities were intense. For the most part, they were engaged primarily in destroying key symbols of pre-existing religious traditions, for instance, cutting down sacred groves, and denouncing beliefs in the spirits, whatever the forms of expressions, be it trees, snakes, or any other totemic object. Not only that, as a show of power, they built Christian churches on the sites of former sacred spaces. Their actions did not lead to the stamping out the influence of primal religions. Besides, they neither had the logistical means to eradicate them nor the commitment to wholly do away with them. These limbo situations created a liminal zone that provided important backdrop for the rise of fault lines movements, at times prophetic, across the centuries as well as for the smooth penetration of the western missionaries at the later period.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Christian State of the Solomonic Dynasty experienced serious difficulties, mainly resulting from the traumatic wars of Ahmad Gagn (1527-1543), and to a certain extent the migration of the Oromo that accompanied it.

The wars of Gagn continued for well over 15 years and affected almost the whole empire. One major consequence of these wars germane to the subject under review is the decline of the influence of the Church, especially in the recently conquered and Christianized regions of the central and southern regions of Ethiopia. Another major consequence of this development relates to the Jesuit interlude.



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Portuguese soldiers came to the aid of the Ethiopian rulers during the wars. Following the end of the wars, the Jesuit missionaries came to Ethiopia for the purpose of evangelization. The positive attitude and friendly reception accorded to the Portuguese missionaries by the kings, and the society at large, gave them the opportunity to spread the Catholic faith, initially within the court circle and later among the populace. In fact, Emperor Susenyos officially espoused Catholicism and even tried to impose it by a decree he passed in 1622. This precipitated a widespread civil war ending in the emperor's abdication of power and in the expulsion of the Jesuits from Ethiopia.

A major ramification of this episode was the development of a xenophobic attitude the Ethiopian society, the rulers and the people alike, evinced towards foreigners in general, and missionaries in particular. The event also had immediate repercussions isolating both the state and the Church from the outside world. Emperor Fasiledes and succeeding kings chose to seal off the country from any external influence. The anti-mission position so pervasive among Ethiopians emanated mainly from the attempts of the Jesuits at forcing Ethiopians to abandon their old Orthodox faith and the debacle that followed climaxing in the bloody civil war of 1632 and their dismissal in 1634. This unfortunate historical precedent left a big mark on the psyche of Ethiopians, in the form of deeply held suspicions towards foreigners, especially missionaries. As a consequence of this radical isolation, the Church experienced centuries of exclusion from the outside world that led to her inward orientation and the further indeginization of its beliefs and practices.<sup>43</sup>

The Jesuit interlude also had the unanticipated outcome of rekindling the old theological controversy that arose at Chalcedon over the nature of Jesus. The hermits

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who were instrumental in the opposition to, and ultimately, the expulsion of the Jesuits could easily instigate the masses to revolt based on the Church's non-Chalcedonian tradition. The Catholics were also accused of belittling the role of Mary by those who saw her as the mother of Jesus and not mother of God. Thus the label, *Tsere Mariam*, literally, anti-Mary, which has since then become a generic brand to categorize all non-Orthodox Christians and a powerful metaphoric symbol of the anthropological "Other." The term has mutated itself to its current usage, which is now applied as a derisive reference to all evangelicals.<sup>44</sup> The Jesuit fiasco left something in the national psyche that for a long period of time meant the branding of some one as turning Catholic, *koteleke*, became a generic label conjuring up heterodoxy, or even worse, apostasy. It did not matter which of the Western forms of Christianity one joined, as long as one is assumed to be abandoning the Orthodox faith.<sup>45</sup>

The new theological strain, the presence and teaching of the Jesuits engendered, revived doctrinal debates, some already in existence and others newly inspired. Mostly a reactive response to the challenges posed by the new Catholic doctrinal influence they gave occasion for the publication of numerous treaties. Essentially, the publications arose from the need to reexamine the doctrinal position of the Church and in due process purify and jealously guard the Church from possible external influences that might still be lingering after the expulsion of the Jesuit missionaries.<sup>46</sup>

The migration of the Oromo, which continued throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> century, also considerably weakened the position of the Church, particularly in the outlying regions. The migration caused disruptions in the linkage between local churches and Christian communities, and the ecclesiastical authority at the center. The situation was

compounded by the disintegration of the central authority that became palpably evident as of the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Ethiopia experienced political chaos in an era, locally known as, *Zemene Mesafint* (1769-1855), the Era of the Princes, *during* which time both the monarchical and church authority lost their power and influence over regional affairs. Unsettled theological disputes took on new regional subtleties and vernacular nuances to advance disguised local interests. In fact, central authority had broken down to such a state that kings were reduced to mere puppets, pawns in the hands of ambitious nobles jockeying for power. This situation considerably affected the position of the Church, for the decline of imperial authority left it without a single guardian institution. Yet, in spite of its weakness, it still continued to serve as the only unifying force for a large portion of the country.<sup>47</sup> More than any time in the country's history, Christianity held the nation together as it descended into chaos with the triumph of regional and local forces.<sup>48</sup>

Emperor Tewodros (1855-1868), the monarch who wanted to put a stop to the century's old socio-economic malaise, gave serious attention to the affairs of the Church. His radical initiative towards reforming the Church, however, was greeted with some resistance. He wanted the church to be more self-sufficient in terms of running its affairs both institutionally and financially.<sup>49</sup> After his coronation in 1855, he set out to reunite the torn empire and restore, as he perceived, its former glory. A pivotal point of his policy was to put an end to religious controversies in the country. The strategy he adopted was to unite and strengthen the Church from within in order to forge the consolidation of imperial authority. It was to this end that he officially decreed the *Tewahido* doctrine to be the sole cardinal tenet of the Church in Ethiopia. *Tewahido*,

which literally means indivisibly united or just “union,” confesses the perfect unity of two natures, divine and human, in the person of Christ, without confusing and without separation.<sup>50</sup> The design of the emperor was to stamp out the various theological houses, which had provided pretexts for some local rulers with a separatist agenda. Tewodros also sought to establish amicable relations with foreign missionaries on whom he placed the faith that he could effectively use their expertise and wider connections for his national project. High on his agenda was advancing his nation’s progress and containing the threat of the Egyptian expansion.<sup>51</sup>

Emperor Yohannes IV, who came to the throne after an intense power struggle in the brief interlude following the end of the short-lived, but momentous reign of Tewodros, furthered the religious policy of his predecessor. He affirmed the *Tewahido* doctrine in 1878 at the Council of Boru Meda, in which many scholars of the Church participated. The Council was summoned in order to promote harmony and peace within the Church and put an end to the age-old theological and doctrinal controversies. It was also intended to boost the Christian missionary enterprise especially in the region of Wello, where Islam had been making considerable inroads mainly since the period of *Zemene Mesafint*. The Muslims from Wello had been actively converting many practitioners of traditional religion who lived in the peripheral regions of the empire thus increasing the potential opposition to the Christian empire.<sup>52</sup>

Yohannes concentrated most of his missionary effort on Wello because the province had virtually become a veritable Islamic state within the heartland of Ethiopia. Another important reason why Wello was made the target of renewed evangelistic activity was its geographical location. The region of Wello served as a buffer zone

between Tigray, the Emperor's bastion, and Shoa, the exclusive domain of Menelik, his power contender. Both Yohannes IV and Menelik were personally involved in putting pressures on the Church to carry out intensified missionary work that was particularly focused on converting the chiefs. In fact, they themselves took active interests in becoming the god-fathers of prominent Moslem rulers. Yohannes baptized Mohamed Ali, (father of *Lij* Iyasu), christened him, Mikael, and bestowed on him, the highly esteemed title of *Ras*. Similarly, Menelik sponsored Aba Watew, who was christened as Haile Mariam, and subsequently granted the title of *Dejazmatch*.

The process of Christianization of the region of Wello as a whole followed the pattern described earlier. What makes it a bit unique is the level of intensity and degree of involvement of the kings. Yohannes told the people, " We are your apostles. All this (Wello and the central highlands) used to be Christian land until Gagn ruined and misled it. Now let all, whether Muslim or Galla (Oromo), believe in the name of Jesus Christ. Be baptized! If you wish to live in peace preserving your belongings, become Christians."<sup>53</sup> The resolution of the Council of Borumeda provided ultimatum for the Wello chiefs and the inhabitants to be converted to the Christian faith. For the Christian heretics, the ultimatum gave them a maximum of two years to conform, for the Muslims, the time limit was three years, and those considered to be pagans had to submit within a time line of five years. Failure to comply with the stipulated ultimatums would result in disfranchisement of land and property and loss of authority.<sup>54</sup> To facilitate the conversion of the Muslims, Yohannes sent some of the foremost priests of the Church to work in that area. He lived in the Wello both to oversee the progress and personally influence the process of conversion by ordering the people to build churches

and pay tithes to their parish priests.<sup>55</sup> We do not know what percentage of the people of Wello became Christians. According to Elrich Haggai, by 1880's some 50, 000 *Jabarti* Muslims and 500, 000 Oromos had been forced to renounce their faith and convert to Christianity.<sup>56</sup>

It appears that the most crucial impulse for his policy was containment of the growing influence of Islam, particularly in Wello province. This imperial mission to convert people en mass, of course, was mainly driven by political imperatives rather than religious, and as a result, much was lacking in the package for the mass conversion to have a sustained effect on the religious and socio-cultural spheres of those who went through this coercive process of Christianization. Considering the wider populace, the religious impact of this top to bottom approach seems to be insignificant, for whatever the size of the converts, they constituted a small minority. The conversion of the rulers and the masses was such a hasty process that neither the priests evangelizing nor the people evangelized had time to go through any serious instruction and discipleship process. The success of converting the ordinary Muslims of Wello into the Christian or the extent to which the people have embraced the faith in such a fast-paced and massive form of conversion is difficult to assess. Richard Caulk cites the remark of a missionary who states that the people were "instructed to fast and to make confessions and observe the holidays. But they are still wed to pagan rituals which nobody disturbs; even the Christians, who live among them take part in these."<sup>57</sup> According to Hussein Ahmed, the Emperor's coercive form of conversion is counter- intuitive for it led to militant opposition from Muslim clerics that outlasted the reign of the Monarch.<sup>58</sup>



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There were some religious movements that developed along the fault lines of this coercive form of conversion. A typical example is the prophetic movement spearheaded by *Sheik Zakaraya*, a well-known Moslem cleric who after some apparitions in 1892 had converted from Islam to Christianity and was later baptized in the Orthodox Church. He pioneered a movement that led to the conversion of thousands of Muslims into the Christian faith.<sup>59</sup>

It may be difficult to make a discrete evaluation of the Emperor's policy of forced conversion, i.e., whether it emanated from honest religious convictions or to fortify political authority long in decline. In this connection Caulk is right in stating, "...one argues that lack of a secular ideology left him with the state's religion as the obvious means of rallying his subjects."<sup>60</sup> All things considered, however, the approach to bring unity under the guise of religion proved to be ill-suited and did not seem to have an enduring consequence. Certainly, Christianity as it was presented in such kind of package did not become a popular religion in Wello.<sup>61</sup>

What this development left behind on the religious culture of the people of Wello, is the normative value attached to the shifting of allegiance from one set of religious beliefs to another. According to informants, even to this day, the region of Wello is exceptionally known for taking religion as well as politics pragmatically, unlike the conditions found in neighboring regions of Tigrai and Begemeder, where people tend to form rigid boundaries firmly maintained and strongly condemn sliding from one religion to another.<sup>62</sup> Perhaps, of all the places in Ethiopia, Wello provides the scene, where the shared space between the two religions has given rise to a culture of

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religious tolerance and an openness that allowed shifting of religious loyalty as politically appropriate, sociologically beneficial, and culturally acceptable.

The religious policy of Emperor Yohannes, which aimed at uniformity and harmony under the banner of the Orthodox Church, also affected the embryonic missionary community, who were seen as a nuisance to the nation. The Emperor told the few Western missionaries operating in northern Ethiopia to leave the country. Yohannes reasoned that his country was not in short supply of preachers of the Gospel as long as the people preached about the same God.<sup>63</sup> For a pious monarch like Yohannes, the missionary presence in Ethiopia always raised the old suspicion and fear of the aftermath of Chalcedon and the stance of the West, which endorsed the view that Christ is a perfect God and man. This was against the Monophysite position of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, which stresses the indivisible unity of the God-head and son-ship.<sup>64</sup> The Ethiopian Orthodox Church adopted this position, as a matter of fact, following the footsteps of the Coptic Church of Egypt, later refining it into the *Tewahido* doctrine. Accepting people with a Chalcedonian background is considered to be an offense to the foundation on which Ethiopian Orthodox Church rests. Chalcedonian theology will always be associated with one of the most destructive attacks on the Orthodox Church, regarded by the Ethiopian clergy as the soul of the nation and the custodian of an authentic Christian faith.

### ***Christianity and State Expansion in the South (19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries):***

The rise of Menelik in Shoa significantly changed the history of Ethiopia. Menelik's strong desire to reunify Ethiopia and restore its glorious past led him to conduct extensive military and diplomatic campaigns into areas that had even remotely

been connected with the central authority in the past. The result was the creation of a large empire that brought a motley collection of diverse ethnic and socio-linguistic groups under one state umbrella. As had been the case in the past, the Church gave ideological and functional backing to Menelik in his expansionist endeavor. In the newly conquered territories, the Church became an indispensable political ally and institutional tool facilitating the pacification process and securing the allegiance of local rulers in their conveyance of loyalties to imperial power.<sup>65</sup> Following the pattern of the past, as was the case in both ancient and medieval times, the church's missionary work involved converting key local elite, religious or secular, baptizing people and building churches. For the priests, involved in the evangelization process, their principal targets were those men who lived in the neighborhood of the "urban" centers. For the new converts, the process involved repentance and denial of previous religious allegiance. In essence, to be converted meant to be a proselyte and to be a proselyte meant to be baptized and be christened, acquiring a new Christian name that marks the end point of the transition of becoming a Christian.

The convert would be expected to attend the Church, celebrate certain prescribed ritual cycles and join one of the fellowships, bond of laities organized under favored patron saints, but irreversible commitment was not insisted. The model one sees here is one of integrative as opposed to extractive. The converts were incorporated into an established socio-religious platform without strict demands being placed on them and without experiencing significant level of disruptions and uprooting from their culture. The conversion process was also socio- political in nature, for becoming a Christian, in a way, involved becoming part of the community that has introduced the

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new faith by assuming the language and, to a degree, segments of their cultural and religious traditions. The absorption level of the Christianity was so minimal that the new faith merely formed a thin veneer over pre-existing religious traditions and popular culture. Consequently, the old religious values still had their hold on the converts. This time, however, there were more churches built than monasteries. These churches were spread mainly around the new garrison centers. The provincial rulers representing the imperial state, and the local chiefs, who were incorporated into the system, became chief patrons of the church by providing it with land grants, financial and logistical support.<sup>66</sup>

The Church in the newly conquered territories basically catered to the large number of soldiers, officials and various state functionaries, locally known as *Neftegnas*.<sup>67</sup> Several factors hampered the success of the Church drawing converts from the local population, particularly from the rural segments. These included the lack of an evangelization program that took local contexts into account, shortage of a rigorous system of theological training, financial limitations, incompetence in the use of the vernacular languages, and the negative image it gave to the local population due to its association with the new power elite.<sup>68</sup>

Menelik followed a somewhat liberal and gradualist religious policy compared to his predecessor.<sup>69</sup> According to Archbishop Yesehaq, Menelik epitomized this principle in what has later become somewhat of a cliché, *Haymanot yegel new ager yegara new*, literally, religion is a private matter but the nation is for all, which clearly was not just liberal but a very radical position for its time. That being said, however, Menelik was still a devout follower of the Orthodox Church and a strong advocate of its

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missionary activities. In fact, Menelik viewed his policy of territorial expansion, as something, religiously inspired. Menelik's expansion, no doubt, was motivated by economic and political imperatives. However, if not at the center, religion was also an important consideration. Ethiopian monarchs took religion both as a source of inspiration and justification for effecting territorial expansions. Menelik advocated a re-invigorated venture of territorial expansion that would bring forth spiritual reconnections and political reintegration.<sup>70</sup>

In his view, the church had lost its influence in the outlying regions, evidence of which is the existence of ruined monastic sites and thinly scattered Christian communities standing as relics of past evangelistic endeavors. Remnants of mission work abounded in places like Zewai, Gurage lands, Welayta, Gofa, Negele, Goba (with vestiges of rock hewn churches), and Arsi. Christianity in these areas had fallen into abeyance largely because of the country's political instability since the days of Gragn and the incapacity of the Church to maintain sustained contacts with the local Christian population through continued teachings and institutional support. As local congregations lost access to ecclesiastical instructions, the ordination of priesthood ebbed, and people developed various creative ways of reconfiguring their religious spaces.

Recent scholarly studies conducted in the south and central parts of Ethiopia have revealed new findings concerning the works of early evangelization. Studies in the Kambata and Sidama areas of southern Ethiopia showed that in the absence of sustained efforts resulting from either the regular presence of institutionalized cadres, or the extension of ordained priests from neighboring monastic centers, the local

converts reverted to their previous religious practices, or made a creative adaptation by fusing elements of the old and the new.<sup>71</sup> According to Ulric Baukamper, when contacts with the north were severed for prolonged periods, the southern priesthood tended to disappear or be absorbed into the tradition. Consequently, the priestly families soon changed into “pagan” clans. Religious practices such as fasts and feasts associated with holidays gradually lost their original meanings and mutated into something different with the interweaving of new elements and the revival of old ones.<sup>72</sup>

A very good example of this is the well preserved heritage of a fascinating mix of Christianity and traditional religion in the Gamo ethnic group where the *tabot*<sup>73</sup> and the veneration of saints like that of St. Gabriel have been indigenized to produce an intriguing version of syncretistic folk religions. In some areas of southern Ethiopia, for instance, in the deep Omo Sheleko area inhabited by the Tambaro ethnic groups the saints have been transformed into local spirits with slightly corrupted names such as *Kitosa* (for Christ), *Gorgisa* (for St. George), and *Maramo* (for Mary). Christian Oromo of northeastern Welega have similarly equated the goddess of fertility, *Atete*, with the Virgin Mary, hence the slightly corrupted naming, *Mariami*. Another good example would also be the case of *Fandano/Fandicho*, a syncretistic fusion of traditional religion, Christianity and Islam.<sup>74</sup> *Fandano*, which was widely practiced by the Hadyas and Kambatas, involved sacrifice, purification rites, fasting for extended period, and prayers bearing the marks of the three religions. For instance, a slaughtering ceremony can be opened by a father saying, *beseme ab* (in the name of the Father), followed by the father in law’s pronouncement of, *bismilahi* (in the name of Allah).<sup>75</sup>

Whether one sees this development as degenerative religious practices or creative syncretism, what explains their evolution is the conspicuous absence of the Church, institutionally, or otherwise, and the subsequent taming of Christianity by the local culture. Cut off from the mainstream of the teachings of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, existing Christian practices easily merged with old patterns, and the new influences mainly coming from the penetration of Islam.<sup>76</sup>

The effects of this energetically conducted process of Christianization that took place during Menelik's reign were not uniform through out the newly incorporated regions of the south, central and south western regions of Ethiopia. One can say that in places like Harar, the Ogaden, and Jimma where Islam had been the dominant religion, the level of penetration and influence of the Orthodox Church has been very low.

In places, such as the central and southern regions of Ethiopia, where the influence of the Church had been kept intact either in the form of memory or in modified syncretistic patterns, it appears that the level of success has been relatively higher. In areas of the southwestern parts of Ethiopia where the historic religious link is not vividly traceable in living memories, or in some existential forms, however, the Church's missionary efforts seem to have produced mixed results. In parts of Wellega where the traditional Oromo rulers saw the need to negotiate the political space following conquest by identifying with the ruling class, they not only adopted the new faith but also engaged in aggressively sponsoring the conversion of their subjects. Witness the case of Jote Tulu of Qelem *Awraja*, who submitted to Menelik's forces anticipating the futility of resistance, and as a result, obtained a semi-autonomous status for his domain. After being converted, he insisted his subjects follow suit and

conversion took place en masse without being proceeded with sound doctrinal instruction.<sup>77</sup> In like vein, the ruler of Nekempte, *Aba Moreda* and his son, *Kumsa Moreda* (who was later named, *Dejazmatch* Gebre Egziabeher, servant of God, after his conversion) pursued more or less the same line.<sup>78</sup> In both cases the local converts possessed only minimal familiarity with the complexities of their Christian faith.

The local rulers found it highly politic to embrace and promote the new faith. On balance, they saw the politico-social advantages of accepting Christianity and thus facilitated the conversion of their subjects, through purgation and political fiat and the sponsoring of the building of churches.<sup>79</sup> Pragmatism and expediency played out more than religious motivation some local rulers embraced the new religion in order to get the protection of the King from rival chiefs or else opted for it because they wanted to rid themselves of strictures of primal religions. They entered into filial relations with the royalty or members of the local ruling class through baptism and the creation of the traditional godfather and godson relations. The model presented here, at least in parts of Wellega, is the expansion of Christianity under the noble and princely patronage. Apparently, what is conspicuously lacking in the process is autonomous local initiative, the character of a popular movement, to be specific, where the chief actors were ordinary men that could take the message to the wider populace volitionally. This had been demonstrated in the example of ex-slaves, such as Onesimos Nesib and social outcasts like *Gidada Salon*, father of the ex-President *Negaso Gidada*, who were instrumental in the expansion of evangelical Christianity in Wellega and Ilubabor.<sup>80</sup>

What can be said overall about the expansion of Christianity during the reign of Menelik is that the dominant forms of its dissemination was a state-sponsored church

planting with a religious elite recruited from the north to take charge of its activities. This is clearly demonstrated in the proclamation he introduced in 1907 emphasizing the view that church planting/construction was the foundation of Christian faith and urged his subjects to invest their resources to that end in order for them not to miss heavenly as well as earthly rewards.<sup>81</sup> With some reservation, I tend to describe this approach as “garrison model,” for the garrison centers were the radiating loci of the push for conversion and evangelization. The old top to bottom approach, which targeted the local rulers, seems to be the functional model and pattern of conversion. The exploitative political arrangement put in place in most conquered territories, as exemplified in the *Neftegna Gabbar* relationship, and the Church’s association with the guardians of imperial authority that introduced intrusive political structures over the people significantly limited its religious impact. The Ethiopian Church, in deed, did very little to promote the Christian faith among the native population particularly among those living in the rural areas.<sup>82</sup> Its impact, as observed by many informants among the rural population, was limited. It did not encourage the participation of the local population to create a sense of ownership and entitlement of the Christian faith through the production of local cadre of clergy serving as deacons, *debteras* and priests in the respective parishes.<sup>83</sup> This discussion is brought not to blame on the national Church, but to put the record straight so that one can appreciate the conditions under which the Western missionary enterprise made considerable inroads in these areas of Ethiopia at a later point.

The fissures and the gaps found here and there, provided an important context for the attraction and notable spread of an alternative form of Christianity that the

Protestant missionaries offered by revealing the secret of “the Book.”<sup>84</sup> The association between the antipathy of conquered people towards the new overlords and the preference they showed to accepting other forms of religions has found some credence through recent scholarly works.<sup>85</sup> The issue nevertheless needs more critical studies and further debates for a balanced judgment.

The model of nation building by extension, and at times, imposition of a common religion with the demands it entails adopted by Ethiopian monarchs, did not seem to serve its purpose in the long run. It left accumulated problems and pent-up resentments for future generations to solve. Members of these generations filled the gaps of the unmet religious needs in ways that appealed to their sensibilities.

### ***The Church in the Modern Era: Challenges and Opportunities:***

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church suffered much during the period of the Italian occupation. Overall, the Italian policy was to discourage the activities of the Church for it symbolized unity and national identity. Albeit unsuccessful, they tried to promote the Roman Catholic faith by increasing their missionary activities. One way by which the Italian officials desired to diminish the influence of the national Church in the newly conquered areas was using propaganda campaigns, which condemned the Church as a tool of Amhara national oppression. To a certain extent, this led to some kind of local tensions and conflicts between the *neftegnas* and the local inhabitants. There is no doubt that the Italian smear campaigns tarnished the image of the Church in the south and southwestern parts of Ethiopia. In so doing, the Italians, however, did not succeed in Catholicizing Ethiopians. Instead, paradoxically enough, they opened the way for the

Protestant faith to get an upper hand.<sup>86</sup> The crack left due to the weakened position of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church constitutes an important background for this development. As pointed out earlier, the Orthodox Church bore stains because of its association with the provincial power elite, and the *neftegna* settlers, and the local people viewed the Catholic faith as the religion of the new “white rulers,” with which the people were not willing to identify. The religious movement, which brought about the conversion of tens of thousands of people in the Welayta, Kambata , and Hadya areas to the Protestant faith during the Italian occupation must be seen against this background.<sup>87</sup>

After the restoration of independence in 1941, Emperor Haile Sellassie tried to give a new face to the Ethiopian Church both at the national and local level. As a short-term solution to the problem the Italian interlude engendered, he encouraged the Church to engage in vigorous pursuit of evangelization both in the towns and the rural areas. In areas where there had been some kind of discord between the local population and the *neftegna* settlers at the time of the Italian occupation, he called for mutual toleration and harmony.

Some of his short-term programs in relation to the church were definitely pushed by the clergy. A good example of this is the much detested and unwise government directive of 1944, which proclaimed that the indigenous people should be converted to the Orthodox faith. The move of the Emperor was designed to dilute the tension and bring healing and national harmony following the disturbed relations during the brief Italian interlude. The mass conversion that took place by a political directive sought to give the impression that all are equal and there is no difference between the

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settlers and the local ethnic community for they all were household members of the same faith.<sup>88</sup>

At the national level, Emperor Haile Sellassie adopted a more enlightened approach towards religion in general. The national Church, both the lower level priests and its upper echelon hierarchy, has been most resistant to change and is one of those countervailing powers with which the forces of modernization must contend.<sup>89</sup> The role of the Church in the government and public space has been perfectly summarized by the Emperor when he said in 1945 that, "The Church is like a sword, and the government like an arm; therefore the sword cannot cut by itself without the use of the arm."<sup>90</sup> He wanted to introduce slow reforms to the established Church as part of his modernization programs, while at the same time he showed some openness to western missionaries.<sup>91</sup> It was not easy for the Emperor to create a balance. In the case of the former, he took a number of initiatives to help the Orthodox Church adapt to the changing temper of the day. But the moves the Emperor took were not decisive enough to introduce radical changes within the established church. He tried to steer a safe, though ambiguous, policy of both safeguarding and reviving the Church without achieving appreciable success.

The Emperor's position vis-à-vis with the national Church, for the most part of his reign, was problematic and undefined. It appears that he sought to introduce the reforms by holding the stick rather than allowing the church to cultivate a sense of autonomy to initiate them. His paternalistic influence is demonstrated in the fact that the 1955 Constitution declares him to be the Head of the Church and in the power exercised in appointing or approving upper level ecclesiastics working at the

Patriarchate Office and provincial bishops. The Constitution required the name Haile Sellassie to be mentioned in all religious services. Upon ordination, the Patriarch had to express pledge of loyalty to the Emperor. He also maintained a strong influence over the Church by promulgating decrees, edicts, public regulations and personal involvement. Whatever the degree of control Haile Sellassie sought to have over the Church, he made it sure that he did not loose its backing since the institution played a vital role as a source of political legitimization.

Another important measure that Haile Sellassie took was to respond to the new global and domestic environment. The Western power was making its presence felt in Ethiopia after the defeat of the Italians, one dimension of this was the growing interests in mission fields that led to the influx of a variety of foreign missionaries. The Emperor addressed this situation by initiating the formulation of a policy to govern missionary activities in Ethiopia, which came out in 1944 as, the Imperial Decree on Missions.<sup>92</sup> This relative openness emanated from the need of the Emperor to obtain technical, medical and educational support from the West to augment his modernizing efforts while at the same time trying to placate the Church and his conservative ministers. The Emperor did not involve the Church either in the formulation phase of the Mission Decree or in the implementation process. As will be discussed below, this was a move, which the ecclesiastics were not pleased with.

The Emperor's initial steps involved introducing institutional reforms. For that purpose, he made securing the autonomy of the national Church his top priority. It was imperative for Haile Sellassie's scheme of modernization to have a revitalized and nationalized church under his control. The struggle for the Church's independence

from Egypt, which started in the immediate post-war period culminated, first in the consecration of *Abune* Baselyos on January 14, 1951 by the Coptic Patriarch, as the first national bishop and the appointment on June 28 1959 of an Ethiopian *Abun* as a metropolitan and head of an autocephalous Church.<sup>93</sup>

In 1961, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church made some institutional innovations as the Patriarch created various departments and councils to cater for various programs. Among the offices created were: Scholars Council, Educational Department, Literature Department. The Emperor played an instrumental role in the setting up of the Department of Mission and Evangelism in 1963. The Department was created basically to engage the church in bringing new adherents and helping the existing members to stay strong in their faith as the country was gradually going through social and economic transformations.<sup>94</sup> The main avenues employed to achieve the aims of the Department were radio programs and preparation and distribution of literature, training, and social services. The opening of the Missions Department at the Ethiopian Orthodox Church may have been a response to the rising presence of foreign missionaries and the threat they presented in recruiting members into their affiliates. The most crucial aspect of mission was ostensibly “preaching and baptism.”<sup>95</sup>

The guiding philosophy undergirding the new mission and evangelization initiatives of the Orthodox Church seems to be “life evangelism,” the perception that the ordinary believers are expected to, “work for the spread of the kingdom,” among people they come in contact with, for it was considered to be their Christian duty to play positive roles in the leavening of society. According to Wondmagegnehu Aymro, the general aim of mission “is the sanctification of their fellow men, and the specific

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aim is, to spread the life of Christian perfection among all classes of society and to form men and women for the exercise of the apostolate- the lay apostolate.”<sup>96</sup> What this demanded was practicality, lived experience, rather than theological rhetoric, expressed in daily life in such concepts as, *Chewanet* (gentility, civility), *Qumnegeregnet* (honesty/consistency), *Yelugnta* ( acting in consideration of others) *Feriha Egziabher* (the fear of God), and *Megbar* (correct manner/ action), considered being embodiments of true Christian virtues and spirituality. Such concepts not only provided the context for normative behavioral guidance, but also inform the exercise of daily life affecting wide parameters of ethical codes of conducts, mannerism, social decorum, commonsense, moral orders, needed for corporate identity. Accordingly, ordinary Christians are expected to show their religious convictions not only in inward mannerisms, and creedal confessions, but also in the individualized acts of charity such as giving alms, helping the poor, attending social and spiritual gatherings such as *maheber*, fasting and regular visits to the church.

Para -church societies, such as the Gospel Preaching Association and *Hawaryat Derigit*, were formed to promote the purposes of the missions and evangelization program. *Hawaryat Deriget* was founded with the express intent of evangelizing new areas, nurturing existing believers, sending missionaries abroad and engaging in activities that promoted social services. This was a new initiative in the modern age taken by the Church to institutionalize mission and evangelism whose impact is difficult to assess in this study, but an interesting area requiring further research.

Apparently, evangelicalism as understood by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church places a strong emphasis on the doing side rather than proclamation. Apparently, what

is missing here is the outgoing nature of evangelization, which characterized the monastic model or the ones introduced by the Protestant missionaries. It is inspired by practical theology embodying social testimony rather than invitational or witness oriented to “catch souls,” typical of the evangelicals or the later counter parts, the Pentecostals. As Shenk points out, instead of reaching out to make new recruits “the church placed emphasis on the silent witness of the worshipping community and the simple faith of the ordinary member of the church in everyday life.”<sup>97</sup>

The timing of the creation of such a department is strongly suggestive of a reactive initiative to the growing presence of foreign missionaries and their expanding influence. The new strategy of mission of the church also incorporated some elements of the western missionary approach, which is to help out marginal groups through the extension of social services such as schools and clinics, a new step that has not been an integral part of mission strategy. Lack of resources and a discreet policy of integrating social services with evangelization seem to have considerably limited the achievement.<sup>98</sup>

As part of his efforts of modernizing his nation, Haile Sellassie focused on institution building. Arising from this imperative, the Trinity Theological School was opened in 1944, mainly to train priests and educators that could serve as the new religious cadres in the Church. In keeping with his policy of reforming his society, the Emperor wanted to raise loyal but educated members of the clergy. The school was intended to serve as an agency of change and give birth to informed and enlightened clergy in place of an ill-trained and conservative priesthood.<sup>99</sup>

The Emperor took a great step when the small theological school was upgraded by its integration with Haile Sellassie University, as a Faculty of Theology in 1961. The aim of the College, named the Theological College of the Holy Trinity, was to give a boost to the Orthodox Church so that it could keep up pace with his modernizing efforts.

The intention of having the college was to train and raise clergymen, religious teachers, and missionaries as part of their preparations to become effective workers in their respective church assignments. The lessons were designed in such a way that those receiving the training were acquainted with modern day methods of teaching and leadership. The Emperor seems to have keenly realized that the modern education had outstripped knowledge of religious faith. He also seems to have appreciated the possible consequences of such a gap unless bridged in a timely way. It appears that the Emperor appreciated the need to update and revitalize the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in light of the existential needs of the new generation of Ethiopians who were exposed to modern situations of life and who faced the challenges of new habits of doing things thrust upon them by urbanization and the expansion of education. This was a time when collective and social identities were giving ways to individual expressions and inbuilt public consensuses were falling apart among the youth and the rising intelligentsia.

In spite of the great effort he made, it is hard to say that the Theological College had any significant impact in terms of achieving its main purpose. The college has produced trained priests and theologians, in accordance to the Emperor's desire to raise educated clergy. Yet, the trained priests have not been successfully used in bringing the change the Emperor desired, essentially due to a deeply entrenched structure that

refuses to transform itself. The vastness of the institution, its hierarchical nature, and the vested interest of so many traditionalist priests have all seemed to conspire to block the progress of the new initiatives. It also has to be admitted that even if the trained priests found position to serve the Church, they were only a drop in a bucket, considering the large number of men running the institution from the capital to the various provincial and local sites. As a result, many of those who graduated from the Trinity College, were not ordained by the Church, and hence never entered the priesthood.<sup>100</sup> Facing disappointments in their placement, the graduates immediately left and joined other institutions that promised better careers. In fact, many of the graduates ended up in entering the service of the Ministry of Education.<sup>101</sup> A study conducted in the early 70's also confirmed the ineffectiveness of putting new wine in the old skin.<sup>102</sup>

A traditional ecclesiastical paradigm that stressed a fixed way of doing rooted in a proud tradition avoids attracting academic theologians to its environment. Education, providing one vector, however powerful it could be, could not be the sole means of transforming the giant and deeply entrenched institution, whose leadership, by and large, exhibited extreme reservations to any kind of change.<sup>103</sup>

Apart from the institutional measures he had taken, Haile Sellassie also sought to challenge the church to making reforms by emulating his exemplary stance. For instance, in 1933, he issued a proclamation concerning *tezkar*, the commemorative feast prepared in remembrance of the dead, in which he made his case that it is a tradition whose continuation could not be justified on moral, economic and religious grounds.<sup>104</sup> He validated his positions personally when he forbade the holding of the ceremony



when his daughter, Princess Tsehay, died in 1942. It appears that the Emperor was subtly dislodging loyalty from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church when he renounced the long held practice of *tezkar* attacking it from a social perspective, but also attempting to crucially undermine its theological underpinnings. Clearly, there was an evolving tension between imperial authority and the Church. But, in the later years, however, the Emperor steered away from his original stance of insisting on radical change and pursued a gradualist, and often inconsistent approach.

One of the most significant steps taken by the Emperor, which inadvertently affected the established church, was the encouragement he gave for the publication of the Amharic Bible for wider readership. The Bible, which was first translated in Amharic by an Ethiopian monk, Abu Rami in 1848, was revised and printed in 1961. The translation of the Bible into Amharic shifted the knowledge center of the source of the Christian faith from a special class to the ordinary people. As shall be seen in a separate chapter, this, more than any thing else, was a factor that has inadvertently undermined the historic Church.<sup>105</sup> Haile Sellassie desired that Ethiopian Christians, at least the literate community, should have a reasonable knowledge of their faith through reading the Bible in the official language. In 1947, he set up a committee consisting of Ethiopian and expatriate scholars with a good knowledge of the Bible, the *Geez*, Syrian and Hebrew languages to work on the translation and personally guided the work until its completion.<sup>106</sup>

### ***Reform Initiatives From Within:***

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church has experienced several reform movements in its history. Some of these movements were mild and localized in nature, while others were assertive and national in their dimensions. There have been some bold men from the monastic traditions who courageously questioned some of the theological doctrines and religious practices of the Church. Suffice to mention the renewal efforts of St. Estifanos and his followers in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

Estifanos (Stephen), in so far as we can construct his character from fragmentary sources, appears to be very critical of some of the positions of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, particularly, the fusion of royal ideology with Christology and some of the tenets of the Church that granted undue emphasis to angels and saints. He was accused of being *Tsere Mariam*, anti-Mary, refusing to worship her, and, heretic (*menafiq*), declining to prostrate before the cross.<sup>107</sup> The Estifanites, named after their leader, expressed opposition to what they considered was “cultic” religious practices that could not be validated by Biblical truth. Their position, however, was viewed as a subversive act intended to undermine the Crown and the Clergy. His theological position concerning salvation challenged accepted assumptions and widely held practices. He emphatically posited the view that salvation is a matter of the “here and the now” for, “those who purify their heart and bear the yoke of Christ’s Gospel will find it.”<sup>108</sup> This was a radical theological treatise not only for its period even for most Orthodox Christians in today’s Ethiopia, for it undercuts the whole basis of the series of funeral and remembrance rites such as *fiṭhat*,<sup>109</sup> and *tezkar*, conducted following the death of a person. Though he raised such critical issues dealing with the

doctrine of salvation, Estifano was much more remembered in the hagiographic tradition as a man who was vehemently opposed to some of the practices related to the veneration of the Mother Lady.

Devotion to Mary was institutionalized during the reign of Zara Yacob, through the publications of materials relating to her, and the practical measures taken to enforce it in church services. The Estifinites refused to bow before the cross, the icon of Madonna and Child or the king, insisting that form of worship was reserved only for the Trinity.<sup>110</sup> Estifanos did not out-rightly reject the devotions to Mary, but was not inclined to make her the center of his worship. He unequivocally made his position clear when he stated, “I worship the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, and I prostrate before this. I shall not add to this... for the love of the rulers of the world.”<sup>111</sup>

In more than one way, Estifanos was an intriguing person. Every thing we know about this monk, who became in subsequent orthodox tradition a heretical bogey, suggests a remarkable sense of spiritual freedom evidenced by his refusal to conform to “statist” religion and his insistence on a radical theology of salvation. Though theological in nature, his protest of some of the religious practices of the Church, in open defiance of the proclamations of the Emperor, sent the message that he was challenging royal supremacy. Both the monarchs, particularly Zara Yacob, and the clergy, charged the Estifanites with hating the Cross and Mary. The Estifanites faulted the clergy for prostrating to the king and for their part in the perpetuation of the excess of rituals the Church had allowed over time. Followers of Estifanos, faced severe persecutions such as flogging and banishment. Estifanos himself was sent to exile and

died after sustaining brutal treatment.<sup>112</sup> Those who survived the persecution founded the monastery of Gunde Gundit, famous for being inaccessible.

In his recent translation of the *Geez* text containing the lives of *Aba Estifanos*, Getatchew Haile characterizes the movement as one of renewal movements that challenged established mainstream institutional practices. He opines that the movement challenged the clergy and an institution that had not allowed critical reflection to itself and discouraged creative approaches or new ways of looking at things.<sup>113</sup> Their refusal to submit to the Zara Yacob not only demonstrated a challenge to royal ideology but the mixing of the state and the church, a revolutionary concept even for the present day clerical thinking.

We do not know much about the legacy of the Estifanites who attempted to introduce radical theological and practical reforms within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. There have always been voices speaking from the margin who posed serious challenges to the Church and its close alliance with the state during the reign of Zara Yacob and afterwards, but they never rose to the level of being organized institutional challenges with significant impacts on the Church. The level of suppression they had to withstand was so great that they existed in some forms of fringe movements led by some legendary monks, here and there, the modern day expressions of which are the “prophetic” figures that appear under the garb of *Bahtawiyān* who often spoke with claimed supernatural voices.<sup>114</sup>

The *Bahtawiyān* are fringe groups who have voluntarily renounced the world in order to pursue a strict ascetic life wandering in the manner of John the Baptist, wearing goatskins often crying for justice, calling for repentance of sin, and urging

reform. Their message emphasized eschatological leanings instead of being salvic oriented -the operative word was *weyolachihu tetentgequ!* woe be upon you.<sup>115</sup>

Though viewed as eerie groups, the *Bahtawiyen* inspired respect and public hearing for they were thought to be purveyors of revelations from God. They were popularly acclaimed as whistle blowers exposing wrong doings of the church and the state alike. The *Bahtawiyen* represented voices speaking from the margin for the marginal people especially in a closed society such as Ethiopia, where democratic forms of expressing dissent were conspicuous by their absence. With respect to the socio-political role of the *Bahtawiyen*, Jesman, a long time resident of Ethiopia, observes that grosser forms of violence would have to be eschewed because of them.<sup>116</sup> These fringe groups within the Ethiopian Orthodox tradition, unlike the other reform groups, do not have doctrinal issues with the Church but spoke boldly against wrongdoing committed by ecclesiastical and secular leaders and condemned any form of moral laxity. They became the mouthpiece of the Church when members of the clergy failed to communicate strong messages strongly.

The Estifanites have not disappeared altogether. There have been leaders of various reform movements claiming direct ancestry from them as well as their modern day ideological equivalents. Significantly, there are some groups who actually trace their theological lineage to the Estifanite movement and who still aspire to raise their banner. One such an example is the group known as, *Mahebere Bekur* that has its base in Addis Ababa operating in a semi-underground status.

The movement *Mahebere Bekur*, the Society of the First Born, traces its origin directly from Estifanos. Leaders of *Mahebere Bekur*, make loud praises of Estifanos

and consider him to be a martyr who died for the true Orthodoxy faith. By claiming to have inherited his mantles, they legitimate their cause through a historical link, dating back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century AD. The group considers the Church to have strayed under the influence of Zara Yaqob and seeks to restore it, by reviving its “pre-Zara Yacob” essence and purity. In *Seme’eTsedq Beherawi*, the book he wrote in 1959, *Aleqa Meseret*, founder of *Mahebere Bekur*, and its organ *Chora*, states that his aim is to restore and revive the Church by cleansing it from the excess of influences that tainted its spiritual vitality due to its gradual blending into the world, its incorporation of unbiblical practices and the close connection it forged with the monarchs and the princes. He envisioned a gradualist approach for his reform initiative. In fact, he was even cautious of the usage of the term *tehadiso*, literally renewal, to avoid causing unnecessary alarm among the Orthodox adherents for it had already assumed some loaded meaning that carried with it some confusion.<sup>117</sup>

*Aleqa Meseret*, was an erudite man with a profound theological insight. He was also a man sufficiently steeped in the Orthodox tradition, and, was regarded as the modern day incarnation of the voices of Estefanos, after 400 years of silence.<sup>118</sup>

His teaching emphasis on the doctrine of personal salvation at Paulos School (Orthodox theological school) soon caused some tensions amongst the staff members who held divergent views. Though he may not have been the one to initiate the conversation of the doctrine of salvation, his emphatic stance and his open teachings of its essential theological tenet, i.e. the fact that salvation is personal and is obtained through the grace of God alone, set him apart.<sup>119</sup> Particularly, his open criticism of the belief that salvation is earned through good works committed by any person, while

alive or by others after his death, struck a sensitive chord. *Aleqa* Meseret quit teaching at the school after facing vehement opposition concerning his theological position on issues of salvation, and became an instructor at the newly established Mekane Yesus seminary. From there, he kept on writing books and contributed many articles to *Chora* magazine to promote the church's revival through the continued teaching of the message of salvation to the Orthodox audience until his death in 1998.<sup>120</sup>

It is interesting to note that members of *Mahebere Bekur* openly challenged the tradition of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church by denouncing the works of its acknowledged hero, Emperor Zara Yacob, as the king who led the Church astray. They contend that the Ethiopian Church missed its direction in the 15<sup>th</sup> century through the production of some strange literature, such as *gedel*, *dersan*, *tamir*, etc, written with odd claims of new revelations dropped from the heaven, Jerusalem, or from *members Markos*.<sup>121</sup> They argue that these materials were not divinely inspired as the claims suggest but are *yefetera qal*, fabricated words, or materials, forced upon the people under the pressure of Emperor Zara Yacob. The association recently established an evangelistic wing called, *Wengel Yemeglet Agelgilot*, Revealing the Gospel Ministry, through which they try to link up with like minded Orthodox Christians who embrace the doctrine of salvation while at the same time maintaining their Orthodox identities. The group believe that the rich tradition of the Church, such as fasting, liturgical worship, songs, the wearing of traditional vestments during church service, and the fellowship bonds, *maheber*, patterned along *maheder*, the secret clubs that the followers of Estifanos formed in the medieval period, are heritages to be honored and nurtured.

### ***The Church and its Encounters with Protestant Missions:***

The advent of the Protestant missions in the modern era introduced a new variant of Christianity that served as an alternative model. Directly or indirectly, their activities impinged upon the established Church. There have been attempts by Western missionaries to bring about reform within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Perhaps, this can be traced from the early ventures of the German Lutheran Missionary, Peter Heyling, scholar and lay theologian. The pioneer missionary came to Ethiopia in 1634/35 with the expressed intention of working with the Orthodox Church in order to “revitalize” it. In his brief stay in northern Ethiopia, mainly in the vicinity of Gondar, he translated part of the New Testament into Amharic in order to promote Scriptural knowledge among ordinary people. This was a novel and even revolutionary initiative for its time. Though it did not replace the popular book of Psalms, *Dawit*, it was the first translation of the New Testament in vernacular language so that the ordinary people could read, understand and make sense of the Gospel. While serving as an advisor to Emperor Fasil (1634-1667) in Gondar, he also managed to build relationship with the local priests.

The beginning of a community of believers with evangelical convictions is dated from this small group whom Gustav Aren characterizes as a “brotherhood of devout churchmen.”<sup>122</sup> The group did not form an independent congregation but continued to teach salvation centered Gospel messages by translating the Scripture from *Geez* into Amharic. The traces of their influences and their legacy could not be fully ascertained at this stage. Donald Crummey is inclined to insinuate that the group left no legacy when he observes that Peter Heyling made no impact as a missionary, “nor is



there any thing to suggest continuity with subsequent Protestant involvement.”<sup>123</sup> Aren makes reference to the existence of a group of evangelicals who kept up their theological convictions as adherents of the Orthodox faith all the way from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the 20<sup>th</sup> despite the condemnation and suffering they had experienced. Aren depends on the letters of Karl Cederqvist, the Swedish missionary in Addis Ababa (1904-1919), to affirm the existence of the remnants of the Evangelical priests. Aren mentions that Cederqvist met some of the priests and lay men of the surviving group and cites men such as *Blatten Geta* Hiruye Welde Sellassie, *Aleqa* Wubie, *Aleqa* Tegegn, *Qes* Bademe, *Qes* Beyene, *Qes* Tegabru Melake and Genet Habte Wold. A somewhat loose union of the surviving believers, described by Cederqvist as the “Evangelical Association,” was reported to have been in existence in areas as far as Gojjam and Begemeder in 1912.<sup>124</sup>

Starting with the period of *Zemene Mesafint*, Protestant missionaries made inroads into Ethiopia along several corridors. Some came with the explicit intent of doing missionary work in order to create a new community of evangelical believers, while others desired to work within the framework of the Orthodox Church in keeping with the vision of Peter Heyling. The Church Missionary Society undertook strenuous efforts to inspire biblical renewals within the Orthodox Church by sending various missionaries to Ethiopia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The CMS reckoned that the reawakening of the Orthodox Church would significantly enhance its potential to evangelize the neighboring Muslims and “heathens.” Though various missionaries had been sent to achieve this objective, their efforts were hampered by several impediments, such as the

lack of articulate contextualized strategy and the dearth of information concerning the country's complex history and culture.

In the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was fresh interest among the Protestant missionaries to do missionary work in close association with the Orthodox Church. Their desire was to energize the Church so that it could be a bulwark against the rising influence of Islam in East Africa and the Middle East. The Locknow Conference of January 1911, a conference convened to consider the challenges of Islam discussed how far the Christian world might expect the Abyssinian Church to prove an ally against Islam. Paragraph 9 of the resolution of the Conference reads:

that in the judgment of this Conference, practical sympathy is extended by the churches we represent, to the Coptic church and other ancient churches upon which the Moslem advance presses hard, is a special value at this time. By such expression of sympathy it is possible, we believe not only to strengthen the faith of those churches and inspire them with fresh courage, but also to estimate the missionary zeal among adherents.<sup>125</sup>

This is also made clear by Alfred Buxton, who came as a missionary to Ethiopia sharing the same goal and purpose. He stated his mission as that of seeing a church “enlightened by a return to the Scripture and renewed by the Spirit of God rising up to preach the Truth not only to her own adherents, but also to the Moslems and pagans in Ethiopia and in the countries around.”<sup>126</sup>

It was against this background that the missionary group known as the Bible Churchmen's Missionary Society (BCMS) came to Ethiopia. BCMS, from a reformed Anglican tradition with an autonomous mission agency, sent its first missionary staff in the 1930's under the leadership of Alfred Buxton. The BCMS's major strategy for renewal constituted training of priests and the spread of Scriptures through the

publication and distributions of literature, a tradition that has been faithfully kept and continued to this day. Buxton made an impressive connections both with the clergy and the Monarch and succeeded in opening a Bible school for young Orthodox Christians, first in Addis Ababa, later in several branch offices in Shoa and Hararghe. It was not his interest to start a new congregation of evangelicals but as he put it, his intention was to establish a “vital indigenous work once rooted thriving without”<sup>127</sup> In fact, Buxton took an Ethiopian name, *Hemame Gedion*, the weakness/sickness of Gideon, to personify the process of reform that he envisioned to bring forth in the national church. With the Bible schools the CBMS set up in Addis and selected provincial towns, such as Fitcha and Hirna, they attracted young students who through their studies and interactions with the missionaries embraced evangelical convictions while remaining members of the Orthodox Church.

The group soon formed a fellowship called the *Serawit Krestos*, Army of Christ, which was later renamed the Society of the Followers of the Apostles, after the restoration of independence. BCMS missionaries hoped that through such associations and agencies and their increasing influence over the church, the expected revival would come, even if gradually. They published a popular magazine called *Mesekere Berhan*, literally, witness of light, in which they attempted to educate Christians through culturally appropriate and highly innovative approaches such as, re-appropriating biblical messages by casting them in popular notions, cultural idioms and the telling of anecdotal stories, by taking verses from the Bible and drawing moral lessons relevant to the society. If the project of the BCMS had succeeded it would have presented the

beginning of an indigenous evangelical movement receiving a tacit endorsement of the government and the clergy.<sup>128</sup>

It is not easy to make an assessment of the impact of these missionaries as agents of religious changes for many of the young Ethiopians lost their lives either as national patriots or during the Italian massacre of 1937, or blended into the existing wider tradition as scattered communities. Their connection with the Anglican missionaries, even if they worked officially with the Orthodox Church, made them suspect, and hence, impaired them from playing the role of change agents. Among the few survivors, most have joined the evangelical church of Mekane Yesus, the only evangelical church that approximates the historic church in its liturgical and baptismal rite, because of the founder's Orthodox background. Still there were some of them who have remained incognito within the historic church committed to bring change from within. According to informants, some of the hidden reform movements in some churches, in both Ethiopia and present day Eritrea, drew inspiration from their legacies.<sup>129</sup>

Missionaries like David Stock and C. Maunsel faithfully pursued the footsteps of Buxton and contributed a lot to the spiritual development of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church through their numerous publications in Amharic such as the epistle of Paul, Amharic, Bible Dictionary, Bible commentaries, and several Biblical tracts carefully prepared for Orthodox audience.<sup>130</sup> Some American Missionaries from the Presbyterian and the Southern Baptist Mission advanced the same line of approaching the national church, though with a changed emphasis. The American missionaries carried out their activities through the venues of local parish churches instead of the larger institution.

They also adopted rural community development programs as their point of entry. The missionaries pronounced that proselytization was not their agenda but their programs were not devoid of evangelistic purposes. They made contacts with the youth and the priests, and encouraged them to read Scriptural materials and form Bible study groups. A missionary from the Baptist group who has worked in the region of Menz and Geshen noted development projects and life style evangelism is used to “attempt to work for renewal and revival within the Orthodox Church, rather than attempt to secretly initiate a Baptist Church.”<sup>131</sup>

An assessment of the likely effects and even their relations to the various underground movements that have unfolded within the established church, is a matter that awaits a serious investigation. Evidently, the various missionary groups who chose the path of working with the national church with the aim of reviving it, whatever that meant to them, and whatever their intention, had an evangelistic agenda. The temptation to renew the faith of millions of adherents existing within, and the tantalizing dream of using the potential of the church to reach out to neighboring people featured prominently in the thoughts of those who came as missionaries and the institutions that sent them. In effect, what they wanted to achieve was to propagate the doctrine of salvation on personal basis through progressive revelations. The tool that they perceived to be most effective achieving that purpose was the dissemination of the Bible, wholly or in part, first among the clergy and the youth and the wider populace, through a gradual process. Training priests, monks and church leaders was also a significant component of their program. Unlike other missionaries, such as the Sudan Interior Mission and the Mennonites, who viewed the congregations they established as

new churches and hence saw no reason to link them with the older church, they did not intend to create separate Christian communities outside the established church.<sup>132</sup> Instead, they wanted to train small groups which they sought to use to impact others to experience salvation without abandoning their cultural tradition. This was an experimental approach, which other missionaries missed, intentionally or unintentionally. Many Ethiopians who claim to be evangelicals today feel ambivalent with respect to the issue of cultural and national identity, because of the extractive nature of the process of evangelization carried out by local or foreign missionary agents.<sup>133</sup>

The publication and distribution of Scriptural literature across a long span of time and the wider readership they found was a major legacy that influenced many Ethiopians for it gave them the opportunity to have a deeper look into their faith, broadly understand it, dialogue with it, interpret it and apply it for their daily life situations. They stimulated fresh knowledge and provided an informed knowledge base fostering personal convictions and critical reflections, which usually promote religious stirrings and renewal initiatives.<sup>134</sup> For members of the younger generation who were exposed to modern education, the effect of distribution of Scriptural literature cannot be underestimated. Most of the religious movements initiated by the youth in the 60's had their starting point as Bible study groups. This seems to be the case for a number of youth movements that are operating under the rubric of *maheber* with the names of favorite patron saints. Some of these movements have branched out into independent groups, some struggling to name the phenomenon, while others are still bubbling inside.<sup>135</sup>

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One thing that has not caught the attention of scholars of Ethiopian history is the role and influence of literature, secular or spiritual among the Ethiopian elite, especially the generation of the 60's. In this connection, it is interesting to note that the publication of the Bible has the unintended consequences of not only informing the Christian public particularly the educated class, but has prompted spiritual ferment consequently leading to new religious awakenings. The availability of the Bible in growing numbers across the years took the message out of the precinct of the Church and opened the door for wide lay readership. Despite the passive resistance of clergy, the considerable encouragement Emperor Haile Sellassie gave for the translation and publication of the Bible in Amharic is also a very important step that needs to be taken into serious account in connection with the rise of reform movement within and outside the established Church.<sup>136</sup>

Seen from another perspective, the availability of the Bible broke a new tradition. Religious books in Ethiopia were regarded in the past as church possessions and secret objects not to be carried around. For that matter, most of the books were made of parchment, big in size, cumbersome to carry and expensive, impairing mobility. Except for theologians who would often delve into hair splitting controversies, the ordinary Ethiopian had neither the access to religious books nor the privilege of engaging in public debate for a personal search and enrichment of the basis of his spiritual convictions. By and large, for the ordinary man, religion was *mester*, mystery, something given, beyond his reach and interpretations. As a result, of the wide circulation of the Bible, people's insight and progressive understanding of its central message increased.<sup>137</sup> This put new demands on the Church, which it was not able to



meet proactively. It was these unmet needs that provided the drive for pushing for reforms on the part of the devotees. It is also the same unmet needs and the exposure to alternative expressions that led many young Ethiopians to seek new routes of expression of faith outside the pattern of the Church in which they have been raised. Thus, one can say that the church has been prodded to renewal through increased religious knowledge, due mainly to the translation of the Bible in Amharic and its increasing distribution. Added to the availability of the Bible in the official language, the prevalence of Scriptural literature circulating in a greater number mainly due to the growing presence of Western missionaries, and the launching of the Radio Voice of the Gospel as of the year 1963, all whetted the appetite of the young to want more. One can glean evidence of these rising expectations in the various open discussions presented in the various student magazines and national newspapers.<sup>138</sup>

Donald Crummey suggested that that Protestants in Ethiopia failed to utilize the Ethiopian Orthodox Christian tradition. This seems to be an unfair remark. In some ways, the above discussions shed light on the fact that there were some attempts made by some missionaries to utilize that channel though the evaluation of their accomplishment is hard to make as it would require a more focused research. His assessment does not take into account the case of many Protestant missionary groups who had applied a different methodology than most western missionaries as the above stories clearly indicate. Spelling out the legacy of the activities of the missionaries is difficult for there are no marked institutional outcomes or easily discernable related developments that resulted from their efforts, unlike the other options taken by other

missionaries which led to the birth of distinctively separate Christian communities and visible institutions.<sup>139</sup>

***Language, the Modern Temper and New Associational Spaces:***

The language factor has been one of the areas with which the Orthodox Church has been struggling with for a long time. *Geez* became the official tongue of the church because it had once been the language of worship, government, and law. Over the years its status has receded, only to serve as a medium in conducting the liturgy of the Church. *Geez* was, and is, the only language of instruction even for the churches that operated outside the core bastion of Christianity, a major impediment limiting the success of the Church in recruiting new converts and sustaining their faith. The rationale given for its long use is the status it has received as a sacred as well as all-transcending language standing above any group. It is also considered that other languages are wanting the ability to express key divine concepts enshrined in the Bible for they were supposed to have been tainted with other non-Christian beliefs. *Geez* is putatively assumed to be endowed with that ability for it has served as the sacred language of the Church.<sup>140</sup> The other imperative for its prolonged use is the importance attached to it as a means of preserving the unity of the Church as well as the nation. It was also believed that the corporate use of *Geez* provided the ideal setting for the harmony of spirit in the mystical body and in the sphere of the public worship of the Church. It was feared that allowing diversity of languages in preaching and other services of the Church would create discord because of possible occurrence of mistranslation or misinterpretation.<sup>141</sup> Conservative members of the clergy had

discouraged attempt at vernacular translation of the Bible in other “vulgar” languages, for instance the Oromo, or even Amharic. This was considered to be tantamount to committing a sacrilegious act.<sup>142</sup> There were even reported cases of certain priests with evangelical convictions being accused of committing heresy, “as they favored the study of the vernacular Holy Scripture in preference over the traditional *Geez* text.”<sup>143</sup> *Geez* was a major factor in allowing people to stay out or distance themselves from the church. This being the case, the various western missionaries operating in the peripheral regions of Ethiopia have inadvertently subverted the Church’s position when they dared to translate the Bible in vernacular languages, while at the same time opening schools for people to read and learn, despite government restrictions.<sup>144</sup>

Many “progressive” Ethiopians who are in favor of the use of vernacular languages have often expressed their displeasure at the continuation of the *Geez* as the language of liturgy. A growing number of educated Ethiopians have lost a sense of appreciation of the liturgical ritual that sounded almost foreign to them. Not only the language barrier, the prescribed nature of the religious practices did not encourage them to nurture a sense of attachment to the Church. Neither did it allow them to have their own spaces whereby they would fully and creatively partake as members.<sup>145</sup> For the most part, the language barrier has been an excuse made by many young people for not attending the church. The youth desired that they should hear clear and relevant presentation of the Gospel applicable for their lives and providing invigorating experience in order to be a life changing and life guiding profession of faith.<sup>146</sup> In short, they were given no sense of direction as to how they should participate in the Church. The Emperor, who seemed to have appreciated the challenge, made great efforts to

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convince the clergy of the need to use Amharic in the preaching and teaching services of the Church, and as a result, at least, in the urban centers, the process has begun since the late 1960's.

The difficulties the *Geez* language presented, and the slow progress the Church was making in the face of modernization and its prodding demands, forced people to navigate ingenious solutions. Conscious of the need to make their faith compatible to the new situation of life, and aware of the church's weakness, the rising elite, including members of the ruling circles, began to form their own religious associations in the 1950's. Most of the concerns of these new associations were the issue of how to stave off the influences of the "medley of modern thoughts" among young Ethiopians who "are fast multiplying" because of the increasing opportunities of modern education. They expressed concern that the youth being affected by the "cross currents of cultural, social, and religious ideas" were experiencing confusion and "wavering in the faith of our fathers."<sup>147</sup>

One good example of these associations was *Yechristianoch Andinet Maheber*, the International Christian Fellowship. This fellowship was formed by members of the royalty, upper sector of the aristocracy, and members of the new elite who were making debut into the political hierarchy.<sup>148</sup>

The aim of the fellowship was to promote a continuing fellowship among Christians, "with a desire to live Christ and apply His teachings to social and economic problems both in the national and international spheres." The emphasis of this lay association is to foster networking among like-minded believers for mutual edification.

It is interesting to note that the fellowship was openly critical of the church's weakness.

This is exemplified in the following quotation:

It is feared that the average Christian has mistaken formalism and ritual for Christian living. Christian community has very often and far too long, laid emphasis on formalism and rituals and has judged its members as good or bad Christians on these external trappings of religion. The divorce between preaching and practice has been the bane of our community. The relation between the layman and the Priest is far too often one in which once a week, on Sundays, the *Priest abuses the flock and the rest of the week the layman abuses the Priest* (italics mine).<sup>149</sup>

This was a loud signal for the Church to address the issue of reform in a timely and proper fashion, considering the language tone and profile of the people who were pressing for change.

This was only one select example, albeit of a high profile, of the new associational niches that people were forming along religious lines to create sub-spaces in the larger body of the Orthodox Christian community outside the ecclesiastical control. On one hand, the new spaces were intended to meet the religious and social needs of the participants, while on the other hand, they represent alternative models indicative of what was missing elsewhere and pointers of new possibilities. A plethora of such lay societies were formed in the subsequent years. Examples abound, to mention but few, Association of Apostles, “*Mahebere Hawariat Fire Haimanot*,” Evangelism and Sunday School Association, “*Yewengel Meliktengyochina Ya Ehud Timhirt Mahber*”; Association of the Educated Educators, “*Temero Mastemar*”; Revelation of Light Society, *Kesate Berhan*, Faith of our Fathers Association, “*Haimanot Abew*,” etc.<sup>150</sup>

Strangely enough, most of these organizations were sponsored and financed by members of the royal family and the ruling class.<sup>151</sup> In some ways, the various societies

seem to betray elements of the “Social Gospel” for they promoted some kind of welfare societies catering for the poor and the needy such as prisoners, prostitutes and the disabled. They were fresh attempts to open new spaces for the Church to engage in social services in organized fashions. They formed only part of a long litany of socio-religious institutions seeking change rather than remaining beached in standardized works.

They grew along the fault lines and fissures that had widened by the late 60’s. The 1960’s were an exceptionally open time in Ethiopia, when the Ethiopian youth began to take independent initiatives across all social lines, as they were struggling not to get constrained by both ends, the traditional and the modern. They viewed their own times as demarcation line between the past and the present. They felt the need to be released from the restraints of established norms setting limitations to new alternatives and yet felt the need to be grounded in the familiar social and religious order. As a result, they walked ambivalently. They were both defensive and responsive to social and religious movements. The youth bemoaned the apathy, corruption, institutionalization of hypocrisy exhibited at the religious and political hierarchy and did not know how to tackle the problem by separating the issue of religion from that of politics, because of the blend of state and church. They were experiencing dispersal of loyalty in manners that had not existed before as different social forces and ideas pulled them along different directions.<sup>152</sup>

Some other things were coming to take the place of religion, or, at least, competing for attention. They included parties, movies, sports, and other leisure activities. This was the generation that was facing a new Ethiopia in the making whose

complete picture they were not able to see, or had not been helped to see. This was also a time when customary consensus was losing its strength to appeal to all citizens. Serious minded people were searching for some terms of reference, upon which to guide their lives in the midst of the new bewildering situations without being irreligious. Any discussion that has to do with the youth movements of the 60's, political or religious in nature, must take this background seriously.

This was the most crucial moment in the history of Ethiopia, where the circumstances of life conspired with the new habits of modernity to render any fixed and standardized way of life almost ridiculous to the mass of the youth. For instance, fasts, both conducted regularly on Wednesdays and Fridays, and the longer ones, like Lent, carried out seasonally, were being abandoned, almost by default, and without serious deliberations. The elite had started to eat food restricted during fasting days, such as meat under the rubric of *shifnfin*, literally, covered up meal, which over time became open.<sup>153</sup>

Of all the various para-church organizations created within the framework of the Orthodox Church, the group, known by the name *Haymanote Abew* deserves special attention. This was an association that was set up in 1958 by the University students, who then represented the cream of the elite. *Qidist Mariam* church was the center of the *Haymanote Abew* association. The government strongly approved its being set up hoping that it would provide some kind of vent to the disgruntled students who were unhappy by the presence of the Jesuits in the University system and the rising number of school and college instructors from western missionary backgrounds. *Abune Basilios* officially inaugurated *Haymanote Abew* in the presence of the Emperor. Haile Sellassie



himself chose to be the principal patron of the religious organization, while the Patriarch and the Prime Minister became its Honorary Chairman and President, respectively.<sup>154</sup> The movement was born with the blessings of the Church and in the lap of imperial patronage. The main purpose of the establishment of the organization was to initiate reforms within the framework of the Church so that the young could cherish its past, build on it to cope with the change the country was undergoing and fruitfully employ their talents to the country's development.<sup>155</sup>

The organization launched programs such as Bible studies, welfare activities, and periodic seminars. It opened branch offices across the country to enlist high school and college students. In fact, it even engaged in preparing Scriptural lessons in Amharic to serve as a new model for the Church's teaching lessons. It was also involved, unlike any of its counterparts, in diverse social services, building houses for the poor, engaged in illiteracy campaigns, produced publications that would help the youth to strengthen their faith. The organization held a country-wide seminar in 1971 under the theme of: "The Role of the Youth and the Church in Modern Ethiopia." The main reason for organizing the seminar was to assess the role of the Ethiopian youth in the past and its possible contribution in the process of nation building. An important rationale for calling such a nation- wide seminar was to "discuss the different alien ideological winds that had affected the 'Ethiopian mind'". The Amharic section of the document translates the problem of the 'Ethiopian mind' as *ye-bahelena ye- menfes menawet*, literally meaning cultural and spiritual tumult.<sup>156</sup> It should also be noted that the association was fundamentally nationalist, and as such, was very vociferous in spelling out that the Ethiopian youth not only had to strongly maintain their national identity but

guard themselves against Western influences and the colonization of the mind and the spirit. An article that appeared in *Frontier*, one of their main publications, vehemently attacked imperialist and neocolonialist influences in Ethiopia, in a manner highly akin to contemporary radical voices.<sup>157</sup>

The foundation of the *Haymanote Abew* association was definitely meant to address the religious needs of the youth and cushion its transition successfully in the face of rapid social and economic changes. It is also apparent that the other impulse for creating the organization was the issue of national identity and cultural cohesion in the face of many intrusive winds coming from outside causing some sort of psychic distortions about which official publications of the time frequently lamented. As is stated in one of the association's publication, it sought to mediate between the old and the new generations and contribute to shaping the message of the Church so as it becomes relevant to the taste of the modern youth. "Haimanot Abaw is a youth movement which serves as a necessary link between the old traditional-bound generation and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church on the one hand, and modern progressive-oriented generation and western technology and modernity on the other."<sup>158</sup> In so doing the organization hoped that it would help prevent any kind of exodus from the church into any other religious organizations and also counter the effect of rising secular tendencies, which have led many to develop some hostility and distaste towards any form of indegenity, traditional customs and religious values. Hence, there was a strong element of intentionality to respond to modernity and its inescapable entrapment. This is the road chosen by those who wanted to stay within the framework of their traditional Orthodox religious convictions seeking both to reform and conserve its rich

traditions. Others chose a radically different path to bring the desired change autonomously, outside the traditional structural bounds. A good example of this category is the Ethiopian Pentecostals whose story will be presented below. In between the cracks, there were numerous associations that came into existence more or less in the same time span. Examples include, *Tewahido Haymanot*, *Ye- Etiopia Tselot Maheber*, *Sewaswe Berhan*, *Haymanot Kebeb* and *Meserete Haymanot*, which in one way or another, represented some kind of reform faith initiatives that originated in the same context all being accommodative movements to the changing socio-cultural situations rooted in the Orthodox tradition.<sup>159</sup>

It is very important to take note of the developments outlined above. The formation and proliferation of such para- churches is symptomatic of generalized spiritual malaise and strongly indicative of greater desire for renewal. The associations, whether they emerged in the form of clubs or organizations, are unnamed renewal movements in the making. They form the liminal zones fertile for creative ideas and innovations. The fact that they stood outside a tightly controlled structure provided the relative autonomy, the latitude for freer initiatives. Unfortunately, most of them were sponsored either by members of the royal family or certain interested members of the clergy and members of the ruling class. This factor is a major roadblock for the organizations to mutate into a self-propelled, dynamic and impacting religious movements. Of course, there were some revivalist groups that really began to express their evangelistic convictions assertively and thereby became vocal in pressing for reforms. However, their leaders and active members were condemned as renegades and forced to leave their churches and even punished.<sup>160</sup> Most of these groups were located

in Eritrea, particularly in St Mary Church, Medhanealem Church, and St. Michael Church. In Addis the *Mahbere Kristos* youth ministry was at its zenith in May 1970 when the Central Youth Office of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church blackmailed its members as *Pente* (Pentecostals) and cracked down on them. Most of them left the church and soon joined the Emanuel Baptist Church located in Arat Kilo.<sup>161</sup>

During the final years of the military regime a new development unfolded within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. A radical renewal movement, which assumed a Pentecostal character, developed around the city of Nazareth. The movement that started as Bible study fellowship at a factory, under the guise of workers fellowship, soon captured the attention of the youth and spread through out southeastern Ethiopia very quickly. It was immediately declared a heretical movement by the Orthodox clergy and banned. The group who initially led the movement were not willing to form another church, but their Pentecostal experience set them apart, in actual fact, from the other adherents of the Orthodox Church. The followers then decided to have their own, *maheber*, fellowship, and not a church. The government denied their request to obtain permission as a fellowship under the Orthodox Church and hence they were obliged to use the name, *Amanuel Menfesawi Maheber*, Amanuel Spiritual Association, which afterwards changed to *Ye Ityopia Amanuel Hebret Bete Kerstiyen*, upon assuming national visibility. This religious movement, popularly dubbed as *Ortho-Pente*, referring both to its origin and its new Pentecostal character, has experienced a remarkable growth. Its members grew from 10,000 in 1995 to 250, 000 in 1998.<sup>162</sup> It has attracted a wide segment of the youth across the country and is burgeoning mainly among urban centers. For the Ethiopian youth who desired to maintain their Orthodox

identity and still looked for changes they found the Ortho-Pent group to be a convenient shelter.

In a way, religious stirrings that unfold within established religious institutions could be viewed as new vocabularies, or even better, metaphors for changes long sought but unheeded. The youth were marching in the absence of clear and rational guideposts searching for religious or fundamental truth on which to settle. Scholars have observed that there was some kind of disconnect between the young educated Ethiopians and the National Church, which led some to develop a sense of apathy and others to opt for alternative routes.<sup>163</sup> In fact, this situation could also explain the sudden appeal of Marxism and its embrace in growing number by the young generation of Ethiopians.

The transformation of consciousness resulting from the rapid expansion of modern education and the establishment of western looking institutions with accompanying new experience inputs forms an important background for the youth to embark in some kind of quest for ideas and principles to order and direct their lives as well as salvage the nation from perceived backwardness.

As noted earlier, the 60's were an exceptionally open time in our history as there were several social, political and ideational forces playing out in the society and strongly undermining the plausibility structure of conventional religious wisdoms and praxis. The confluence of new ideas running at high speed was perplexing for the youth on the frontier of change, vulnerable and ill-equipped to successfully negotiate the contested space without going through a sense of loss of bearings.

In this regard, it can be said that the generation of the 60's and the 70's was short-changed from the process point of view, and short ended, from the end product point of view. That explains the dilemma of the Ethiopian youth and its multi-faceted efforts to interrogate dominant positions, political or spiritual, and chart out ways that gave meaning to them, flawed or sound, ill-conceived or well conceived.

Today, there are many underground movements operating within the Church, some with evangelical and others with Pentecostal convictions. Most of the followers of these movements cherish the traditions bequeathed them by the Orthodox Church and hence whatever their theological convictions, are determined to retain their cultural, liturgical heritages and their Orthodox identity. Some of these movements exemplify attempts at religious innovations though it is hard to plot their trajectories because of their hidden nature and complex characters. Such developments are affecting wide-ranging areas of the established structures of the Orthodox Church institutions such as Sunday schools, the traditional friendly/socio-religious societies formed under favored patron saints, *maheber*, the monastic centers and even local churches in major cities.<sup>164</sup>

### ***Conclusion :***

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church is deeply rooted in the culture of Ethiopia. It was not only the official religion of the empire, but was considered to be the most profound expression of the national existence and the most important cultural force in the lives of many Ethiopians. As Haggai Erlich has aptly summarized its role, the Church has become “ the comprehensive prescription for the Ethiopian state, culture and life style.”<sup>165</sup> Essentializing all these elements is the term *megbar*, a profound

cultural code and a constitutive norm informing social and religious duties of Ethiopians. In essence, the Orthodox faith in Ethiopia is a religion that embraces culture, politics, flag, identity, nationalism, all together in one package. As the Ethiopian Orthodox Church operated and extended its faith in diverse cultural situations it was forced to some levels to follow an accommodative *modus operandi*, turning it into some kind of civil or public religion incorporating elements of secular culture in its basic Christian faith.<sup>166</sup> This is unlike the evangelicals or Pentecostals who tend to de-emphasize other things, except the vertical dimension of religion. Its medieval form of mission and evangelization, monastic and state sponsored did not seem to be effective in putting the church and its community of believers on firm spiritual foundations. The church lacked definitive policy regarding the process of evangelization of the people of conquered regions for it has used generic standards without much modification of its methodology across regions and across time.

The Church and its adherents co-existed with remnants of primal religions, which in some cases had formed parts of the sub-stratum of the belief systems and practices of the Christians. Examples include: *adbar* (worship of sacred trees), places of pilgrimage example, *Qulibi Gabriel*, continuation of divination practice by the *debteras*, consultation of *qalichas*, (a variant of local diviners) for daily existential needs such sickness, financial distresses and settlements of disputes. Often pagan sites were reinterpreted, but not abolished: pagan deities were defeated but not destroyed.<sup>167</sup> Since the church did not require much from the new believers, the break from the past was minimal, hence one can characterize those embracing the new believers to be more of adherents of religious prescriptions rather than converts.<sup>168</sup> As Shenk points out,

“Many were brought to the threshold of Christianity but too few had an irreversible commitment.”<sup>169</sup>

Converts were not demanded to give up established customs. They continued to live in the same ways as before and in most cases they lost almost none of their traditional loyalties to their gods or priesthood. In fact, its expansion in Welega is aided by the looseness of its discipline and demands of the basics of Christian life that “eased the transition from ‘paganism’ to the new Christian faith.”<sup>170</sup> The position, of the church as has been succinctly summarized by Ephraim Isaac, was, “live and let live.”<sup>171</sup>

By embedding itself in the culture of the people it came in contact with, the church might have increased its survival capacity and broadened itself, and perhaps this has a positive side as it promoted coexistence. Coexistence has definitely been important for mitigating the centrifugal elements, but it also weakened its spiritual position. In this connection, “harmonial religion,” the expression which Sydney Ahlstorm uses in the American context, can best describe the type of Christianity that the Church has promoted in Ethiopia.<sup>172</sup> The legacy of the church, especially its “live and let live” approach had mixed results. The expansion of its influence over a considerable portion of Ethiopia since the medieval period, resulted in the sowing of the seeds of Christianity across diverse geographic and ethnic areas. Yet, its inability to create well-established Christian communities firmly founded on Biblical teachings and its failure to provide sustained guidance for converts created a chasm that left the believers straddled between two worlds. The cracks and the fault lines were easily filled when alternative forms of Christianity, or for that matter other universal religions, including Islam, made their ways in those areas. What also made the process easy was



the weakened position of the traditional religions by the monastic movements and the garrison centered expansion of Christianity during the imperial expansion of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>173</sup>

The impact and influence of the church thins out as one advances from the center to the peripheral regions of Ethiopia. It appears that in most parts of the southern and southwestern parts of Ethiopia, there had not been strong Christian communities with distinct Christian culture of the north influenced by the church. If they had existed in the past, they waned through time. Among the major factors contributing to that, apart from the issue of language, is the lack of theological education and training on the part of the clergy and the monastic leaders to help them appreciate local situations and present their messages contextually. Not only that, until recent times, the church has shown little interest to recruit and train clergies from the local population that would serve the local Christian communities and ensure sustained continuity. The local Christian communities have not been helped to see the Christian faith as their own and not something grafted upon existing faiths. This can partially be supported by the tendency of some of the peripheral regions to fall back to their old religions following the new government's policy (1991) that favors ethnic based administration.

After their espousal of the Christian faith for several decades, some of the people of the peripheral regions that had been brought under imperial control during Menelik's expansion, are retreating from the Orthodox Christian faith since they perceived it as the religion of the conquerors. Obviously, political pressures, particularly from the elite group that always seeks to engineer changes through its own systems of remote control cannot be discounted.<sup>174</sup>

In some cases, conversion of those viewed as “heathen” was carried out less by the church than by imperial arms and edicts, thus the state’s important role as agent of diffusion of the Christian faith. The church’s association with the state especially in the territorial expansion of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, identified her as an arm of the ruling class and for that reason alone, people of the conquered lands tended to resist conversion precisely because they perceived in Christianization a form of assimilation. The attachment of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church not only ideologized its messages but made her captive to the power structure of the state, which has stained its image and considerably limited its free initiatives.<sup>175</sup>

It also appears that the church, in its recent past has not been aggressively evangelistic outside its sheltered tradition-bound existence. In fact, with the decline of the monastic evangelization enterprise and the end of territorial expansion, the impulse for mission and aggressive Christianization seems to have abated. The establishment of mission and evangelism department within the church structure could by no means reset the old dynamics for that aggressive pursuit could not to be rekindled under the changed condition of the country.

The various para-church organizations came into existence mainly because there was a hunger for spiritual truth and an understanding of the foundations of their faith. Exposure to modern education has rendered subscribing to unquestioned belief and taboos almost superfluous. By and large, the Church has based her foundation of faith, to be more specific, the conceptualization of the Transcendence, on the fear of the unknown (*mestir*). As Getachew, a leading scholar on medieval manuscripts, put it, “her basic teachings or her pillars, are kept as “mysteries,” mystery of baptism, the

Trinity, the Incarnation, and so on and so forth.”<sup>176</sup> Such traditional outlook could not be expected to resonate to the new mood of the emerging elite that began to question almost everything, sought rational and experiential faith.

In the Orthodox tradition, especially in the rural areas, expository study of the Scripture was resisted for lack of strong hermeneutical tradition. Bible-toting preachers were nothing, but missionaries. In fact, the word *sebket*, meaning preaching, has a negative connotation in Amharic since it suggests delivering empty talks, void of substance. Ray, the British traveler who visited Ethiopia in the 1920’s, cites an interesting instance where a learned man, “had been accused by priests of expounding the Gospel in a manner somewhat different from the generally accepted pattern and as a result was imprisoned for three years.”<sup>177</sup>

Several newspapers and popular magazines of the time, particularly in the 60’s were very vocal in expressing the problematic nature of the gaps existing between faith and habit, belief and conventional practices, in short the dilemma of most Ethiopians concerning their love for their religion and the lack of an informed basis and perspective.<sup>178</sup>

The nationalist intelligentsia, substantially alienated by the church’s stagnant and rigid posture, either chose to be indifferent or opted for alternative life styles, which in some cases meant joining other denominations. There were wide symptoms of restlessness among the educated youth of the early 60’s, especially among some university students who were beginning to feel that they were “resident aliens.” There were a few students who took the extreme path of joining the monasteries. There were others who were looking for new “homes” and capping for their faith in the “mission

religions” in search of a more fulfilling religious expression. This was only a precursor of the exodus that transpired in the late 60’s and early 70’s with the rise of the Pentecostal movement.<sup>179</sup>

The church has not been able to perfect its tradition and, as a result, it could no more successfully embrace the new social force that was springing within her fold. Resistance to change, by the national literati, was a major drawback, in fact, a catastrophe to the nation. I would like to end this section from a quote by one of the most outstanding African theologians John Mbiti noted, “For many centuries the Church in Ethiopia was cut off from constant contact with the rest of the Christendom, which partly helped it to acquire a uniquely African expression, but which also reduced its spirituality and left it with a conservatism extremely difficult to overcome in adjusting itself to modern times.”<sup>180</sup> The lack of psychic mobility is one of the major factors which had placed the church outside modern influence and is perhaps one of its negative legacies in shaping the fortress mentality of most Ethiopians. The prevalence of traditional outlook and the Church’s failure to adapt to changing social dynamics was one of the major conditions that induced the emerging elite to opt for alternative ideologies and faith expressions. This being said, it should be emphasized that the long presence of the Orthodox Church in Ethiopia, no matter its shortcomings and however uneven its influences, forms an important cultural and spiritual backdrop against which the remarkable spread of the evangelical movement proceeded in a relatively short period of time. This is notwithstanding the fact that the evangelical church operated without institutions backing it from above unlike the National Church that has for centuries enjoyed the backing of the state.

<sup>1</sup> Monsieur Francis Anfray, a French Archaeologist, found Emperor Ezana's inscription written in Greek, which read, "In the faith of God and the power of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost, who has saved my kingdom. I believe in your Son, Jesus Christ who has saved me. Steven Kaplan, "Ezana's Conversion Reconsidered," *Journal of Religion in Africa*, XIII, 2(1982), p. 103.

<sup>2</sup> The story of the advent of the Syrian brother and the conversion of Ezana has become almost a standard version. I have not been able to find any study that has challenged the view or critically evaluated it.

<sup>3</sup> Haggai Erlich, *The Cross and the River: Ethiopia, Egypt and the Nile* (London: Lynne Rienner Publisher, 2002), p. 17. Though the connection ("voluntary dependence") kept Ethiopia in touch with the Mediterranean World through its ties with Egypt, lamentably, it has affected the independence on the national church considerably for it arrested its autonomy and free initiatives.

<sup>4</sup> According to Sergew, Hable Sellassie, a noted Ethiopian scholar of ancient Ethiopian history, these merchants had their prayer houses and openly practiced their religions in some of the major cities of Axum. Sergew Hable Selassie, "The establishment of the Ethiopian Church", *The Church of Ethiopia: A Panorama of History and Spiritual Life* (Addis Ababa: Ethiopian Orthodox Church, 1970), p. 3. It has to be noted that the Bible (Acts 7:26-40), contains a reference to the conversion and baptism of an Ethiopian official by the apostle Philip. Ethiopian sources claim that Queen Candace, was converted due to the influence of her Minister of Finance, the eunuch, whose encounter with the Apostle Philip is reported in the book of Acts. Though the issue of the Queen is still a source of dispute, some local sources indicate that she had left a coin engraving with a cross and her name found in Axum. For further see, Archbishop Yesehaq, *The Ethiopian Tewahido Church: An Integrally African Church* (New York: Vantage Press, 1989), p.17; Liqe Tebebt Akille Berhan. *Metshete Amien* (Addis Ababa: Tensae Zegubae Printing Press, 1946), p.28. In his Homily on Pentecost, St. John Chrysostom mentions that the Ethiopians were present in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. There is also the unsubstantiated claim that the Apostle Matthew suffered martyrdom in Ethiopia while spreading the gospel.

<sup>5</sup> Ephraim Isaac, *The Ethiopian Church* (Boston: Henry N. Sawyer Company, 1968), p.21.

<sup>6</sup> Sergew Hable Sellassie. *Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History*. Addis Ababa: United Printers, p. 104.

<sup>7</sup> The Council of Chalcedon was convened in 451. The Ethiopians Orthodox Church took side with the position of the Alexandrian bishop Athanasius in denouncing the Chalcedonian position, which affirms that Christ is at once fully God and fully human, this one and the same Christ made known in two natures. Chalcedonian position advocated the teachings of the "two nature of Christ" as opposed to two indivisibly united view the Ethiopian Church professed.

<sup>8</sup> *Geez*, or ancient Ethiopic, is a branch of the Semitic linguistic family, widely spoken in the ancient times now only used by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church as the language of its liturgy and mass. It is also the foundation of many modern Ethiopian languages such as Amharic and Tigrigna.

<sup>9</sup> Calvin E. Shenk, "The Ethiopian Orthodox Understanding of Mission," *Mission Studies*, (1989), p. 5.

<sup>10</sup> According to Shenk, the Church usually followed a policy, which attempted to "Christianize" pagan temples and customs rather than completely eradicate them. Calvin E. Shenk, "The Development of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and its Relationship with the Ethiopian Government from 1930-1970", Ph. D. dissertation, School of Education of New York University, 1972, p. 26. In the latter period, as the church expanded its realm together with the territorial enlargement of the empire, this policy coupled with the thinning out of resources, eventually gave rise to the development of syncretistic forms of religious expressions.

<sup>11</sup> Steven Strauss claims that, during the lives of the Nine Saints, non-Chalcedonian Christianity was firmly secured through out Ethiopia and even spread across the Red Sea to Southern Arabia. Stephen J. Strauss, "Perspective on the Nature of Christ in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church: A case study in Contextualized Theology (Non-Chalcedonian Evangelism)," Ph. D. dissertation, Trinity International University, 1997, p.59.

<sup>12</sup> Elrich, pp. 37-38

<sup>13</sup> Kebré Negest ( *The Glory of Kings*) is a book that has been held in the highest honor for several centuries and is a document that claims the kings of Ethiopia were descended from the Solomon, King of Israel. It also maintains that the Ark of the Covenant was brought to Ethiopia from Jerusalem by Menelik, Solomon's son from Queen Sheba of Ethiopia, as a result of which god transferred his place of abode from Jerusalem to Axum, the ancient capital of the Axumite empire. For further, see: F. Brooks, *A Modern Translation of the Kebra Nagast ( The Glory of Kings)* ( Lawrenceville: Red Sea Press Inc., 1996 )

<sup>14</sup> For further see, Tadesse Tamrat, "A Short Note of the Tradition of Pagan Resistance to the Ethiopian Church ( Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries)," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, x 1 ( 1972); Tadesse Tamrat, " Process of Ethnic Interaction and Integration in Ethiopian History: The Case of the Agaw." *Proceedings of the Ninth International Conferences of Ethiopian Studies*, Moscow, 1986.

<sup>15</sup> Zara Yaqob was one of the most outstanding rulers of the medieval times. His reign marks the apogee of state and church relation approaching theocracy par excellence.

<sup>16</sup> Steven Kaplan, " Seeing is Believing: The Power of visual culture in the religious world of Atse Zara Yaqob of Ethiopia, 1434-1468", *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 32, 4(2002), p. 404.

<sup>17</sup> Tadesse Tamrat, " Evangelizing the Evangelized: The Root Problem between Missions and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church," *The Missionary Factor in Ethiopia* (Frankfurt am Main, Studien Zur I.G.C, 1998) pp. 21- 22. For more see, Getatchew Haile, *The Mariology of Emperor Zar'a Ya'acob of Ethiopia, : Texts and Translations* (Rome: Pontificum Institute Studiorum Orientaliam, 1992).

<sup>18</sup> Steven Kaplan argues that the King's motivation for eradicating magic was political for he sought to attack and weaken the position of a general class of rebels, deviants, and heretics opposed to him who used magic to undermine his authority. Steven Kaplan, "Magic and Religion in Christian Ethiopia: Some Preliminary Remarks," in Verena Boll (ed), *Studia Aethiopia Harrassowitz Verlag : In Honor of Siegbert Uhlig on the Occasion of his 65<sup>th</sup> Birthday*, (2004), p. 422 .

<sup>19</sup> Memher Getachew, *Gedel Wayes Gedel* ( Addis Ababa: Africa Maternia bet, 1995[2002/3]), p.50.

<sup>20</sup> Steven Kaplan, " Christianity and the Early State in Ethiopia," in S.N Eisenstadt (ed.) *The Early State in African Perspective* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), p. 165.

<sup>21</sup> Steven Kaplan, *The Monastic Holy Man and the Christianization of Early Solomonian Ethiopia* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1984), p.91. The issue of conversion is a subject that has not been studied critically. Kaplan has recently opened the conversation by his new article, "Themes and Methods in the Study of Conversion in Ethiopia; A Review Essay," *Journal of Religion in Africa*, vol. 34, 3(2004),pp. 373-392. The process of conversion, let alone at the period under review, even in the modern times, has not been clear. At the end of his conclusion of the study of the role and impact of monastic missionaries Kaplan makes the assessment that Christianity, as presented by the holy men, was apolitical, tolerant, and had a strong this -worldly emphasis. Converts were expected to accept a new religion, which was more powerful than their previous faiths but did not claim to differ from them in essence. No attempt was made to change their political system or reform their social customs. Neither did Christianity represent a foreign culture or bring with it disruptive changes. It is accordingly, easy to understand the success enjoyed by the monastic missionaries. For the details see, Kaplan, *The Monastic*, pp-131-132.

<sup>22</sup> Tadesse Tamrat. *Church and State: 1270-1527*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972) p. 173.

<sup>23</sup> Tadesse Tamrat, " A Short Note on the Tradition of Pagan Resistance," p. 147.

<sup>24</sup> This was a forced situation in most of the cases. Witness the case of the example the Bete Israel. For further see, Kaplan, *The Monastic*, p.105. In many occasions the monks were closely identified with rulers and involved in the pacification and subordination of the local rulers.

<sup>25</sup> Technically, the bishops were subject to Moslem rulers in Egypt. Every act of development unfavorable or considered to be threatening to the Moslem's interests in Ethiopia affected the Patriarch and the Christian community in Egypt. The reluctance of the bishops had a slow down effect on the missionary efforts of the monks. There were also times when the bishops were absent during which period the church lacked central leadership. The weakness of the institution of the *abun* and the frequent absence of the head of the church, according to Elrich, also resulted in the weakening of the entire priestly class. " Elrich, p. 21. The monastic system consolidated during the reign of Zara Yacob under the *echage* institution could also be described as a discursive establishment to subvert the Coptic absolute influence. It may also represent a national evangelistic strain in the absence of a zeal for mission on the parts of the foreign bishop.

<sup>26</sup> Elrich, p. 20.

<sup>27</sup> The expansion of Christianity had covered the northwestern lowland of today's Eritrea, areas occupied by the Mensa, Bogos, Habal, Bet Auqu, and Maria. The populations of these regions are now completely Islamized. When Munzinger visited the area in the year 1860, there were many practicing Christians. By 1905, the picture changed radically as most of them were converted to Islam. "Note on Islam in North Abyssinia", *The Moslem World*. 1912, pp.183-184.

<sup>28</sup> This word needs a critical unpacking. Given the relative autonomy of the monks, their theological and training and educational background, their limited knowledge of local cultural contexts, what happened on the ground under the generic name of evangelization/ Christianization needs a much more nuanced and serious inquiry. As some works suggest, Christianity, or, the Christian God was added in the list of the local gods and the monks who were at the forefront of its expansion were simply perceived as a new, stronger forms of magician. There were instances where local religious leaders were even smoothly incorporated into the monastic clerical ranks to evangelize the local people. The alacrity with which the faith had been accepted and the ease with which it was discarded calls for an examination of the issue of conversion and the resultant transformation it engenders. Kaplan opines that many of the evangelized may not have undergone conversion, which according to Nock, suggests, "the reorientation of the soul of an individual, his deliberate turning from an earlier form of piety to another" A. B. Nock. *Conversion: the old and the new*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 7; Kaplan, *The Monastic*, p.116. According to Nock, the adoption of the new faith was more of a useful supplement rather than substitution for the old.

<sup>29</sup> For further see, Tadesse Tamrat, "A Short Note on the Tradition of Pagan Resistance," pp. 137-144.

<sup>30</sup> *Mateb* or *Matab* means an authoritative symbol. It comes from the Geez word *Mateb*, which means a sign, a holy and distinctive mark of the sons of God. Tadesse Tamrat, "*Mateb*" *Ethnological Society*, Bulletin No 9, July-December 1959, p.38; To wear the *Mateb* is an indication of being a Christian, and not to wear it means, you are not. I will die for my *Mateb*, means, I will die for my faith. To cut or tear ones *Mateb* literally means denial of a faith, it means that one has nothing to do with it. Traditionally, it follows baptism of a baby born in a Christian family or new converts. It has an earlier history but the tradition was more re-enforced because of the threat of Islam.

<sup>31</sup> Memher Getachew, pp. 82-83.

<sup>32</sup> According to bishop Yeshaq, the custom of wearing was a post-Chalcedon phenomenon. It was used as a symbol to designate those who renounced the Council's proclamation. Archbishop Yesehaq, *The Ethiopia Tewahedo*. 1989, p. 108.

<sup>33</sup> The monks seem to have generally been content in equipping the new converts with a minimum version of Christianity which stressed only the belief in one God and in his miraculous power, and a few other elements of the religion. This should be seen in view of the priest's level of strength educationally, institutionally, and financially. They neither had the capacity to appreciate the cultural and linguistic nuances of the people they were proselytizing nor the resources to effectively transmit the basic tenets of the faith in a sustained manner.

<sup>34</sup> Tadesse Tamrat, "A Short Note on the Tradition of Pagan," p. 140.

<sup>35</sup> Steven Kaplan, *The Monastic Holy Man*., pp.116-120

<sup>36</sup> Harold Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia* (Berkley: University of Berkley, 2002), p. 22.

<sup>37</sup> In this sense, the usage of the term expansion of Christianity seems to be more appropriate in describing the Ethiopian situation, than the term evangelization. From the process and purpose point of view, the operation involved preaching and proselytizing but from the product or end point of view, what took place is unclear as long as the convert does not make a significant departure from his past and demonstrates the effects of the transformation that the new change has brought to his life. If one takes the idea of evangelization seriously, both as a historical and theological concept, it is hard to equate the spread of the influence of Christianity with evangelization which embodies conversion and a degree of separation. The Orthodox Church, with its emphasis on the sacrament of baptism and with the role it has played as the integrative force of the society, might not have stressed conversion centered evangelization approach insisting on fundamental behavioral changes. The latter was the model of evangelism pursued by most missionaries who worked outside the national church in Ethiopia.

<sup>38</sup> Tadesse Tamrat, "A Short Note on the Tradition," pp.146-147.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. p. 141-145. For a typical example of power encounter, see the testimony of Homicho, A Sidama evangelist-missionary, in Brian Fargher, *The Origins of the New Churches Movement in Southern Ethiopia, 1927-1944* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), pp. 53-54; Sorsa Sumamo, *Bivocational Missionary-*

*Evangelist: The Story of an Itinerant Preacher in Northern Sidamo* (Edmonton: Enterprise Publications, 2002), pp. 127-146. For a more recent study on the issue of power encounter involving evangelical Christianity and African Traditional Religion in southern Ethiopia, see, John H. Hammer, "The Religious Conversion Process Among the Sidama of North East Africa," *Africa*, vol. 72, no. 4, 2002.

<sup>40</sup> B. Sundkler. *A History of the Church in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 40-41. Sundkler points out that conversion takes place after the demonstration of power. The process of conversion could be brief and an informal affair involving profession of faith in the Triune God, baptism and a new name. Casting out demonic forces is one of the most prevalent themes suffusing the *Gedlat*. Exorcism and healing of the sick have been powerful tools of evangelization, a tradition that the Pentecostals of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have successfully used. The monks and the later day spiritual healers received wide spread attention and veneration because of the prevalence of diseases, and the limitation of medical technology, and the attribution of afflictions to malevolent spirits. As Bird Herbert points out "the Ethiopian villager never lacks access to sorcerers, exorcists, spirit doctors and the like who do a brisk trade in all types of therapy." Bird Herbert, "Primitivism in Ethiopian History," *Reformed Bulletin of Mission*, April 6 (1971), p. 4.

<sup>41</sup> We do not for certain know when Amharic began to replace *Geez*. Though court officials and the army spoke Amharic during the Zagwe period, it was under the Solomonic dynasty, and especially in the 14<sup>th</sup> century that the language substantially became vernacular taking the place of *Geez* as the language of the ordinary people.

<sup>42</sup> Steven Kaplan, "Christianity and the Early State in Ethiopia," p. 158.

<sup>43</sup> Donald Crummey, *Priests and Politicians* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1972), p. 7.

<sup>44</sup> The lack of reverence towards Mary, which the Jesuits observed was most probably to her images of the pictures they themselves had introduced, rather than the mother of Jesus per se.

<sup>45</sup> Bahru Zewde, *Pioneers of Change in Ethiopia. : The Reformist Intellectuals of the Early Twentieth Century* (Oxford : James Curry, 2002), p. 71.

<sup>46</sup> Tadesse Tamrat, "Persecution and Religious Controversies", *The Church of Ethiopia: a Panorama of History and Spiritual Life* (Addis Ababa: Ethiopian Orthodox Church, 1970), p.29.

<sup>47</sup> Commenting on this development, Rubenson states, "Though the clergy in many cases still acted as mediators, the doctrinal and structural unity of the church had all but disappeared." Sven Rubenson, *Survival of Ethiopian Independence* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc. , 1976), p. 34

<sup>48</sup> Donald Crummey, *Priests and Politicians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), pp. 93-94. It has to be noted that the strength of the Church was vitiated not only by the whittling down of imperial authority, but due to internal weaknesses. The crack within the state and the church provided the opportune moment for lurking doctrinal controversies to resurface themselves assertively, albeit taking a more regional tinge. For more on the doctrinal disputes see Crummy, pp. 15-27. For the overall assessment of the socio-political and religious developments of the period see, M. Abir, *The Era of the Princes. The Challenge of Islam and Reunification of the Christian Empire 1769-1855* (London: Longmans, 1968), pp. 39-41.

<sup>49</sup> Tewodros wanted to introduce a major religious transformation within the Church, which unfortunately backfired on him. He advocated the *Tewahido* doctrine basically to end the religious controversies and effect both religious and political unity in the country..

<sup>50</sup> There had already evolved a plethora of movements within the Church that built their basis around different interpretations of the nature of Christ. Few example can be cited: *Qebat*(signifying auction), *Ye tsega Lig* (*Son of Grace*), *Kara* (*knife*) in opposition to *Sost Lidet* (three birth of Christ). *Kara* is conceptually close to *Tewahdo*, hence the occasional inter-changeable usage. Delving into the details and intricacies of these hairsplitting theological positions is pointless and not relevant here. The point being made here is that Tewodros saw their potential danger for causing discord among the church and their peril to national unity.

<sup>51</sup> Rubenson, p. 174. For a more recent analysis of the connection between Ethiopian kings and foreign missionaries see, Donald Crummey, "Ethiopia, Europe and Modernity: A Preliminary Sketch," *Ethiopica*, 3 (2000), pp. 7-24.

<sup>52</sup> Zewde Gabre-Sellassie, *Yohannes IV of Ethiopia: A Political Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p.96. The whole of the region of Walo had been a Christian center with many historic churches and monasteries before the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Largely due to the wars of Gragn and the weakness of both the state and the church in the era of the princes, the population including prominent chiefs of various



localities became Moslems. For further see Hussein Ahmad, *Islam in the Nineteenth Century Wallo, Ethiopia* (Leiden: Brill, 2001),

<sup>53</sup> Cited in Erlich, p. 73.

<sup>54</sup> For further, see, Zewde Gabre-Sellassie. *Yohannes IV of Ethiopia*, pp. 95-96

<sup>55</sup> Zewde Gabre Sellassie *Yohannes the IV*, pp.97.

<sup>56</sup> Erlich, p. 73.

<sup>57</sup> Cited in Richard Caulk, "Religion and the State in the Nineteenth Century Ethiopia" *Journal of Ethiopian History*, x, 1(1972), p. 27. Caulk also cites other sources which make the claim that the attachment of the Muslim converts to the Christian faith seems at best to have been unwilling and nominal and recounts that the revolt of 1855 led by Sheik Tolla largely was a culmination of this enforced conversion and religious conformity. See Caulk, pp. 33-41.

<sup>58</sup> For a more analytical and critical discussion of the effects of Emperor Yohannes' religious policy towards the Moslems of Wello see, Hussein Ahmed, pp.167-187.

<sup>59</sup> Such movements appear in the fault lines, along the liminal space between Islam and Christianity. Sheik Zakaria, who later took the name *Newaye Kirsotos*, led massive Christian movements in the area of Wello and Begemder. He led his Moslem converts to baptism in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The movement gradually fizzled out for lack of support following the death of the leader. When the Seventh Day Adventists came into the area of Begemeder, they picked the remnants and founded a congregation. See Jonas Iwarsson, "A Moslem Mass Movement Toward Christianity in Abyssinia", *The Moslem World*. 1918, p.287-289. See also, Donald Crummey, "Shaikh Zakaryas: an Ethiopian Prophet," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, x,1 (1972), pp. 55-66; World Dominion Press, *Light and Darkness in East Africa*. (London: Wilson Printing Company, 1927), pp. 156-157.

<sup>60</sup> Richard, Caulk, "Religion and the State...", p. 38. Caulk points out that Yohannes had to abandon his religious policy at least as applies to Moslems towards the end of the reign.

<sup>61</sup> A.B Wylde, *Modern Abyssinia*. (London: 1901), p. 383.

<sup>62</sup> Informants: Tefera and Getachew.

<sup>63</sup> The emperor summoned missionaries, Catholics and Protestants, alike, and interrogated them about why they had come to Ethiopia. They answered, "to preach the gospel" and the Emperor responded, "The Gospel is one and God is one, I have sufficient bishops and priests to preach to my people. To whom do you preach?" To this, they responded, "the Jews." His sarcastic remark was, "How could you have passed Jerusalem." As cited in Yesehaq, *The Ethiopian Tewahido Church*, p. 76.

<sup>64</sup> The council of Chalcedon of 451, defines Christ as Perfect God and Man, con-substantial with the Father and con-substantial with the Man, one soul being in two natures, without division or separation and without confusion and change.

<sup>65</sup> Kostas Louskeris, "Church and Attempted Modernization in Ethiopia," *Proceedings of the 13<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, 1998, p.212

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> *Neftegna* is a generic term derived from *neft*, which literally means rifle. It is used to refer to the soldiers and administrative staff who settled in the newly conquered regions.

<sup>68</sup> It appears that those who initially became members of the Church in the conquered lands were ambitious individuals, or members of the local elite, such as traditional power holders, who were co-opted into the emerging political system, either out of expediency or under pressure.

<sup>69</sup> Harold Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menelik II: Ethiopia, 1844-1913* (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1975), p. 58.

<sup>70</sup> Menelik's southern march, in its religious sense, raises some critical questions such as : Could the process be viewed as one of fresh evangelization, re-evangelization, or a combination of both?

<sup>71</sup> Ulrich Braukamper, "Aspects of Religious Syncretism in Southern Ethiopia," *Journal of Religion in Africa*. XXII, 3(1992), pp. 196-199; Johnny Bakke *Christian Ministry* (Oslo; Solum Faarlagy, 1987), pp. 107-108; Spencer Trimmingham, *The Church and Missions in Ethiopia* (London: London Dominion Press, 1950), p. 50. (Trimingham cites W. C. Harris, *The Highland of Ethiopia*, 1848, pp. 78-80).

<sup>72</sup> Braukamper, pp. 196-199.

<sup>73</sup> The *Tabot* is a wooden engravings representing the Ark of the Covenant placed on every Orthodox Church and no building is considered a church without it. In fact, when priests talk about church planting, they talk of *tabot metkel*. There is no other Amharic term that I have found to designate the concept of church planting.

<sup>74</sup> U. Braukamper, "A vanishing Socio-Religious system; Fandano of the Hadiya," *Xiii International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, vol. 11, pp. 314-326; Informant: Kidamo.

<sup>75</sup> Stefan Grenstedt, *Ambaricho and Shonkolla* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2000). p. 52. One major problem accounting for this was the Church's dependency on the Coptic Church of Alexandria. The *abunas* were sent under oath never to consecrate bishops or undermine the full Ethiopian dependence on Egypt in any other way. According to Erlich, "since only a bishop could consecrate a church and priests, and only priests could administer the sacraments, the very existence and spread of Christianity, a process upon which the entire empire really rested, was completely dependent on a limited church." Erlich, p. 20.

<sup>76</sup> For further see, U. Braukamper, "Aspects of the Religious Syncretism...", pp. 197-207; Braukamper, "A vanishing Socio-Religious system...", pp. 314-326; Some informants have recently indicated to me that with the current resurgence of ethnic politics in Ethiopia the *Fandano* folk religion is suddenly reviving after its huge decline in the period of the Revolution. Informants: Evangelist Kedamo Mechato (I: 27-05-03), Belachew Berdolo (I: 19-05-03), and Shagna Andaro (I: 15-05-03). For a more in-depth study of recent forms of syncretistic religions in the southern parts of Ethiopia with a complex mix of local folk religion, Islam and Christianity, see, Norbert L. Vecchiato, "Illness, Therapy, and Change in Ethiopian Possession Cults," *Africa*, 63, 2 (1993), pp. 177-195.

<sup>77</sup> Negasso Gidada and Donald Crummey, "The Introduction and Expansion of Orthodox Christianity in Qelem Awraja, Western Walaga From About 1886 to 1941," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, x, 1(1972), pp., 104-105.

<sup>78</sup> Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, p. 106.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> For the activities of the early local missionaries in southern Ethiopia see: Gidada Solon, *The Other Side of Darkness* (New York, 1972); Terfassa Digga, *A Short Biography of Onesimos Nesib: C. 1850-1931* (Addis Ababa, MYC 1999).

<sup>81</sup> Gebre Sellassie, *Tarik Zemen Ze-dagmawi Menelik* (Addis Ababa: Artistic Printing Press, 1959[1966/7]), p.326

<sup>82</sup> This has been confirmed by researches conducted in south-western Ethiopia. For further see, Charles McClellan, *Articulating Economic Modernization and National Integration at the Periphery*, *African Studies Review*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 1990, p. 36; D. Donham and Wendy James, *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 183.

<sup>83</sup> Fekadu, *Ye Wengel Emnet Enqesqase be-Itiyopia* (Addis Ababa: MYC, 1999), pp. 198-206.

<sup>84</sup> Hammer, "The Religious Conversion Process Among the Sidama...", p. 606. This does not belittle the complex political and socio economic issues involved in the areas of southern Ethiopia. A misreading of this complexity might cause a misreading of the whole picture as is often betrayed by some writers from missionary backgrounds.

<sup>85</sup> Several observers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Ethiopia have commented on the tendency of people in the southern and south western parts of Ethiopia to accept either Islam or alternative forms of Christianity instead of Orthodox Christianity to redraw their ethnic identity. For further see, Ulrich Braukamper, "The Islamicization of the Arissi Oromo" *Proceeding of the Eight International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, vol. 1, 1988, pp. 767-777; Finn Aasebo Ronne, "Christianity in the Dynamics of South Ethiopian Societies and Culture: Kambatta-Hadiyya", *Proceedings of the 13<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, 1998, p. 144.

<sup>86</sup> Hammer, "The Religious Conversion Process Among the Sidama...", p. 606.

<sup>87</sup> Tibebe Eshete, "The SIM in Ethiopia: A Preliminary Note" *Journal of NorthEast African Studies*, 2003, pp. 27-57.

<sup>88</sup> Arne Tolo, who did his research in the Sidama area, concluded that the attempt to win the hearts and minds of the farmers in this manner did not serve the purpose of demonstrating unity and equality among people. He characterized the move as hypocritical and contradictory. Arne Tolo, *Sidama and Ethiopian: The emergence of the Mekane Yesus Church in Sidama* (Uppsala: University of Uppsala, 1998). p.124; Debela, pp. 45-46; Charles McClellan, p. 145. Informants have mixed feeling about the act. Some saw it as a good overture of embrace and inclusion for each person was made to have a God father from the settlers who was there during the hair shedding ritual accompanying baptism, which in a way, was in keeping with the traditional symbolism of marking changes. This, for them, fostered, to some extent, some kind of social harmony. Some, however, remember the moment with vexations, for it involved an

element of coercion even if the intent was assumed to be good. Informants: Belachew, Menamo, Shagna, Kedamo, Muse, and Abebe Waton.

<sup>89</sup> Peter Schwab, *Decision Making in Ethiopia: A Study of the Political Process* (London: C. Hurst and Co., 1972), p. 34

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. p. 35.

<sup>91</sup> Virtually all available mission literature considered him not only as an enlightened monarch but also favorably disposed towards missionaries of the Protestant faith. Some have even stretched this further by stating that he had evangelical convictions deep at heart. During a session held at his palace in 1949, an American personal who had the occasion to interview the Emperor asked him if he would mind giving him an expression of his personal faith, to which the Emperor responded, "I know I am saved, not by any thing that is of character or the works of the human heart, but by the blood of Jesus Christ alone." A. G.H Quinton, *Ethiopia and the Evangel*, (London: Marshal, Morgan & Scott, 1948), p. 24; He definitely used evangelical vocabularies, whether it was his usual pragmatic style or a real confession of faith, it is hard to judge. See also John Flad, *Abyssinia: A Romans of Missions* (London: n.d ), pp.35-36; Joseph J. Cooksey, *A Serious Aspect of the Abyssinian Situation* (London: New Mildmay Press, 1935), pp. 31-33.

<sup>92</sup> To be discussed below.

<sup>93</sup> For more on the extensive diplomatic wrangles between the Ethiopian government, the Coptic Church and the Egyptian government see, Haggai Erlich, *The Cross and the River: Ethiopia, Egypt, and the Nile* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002) , pp. 103-143.

<sup>94</sup> Aymro Wondmagegnehu, *The Ethiopian Orthodox Church*. (Addis Ababa: Ethiopian Orthodox Mission, 1970), p. 30.

<sup>95</sup> Many non-Christians have received Baptism and become practicing members of the Church. Ibid. 40.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Calvin, Shenk. "The Development of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and its Relationship with the Ethiopian Government from 1930 to 1970," p. 277. Abebe observes that the change was also intended to curb the growing influence of Islam along the border. For further see, Abebe, " Ethiopia and the Formation,," pp 189-203.

<sup>98</sup> Shenk, *The Development of the Ethiopian*, p. 285.

<sup>99</sup> H. J. Shultz, " Reform and Reaction in the EOC," *The Christian Century*. 85, no., 5, January, 31, 1968, p. 143.

<sup>100</sup> Robert Hess, *Ethiopia: The Modernizing of Autocracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), pp.110-111.

<sup>101</sup> According to Haile Woldemikael, the scholars who were sent for theological education in Greece and Germany joined the other institutions including the university for they were not received by the clergy. Haile Woldemikael "Social and Economic Impediments in Ethiopia," Ph. D. dissertation, University of Utah, 1972, p. 185.

<sup>102</sup> A project that assessed the impact of the graduates of the Holy Trinity College showed that it fell far from the desired objective, Shenk, p. 247.

<sup>103</sup> Shenk, pp. 245-248.

<sup>104</sup> According to Messing, the Emperor even advised the clergy to teach about the harmful aspects of *Tezkar*, Simon Messing, " Changing Ethiopia," *Middle East Journal*, 9 (1955), pp. 418-420. *Tezkar*, a religious practice associated with the doctrine of the second chance, has been one of the most notable services for the dead, serving also important social functions. Critics often say that it is one of the social foci where extractive consumption takes place. This is an issue that Dr. Haile Woldemikael vehemently attacks in his Ph. D. dissertation. For further see his "Social and Economic Impediments..." A family of an average income normally hods the memorial meal service for the deceased on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, 40<sup>th</sup>, 80<sup>th</sup>, after his death. Not only that, there is a bi- annual feast, called *menfeq* and a yearly feast called, *mut amet*, which would continue up until the 7<sup>th</sup> year of the passing away of the deceased . What ever its social value, the theological assumption of such services or offerings of absolution, was subjected to scathing criticism as early the 15<sup>th</sup> century by the Estifanites. For a theological critique see, Memher Getachew, *Gedel Ways*, pp.49-50.

<sup>105</sup> The translation work started in 1934. Involved in the project were 18 Ethiopians and 6 foreigners. The Italian war interrupted the work. Buxton from the BCMS, an inspiring figure behind the project, died in Britain. The work was later taken up after the Restoration, but took several years to complete. Various versions of the Bible and portions of it, were printed and were in wide circulation in the 60's

through the Ethiopian Bible Society or other Mission organizations. They circulated widely because of the affordable price at which they were sold. Their availability through purchase, gifts, or other venues such as library loans, brought a new tradition of seriously reading and understanding ones faith as distinct from observing prescribed traditions. The Bible eventually replaced *Dawit*, the Psalms, the most favorite book in the hand of ordinary Ethiopians. At least this was a valid case for some of the emerging elite.

<sup>106</sup> Berihun Kebede, *Ya Atse Haile Sellassie Tarik* (Addis Ababa: Artistic Printing Press 2000), pp. 321-323. This was a second committee set up by Haile Sellassie to continue the work of translating the Bible after it was discontinued due to the Italian invasion. The committee consisted of seven Ethiopian scholars ( *Belata Merse Hazen, Like Seltanat Melketu, Aleqa Mekuriya Aboye, Tessema Habtewold, Markos Agaze, Yohanes Wolde Maiam, Araya Sellassie Woreta*) and three expatriate scholars ( Mathew, Mr. Graham, Dr. Davis).

<sup>107</sup> The cult of Mary was instituted by royal intervention during the reign of Emperor Zara Yacob (1434-1468). For further see, Getatchew Haile, *The Mariology of Emperor Zara Yacob of Ethiopia*; Steven Kaplan, *The Monastic Holy Man and the Christianization of Early Solomonic Ethiopia*, pp. 42-43.

<sup>108</sup> Adrian Hastings. *African Christianity* (London: Chapman, 1976), p. 38.

<sup>109</sup> *Fithat*, literally freedom from condemnation or sin, is a prayer/church service conducted for the deceased before his burial. It is believed to be a plea before God on behalf of the dead to absolve all his sins so that his soul would not end up in hell for sins committed in life. Memher Getachew, pp.106-107.

<sup>110</sup> For further see his new translation of the Geez text that chronicles the lives of the leader of the movement *Aba Istifanos*. Getatchew Haile, *Daqiqa Estifanos: " Beheg Amlack."* (Collegeville; Avon, Minnesota, 2004), pp. 13-116.

<sup>111</sup> Tadesse Tamrat *Church and State*, pp. 103-104.

<sup>112</sup> For a brief history of Estifanos, see *Chora* no. 18 (N.D, 1998), pp. 20-25; Tadesse Tamrat, "Some Notes on the Fifteenth Century Estephanite' "Heresy" in the Ethiopian Church," *Rassegna di studi etiopici*, xxii , 1966, pp. 103-115.

<sup>113</sup> Getatchew, *Daqiqa Estifano ...*, pp.23-25.

<sup>114</sup> So far as I know, there has never been any study on these intriguing fringe groups, the so called, *Bahtwians*, literally, those who have renounced the world.

<sup>115</sup> Haile Mariam Larebo, p. 155.

<sup>116</sup> Gezlau Jesman, *The Ethiopian paradox* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 16-17.

<sup>117</sup> Informants: Tsertsu, Eguale Tsion (I: 30-01 03), Tsegaye Demese (I: 30-01-03) and Ashenafi Isayias (I: 30 -01 -03).

<sup>118</sup> According to Gusatv Aren, there were underground evangelical movement in northern Ethiopia whose origin he traced from the times of Peter Heyling in Gonder in 1634. He claims that Heyling succeeded in creating a small congregation of Orthodox Christians with evangelical convictions who were able to extend their influence among others in northern Ethiopia. They developed some underground networks and communications, but petered out in the hazy years of *Zemene Mesafint* and as a result of the persecution they had suffered. He believes that their remnants, though not easily traceable, kept on the tradition and continued to have some influence on the key issue of salvation and grace. Gustav Aren, *Evangelical Pioneers in Ethiopia* ( Stockholm: EFS forlaget, 1978), pp .409-410.

<sup>119</sup> The doctrine of salvation has not been seriously debated among the clergy in Ethiopia, for salvation , is considered given after baptism. Some theologian teachers in the same school like, *Aleqa Beyene Damtew* and *Aba Habte Sellassie*, had broached the subject without being very vocal. They suffered minor persecutions, yet did not experience rejection like that of *Aleqa Meseret*.

<sup>120</sup> Informants are strongly inclined to suggest that *Aleqa Meseret* embraced the doctrine of salvation with the insights he gained through a rigorous study of the Bible. Of course, the acquaintance and friendship he built with the BCMS missionary, David Stock, with whom he built a long time relationship, must have refined his perspectives. Informants: Mesfin Lisanu ( I : 22-01-03, Tsegaye and, Ashenafi. For more information on Meseret, his theological position and critique of the Church see, Dawit Chibsa, " Messert Sebhat Leab an Orthodox with Evangelical Convictions," BA thesis, Mekane Yesus Seminary, 1990.

<sup>121</sup> *Chora*, p. 5. In the book he wrote in 1959, *Aleqa Meseret* extensively discusses this issue by expounding the theology of salvation and methodically outlining the strategy for revival for the Orthodox Church. For further see his book, *Sema Tsidiq Beheraw*. Addis Ababa, 1959.

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<sup>122</sup> Aren, *Envoys of the Gospel*, pp. 134-135.

<sup>123</sup> Donald Crummey, *Priests and Politicians*, p.10

<sup>124</sup> Aren. *Evangelical Pioneers* p. 409; Aren, *Envoys of the Gospel*, pp. 134-135. It is very doubtful that such a long continuity was maintained, from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Except citing Cederqvist as a source, Aren does not make further comment on this. It might be possible that Cederqvist could confuse the fledgling evangelical community in Wellega that came into existence due to the activities of ex-slave local evangelists and Eritrean priests, who by then might have formed some kind of loose evangelical associations, though they still worked under the banner of the national church. Aren does not provide the indigenous name for the "Evangelical Association" he describes, for that would have given us some clue as to its history and increased the credibility of the claim.

<sup>125</sup> *The Moslem World*, 1911, p. 152.

<sup>126</sup> Roman Grubb, *Alfred Baxton of Abyssinia and Congo* (London: Lutterworth, 1942), p. 54.

<sup>127</sup> Doris Benson, *Looking to Ethiopia* (London: Bible Churchmen's Missionary Society, 1953), p. 23.

<sup>128</sup> Joseph J. Cooksey. *A Serious Aspect*, pp. 32-33.

<sup>129</sup> Informants: Mesfin and, Tsega.

<sup>130</sup> Informants: Mesfin, Tuja Jimma ( I: 30-01-03), and C. Mansel. Concerning the activities of the BCMS and the early history of these group see, Stokes David, *Ethiopia, Land of the Outstretched Hand* (London: Bible Churchmen's Missionary Society, 1948).

<sup>131</sup> John R. Cheyne, " Southern Baptist Evangelism of Coptic Christians: Is it Proselytism," *Transformation*, 4 (1991), p.24. However, the unintended consequence of their missionary work in the Menz and Debre Sina area, is the formation of an evangelical church that grew out of the fellowship of Orthodox Christians, especially the youth wing. They broke out and formed a church, called Addis Kidan Bete Kristian, literally the New Covenant Church, mainly due to the increasing pressures coming from the local clergies who were not supportive of their evangelical convictions. Informants: Kassahun Abebe ( I : 23- 03-03), Endalkachew ( 10-07-03) and Ashenafi.

<sup>132</sup> For the position of SIM see, Fargher, p. 50.

<sup>133</sup> Informant: Endale Gebre Meskel ( I : 02-04-03)

<sup>134</sup> A good example of this is *Aleqa* Gofu Abreha's book, *Metshafe Tegtsas ena Mesale*, (1952), highly critical of the practices of the Church, and emphatically calling for its reformation.

<sup>135</sup> There are a plethora of associations operating under cover mostly bearing names of saints..

<sup>136</sup> Messing, "Changing Ethiopia," pp. 424-427.

<sup>137</sup> Informants: Getachew and Tefera.

<sup>138</sup> For more see, Shenk, p. 373; Haile M. Larebo, " Quest for Change: Haymanote-Abew Ethiopian Student's Organization and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, 1959-1974, " Proceedings of the 13<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, 1996, , pp. 329-333.

<sup>139</sup> Though limited in success, their impacts are felt here and there. Witness the Eritrean priests who were forerunners of the evangelical movements in Wellega , the tremendous influence of the works of David Stocks in Gondar and Addis Ababa, and the activities of many missionaries from Presbyterian and Baptist groups who are still active. Witness too, the case of the Swedish Evangelical Mission which operated in the southern parts of Ethiopia with local priests like *Qes* Badme, and ex-slaves, driving forces behind the formation of the Mekane Yesus Church.

<sup>140</sup> Informants: Getachew and Tefera.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Aren recites a trial conducted at Boji in 1911, where the case involved the issue of whether it was right to present the Christian faith in a vulgar language, in this case the Oromo. Aren, *Envoys of the ...* p. 72.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid. p. 127.

<sup>144</sup> The government decree that was passed in 1944 to regulate missionary activities stipulates that the language of teaching and instruction should primarily be Amharic and all missionaries were expected to learn the language. The language factor is to be seen considering how it limited the accomplishment of the established Church and conversely the Protestant missionary's success in obtaining local converts. This again should be seen in light of the major findings of Lamin Sanneh concerning the role of vernacular language in the expansion of Christianity in Africa in his seminal work: *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* ( New York: Orbis, 1989).

<sup>145</sup> Informants: Yohannes, Taye and Wubshet.

<sup>146</sup> Informants: Solomon, Wubshet, Mesfin, and Negussie.

<sup>147</sup> The International Christian Fellowship , Addis Ababa(no author), *The Ethiopia Observer*, 1960, p.48.

<sup>148</sup> The association was led by the Crown Prince( Honorary President), Commander Eskinder Desta (President), Ato Emanuel Gebre Sellassie(Vice-President), Dr. Mengesha Geberehiwet(Secretary). Its Executive members include men like: H. H. Asrat Kassa, H.H Abebe Reta, Mrs. Leach Workineh, Dr. K.M . Simon and Lij Hailu Desta, an intriguing mix of foreigners and evangelicals.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Shenk, "The Development of the Ethiopian," pp.267-290

<sup>151</sup> Involvement of the royal family and members of the echelon of the aristocracy is surprisingly substantial. Perhaps, this could emanate from the need to introduce reforms through modeling by creating sub-formation without challenging the system in which they were located. Interpreted differently, the ruling group saw the restlessness and displeasure of the rising elite members of the Church, and hence were setting the tone of the new direction while at the same time being in charge of it. This is a typical example of pressing a change from behind when frontal attempt was found to be dangerous. An article that came out in the *Ethiopian Herald* on December 13, 1966 under the title, "Minister urges Church to follow civilization in peace" is strongly indicative of the government's choice of such an approach. See also, Shenk, p. 271.

<sup>152</sup> Informants: Kebede, Negussie and Getachew.

<sup>153</sup> Some prominent members of the ecclesiastic community, such as *Like Seltanat* Haile Mariam, Administrator of Trinity Cathedral, expressed concern on the rigidity of fasting, "the stricter we are the more we loose" was his remark regarding the danger and the need for reform. Shenk , "The Report on Mission," p.112.

<sup>154</sup> Shenk, "The Development of the Ethiopian," p. 270

<sup>155</sup> According to Haile Mariam Larebo, the Emperor and his associates created the organization with the purpose of using it as a significant platform of change in the direction of the new modernizing programs. For further see, Haile M. Larebo, " Quest for Change: Haymanote-Abew", pp.326-337.

<sup>156</sup> Haymanote Abew Ethiopian Student Association, 13<sup>th</sup> year Seminar, April 22-25, 1971, Addis Ababa, p.1.

<sup>157</sup> The article appeared in 1969, By this time, the student movement had totally changed gears by swinging towards Marxism with the formation of a secret Marxist society known as, Crocodiles. Members of this group might have infiltrated the association. In the early years of the 1970's, definitely, the *Haymanote Abew* members and the radical students struck, strangely enough, an alliance against the Pentecostals, who were viewed by both as agents of foreign missionaries and tools of western interest. For a partial clarification see, Randi, Blavsik. *Haile Sellassie's Students*, pp. 240-242.

<sup>158</sup> Haymanote Abew Ethiopian Student Association, 13<sup>th</sup> year Seminar, p.1.

<sup>159</sup> Shenk, pp.274-275.

<sup>160</sup> Aleqa Tewelde Medhin and Gorfu Abrha can be cited as good examples.

<sup>161</sup> Informants: Ashenafi and Ezra Eshetu (I : 02-02-03).

<sup>162</sup> Mussie Al-Azar, "Amanuel Mahber: Foundation and Growth," BA Thesis, MYS, 2000, p. 10.

<sup>163</sup> According to Getatchew Haile's observation, " since people do not feel comfortable about accepting the church while not observing its rules, many especially in the rural areas, have already stopped going church." Getatchew, p. 5; Ephraim Isaac opines that some of the youth "found a solution in the conversion, particularly to Protestantism while others have formulated a variety of personal creeds which are different from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church." Ephraim, Isaac," Social Structure of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church," *Ethiopia Observer*, xiv, 4(1971), p. 252. This has also been reiterated in government newspapers such as *Addis Zemen*. In its issue of November 1972, the newspaper contained writings expressing dissatisfaction at the incapacity of local churches in capturing the attention of the youth who were straying away from its influence because of repetitive liturgy and the absence of qualified priests to bring messages relevant to the youth. For further see, "Wetatoch wede betekrstyian bemikerbubet mended weyeyet tederege, *Addis Zemen*, Hedar, 6, 1965 ( Nov14, 1972/73).

<sup>164</sup> Informants: Ashenafi and Ezra.

<sup>165</sup> Elrich, , *The Cross...*, . p.16.

<sup>166</sup> Abiy Tsegaye stretches the point by stating that the Ethiopian Orthodox Church has been the foundation of what he calls, "the Ethiopian reality," a balanced blend of secularism and Orthodox faith appealing to the country's pluralistic tradition. Tsegaye contends, by breaking this tradition the Pentecostals' one way religious track caused a terrible injury to the nation's core values. Abiy Tsegaye,

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"Ethiopia and social Change : A Philosophical Assessment," Ph. D. thesis, Howard University, 1999, p. 300.

<sup>167</sup> Tadesse Tamrat, "A Short Note on the Tradition of Pagan Resistance to the Ethiopian Church (Fourteenth and Fifteenth centuries)," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, x, no. 1(January 1972), p.147.

<sup>168</sup> I am more in agreement with Nock's characterization of such shift of loyalty as adhesion where the stress is acceptance of new beliefs and practices as useful supplements to existing ones. The debate over the concept of conversion, whether it assumes drastic changes or is a gradual process with the same effect is an open-ended one and is as yet an unsettled issue.

<sup>169</sup> Shenk, "The Ethiopian Orthodox Understanding of Mission", p. 11.

<sup>170</sup> Gidada, p. 111.

<sup>171</sup> Ephraim Isaac, " Social Structure of the Ethiopian Church," *Ethiopian Observer*, p. 278.

<sup>172</sup> For a further consideration of the concept of harmonial religion see, Sydney Ahlstorm, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972)

<sup>173</sup> It is interesting to note that in spite of years of labor of the Church to Christianize the south and south western parts of Ethiopia, it was designated as "Open Areas" for western missionary activities in the first government decree that came out in 1944 regarding Mission

<sup>174</sup> Informants : Merera Gudina, Bekele and others. The revival of the *Qalu*, institution a system of possession and medium-ship is another case in point.

<sup>175</sup> This a point which Tadesse Tamrat has noted for the earlier period which is also equally valid for the recent times. Tadesse has observed that, "the close union between State and Church did not always help the further expansion of the Christian faith." Tadesse Tamrat, " A Short Note ", p. 149.

<sup>176</sup> Getatchew Haile, " Ethiopia: a case study," p .4. In contrast, the Pentecostals in Ethiopia stress the aspect of immanence of God where his presence is to be felt and experienced in the here and the now. In fact, this could be a major unspoken difference between the two Christian communities in Ethiopia.

<sup>177</sup> Rey Charles, *Real Abyssinia* (London: 1935), p..182.

<sup>178</sup> For instance, Negash Gebre Mariam, chief editor of *Addis Zemen*, notes, " The Ethiopian Christian would rather hear readings from Melake Gebriel, than listen to the passages straight from the Bible" *Addis Reporter* October 10, 1969, p.7. See also, *Addis Reporter* vol. 1. No. 1.February 7(1969); February, 14, 1969. Various article on *News and Views* of the 60's also express similar concerns.

<sup>179</sup> Examples include men like Abayneh Worke, Shimelis Adugna, Professor Seyum, Tilhaum Yilma, Daniel Lema and Negussie Ayele.

<sup>180</sup> John S. Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers,1969) p. 230.

### **Chapter III**

#### **Modern Evangelical Enterprises in Ethiopia: External and Indigenous Dimensions (1850's –1950's)**

This chapter provides a brief history of the roots of the evangelical movement in Ethiopia by paying attention into the works of modern Protestant missionaries who gave rise to it and spelling out the contribution of the indigenous agents who most of the time did the frontline work. It will also outline the various factors and circumstances that interacted to galvanize and shape the evangelical movement.

##### ***Early Mission Efforts: Opportunities and Challenges:***

The Germans were the earliest Protestant missionaries to have made an attempt to start mission work in Ethiopia. Peter Heyling arrived in Gondar in 1634/5 during the reign of Emperor Fasil (1634-1669). Heyling's primary interest was to work with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church with the aim of "revitalizing" the Church so that it would focus on its Scriptural origins, reform and be endowed with a heightened sense of evangelization and missionary zeal in accord with the doctrine of salvation. It appears that Heyling neither conceived the idea of introducing an alternative form of Christianity nor desired to create a new church. His vision was to initiate, through literature and education, a deeper knowledge of the Scriptures and infuse spiritual life and transformation within the adherents of the historic Orthodox Church with due respect to its long and rich tradition. His experiment was short-lived. He was killed by the Turkish Pasha in 1652, as he was journeying back through Egypt.<sup>1</sup> Not much is



known about the legacy he left behind, except the translation of the Gospel of John in Amharic.<sup>2</sup>

In 1825, the Church Missionary Society(CMS) sent five missionaries to Egypt. The CMS society sent three of them to strengthen its ministry to the Oriental churches, while the remaining two came to Ethiopia to promote “revival.”<sup>3</sup> The two missionaries, sent by the CMS, Samuel Gobat and Christian Kugler, arrived in Tigray in 1829. Like Heyling, the CMS also aimed at forging collaborative efforts with the national church to inspire a biblical “renewal” and “internal transformation.” Samuel Gobat explicitly stated, his intention was to “multiply copies of the Bible and to instruct the people with the Holy Scriptures.”<sup>4</sup> CMS might have realized the potential of the historic Church, if strengthened, to evangelize neighboring areas, especially the Muslims. However, their experiment did not last long. Though they started with a measure of success in distributing thousands of copies of Scriptures from a manuscript in Amharic, they were not able to win the hearts and minds of the people. Kugler died a year after his arrival in Ethiopia. Gobat traveled in parts of Begemeder where he was able to make connections with the various local rulers and church leaders. We do not know much about the impact he made apart from his distribution of the Gospels and the Epistles of Rome to some priests and monastic leaders. After his return to England, he came back to Ethiopia with C.W Isenburg, a German missionary, choosing Shoa as their mission target. Gobat returned home again for health reasons leaving Isenburg behind. Later on, Gobat managed to come back to Shoa with Johann Krapf to meet with Sahle Sellassie, ruler of Shoa, who unfortunately did not extend a welcoming hand to them. The king expressed his desire to have artisans and technical experts and not preachers. That

closed all opportunities for the missionaries to start mission work in Ethiopia. In his four-year stay in Shoa, Krapf learned about the language and culture of the Oromo. As a result, he began to develop a great interest in evangelizing the people. When opportunities to reach the Oromo along the Shoan corridors were blocked, he considered the other option of reaching them via the Kenyan border.<sup>5</sup>

Krapf's commitment to serve as a missionary among the Oromo partly stems from his fascinating conception that if he reached the Oromo, he would reach the rest of Africa.<sup>6</sup> His made a major contribution by his translation, for the first time, of portions of the Gospel (the Gospel of St. Matthew and chapter 1-5 of the Gospel of John) into the Oromo vernacular language.<sup>7</sup> More significantly, his popularization of the idea that the formation of a Christian community among the Oromo was central to the evangelization of Africa, attracted many other missionaries in Europe. His slogan, "Give us the Galla and Central Africa is Ours," became a powerful incentive to attract the attention of several missionaries from the Lutheran Churches in Germany and Sweden.

The two missionary groups that took immediate interest in Krapf's call and made enormous investment in the missionary enterprise to evangelize the Oromo were the Hermannsburg Mission from Germany and the Swedish Evangelical Missions from Sweden. Another notable achievement of Krapf was his publication of an improved edition of an Amharic Bible in 1870's based on the version that had previously been written by Abu Rumi. He produced translation with the help of Michael Aregawi, a *Felasha* convert from Gonder, northern Ethiopia.<sup>8</sup> The lack of open opportunities in evangelism led Krapf to the misguided position of soliciting British colonial

intervention in Ethiopia, which greatly offended the Ethiopian ruler and which among other things, became a cause for his loss of permission to reenter Ethiopia.<sup>9</sup>

Some missionaries came to Ethiopia during the reign of Emperor Tewodros (1855-1868). The emperor's astounding energy and desire to modernize his country led him to welcome Protestant missionaries on his own terms. He welcomed the lay missionaries from Europe provided that they trained his people in handicrafts and were willing to share their technical expertise. Tewodros was prepared to utilize resources that the western missionaries brought and integrate them with his reform initiatives as long as they did not become sources of confusion of national identity, a key component of which belonged to the Orthodox Church.<sup>10</sup> According to Trimmingham, before he assumed the throne, Tewodros offered missionaries freedom of work "on condition that my subjects do not say, 'I am French because I am a Catholic' or 'I am British because I am a Protestant.'"<sup>11</sup>

Realizing the interest Tewodros has displayed towards foreign missions, some European missionaries took initiatives to work in Ethiopia. A group, known as Pilgrim Missions, from a training center of St. Chrishona, Switzerland, arrived at the Emperor's court in April 1885. Among the six missionaries was, Martin Flad who in 1856 began mission work amongst the *Bete Israel* ( the" black Jews," commonly known as the *Felashas*). The Pilgrim Mission, which combined Christian witness with technical aid, was acceptable to both the government and the mission societies. Gobat, who initiated this program, hoped that the lay missionaries would use their expertise in the area of carpentry; weaving and masonry to draw people's attention around Gonder and facilitate contact. The expectation was that such entry approaches would provide

venues to launch Bible study fellowships that might evolve into more permanent congregations.<sup>12</sup>

This strategy, which aimed at paving the way for more open and direct mission work in the future, did not have proselytization as its immediate agenda, rather to bring change through dedicated service and the teaching of the Bible, via local study groups. Despite the novelty of the approach, the Pilgrim missionaries could not do much beyond providing royal service. Neither *Abune Selama*, the Patriarch, nor the Emperor, was receptive toward their evangelistic endeavors, more truly of the latter than the former. Hence, the missionary venture came to a halt without significant fruit.<sup>13</sup>

An upshot of this development, however, was the onset of new mission work amongst the *Bete Israel*, or the *Felashas*, by Henry Stern and Martin Flad, one of the young missionaries from the Chrishona Institute at Basel. Flad's work merits further mention because it represented the first major attempt to reach the Ethiopian Jews by foreign missionaries. Flad, who had been trained as a missionary at St. Chrischona, Basil, became intensely interested in developing mission work among the *Felashas* while serving in the royal court, which gave him the occasion to develop informal contacts with them. In 1859, he joined an organization called the *Felasha* Mission in order to undertake more organized and focused evangelistic work among the *Felasha*. He began his official mission work among the Ethiopian Jews with the permission of the Emperor and the consent of the Bishop, but with the express condition that his work should not involve the adherents of the Orthodox Church, and that proselytes from the *Felasha* community were to be baptized into the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Flad

accepted these conditions because he believed that in the long run *Felasha* converts would bring about spiritual renewal within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.<sup>14</sup>

Joined by Henry Stern, a Jewish convert, and aided by local converts such as *Debtera* Beru and *Aleqa* Michael Aregawi, the work of the *Felasha* Mission was expanded and as a result a community of believers was established in the heartland of the *Felashas*.<sup>15</sup> The principal strategy on which they depended was the distribution of Scriptural literature in Amharic language and the establishment of schools to be used mainly for language instructions and the teachings of the Bible.<sup>16</sup> The distribution of the Bible extended as far as neighboring monastic communities where readings and debates opened the way for some to develop evangelical convictions.<sup>17</sup>

Though the *Felasha* converts represent the earliest prototypes of evangelical Christians in modern times, the activities of Flad and others after him did not result in the creation of large-scale permanent evangelical Christian communities in Ethiopia. The number of converts by 1881 was estimated to be 800. By 1912, the number rose to 2, 000, an impressive figure, given the tenacity of the Ethiopian Jews to cling to their faith. In assessing the evangelical enterprise among the *Felasha*, Gustav Aren observes that the impact had not been one of national significance. Aren makes the case that the restrictive term of their entry and the tight control of missionary activities rendered their works ineffective.<sup>18</sup> It is interesting to note that one unintended consequence of the works of the missionaries was to bring the Ethiopian Jews into international focus. As Sundkler comments, “more important in the long-run is the interest these activities evoked among World Jewry, who were later inspired to attempt to incorporate the

Felasha into the Jewish world community.”<sup>19</sup> In 1905, the activities of the missionaries led to a counter movement by European Jews to keep the *Felasha* in Judaism.<sup>20</sup>

Generally, Tewodros tried to maintain friendly contacts with Flad and his colleagues, though the Emperor did have stormy relations with some of the lay missionaries. Stern, for example, meddled in Ethiopian politics because he understood little of instructional relations. In addition, Stern strained relations between Tewodros and the missionaries by inserting negative comments in his book, *Wanderings among the Felasha in Abyssinia* (1862).<sup>21</sup>

The political situation in Ethiopia following the death of Tewodros in 1868 was murky, and as result, missionary activities seem to have been considerably damaged. Gobat’s project of sending pious craftsmen to serve the rulers came to a halt, and the activities of expatriate missionaries of the *Felasha* Mission declined when the missionaries left the country. In 1874, Flad made an unsuccessful appeal to Emperor Yohannes IV to continue mission work. He was rejected and had to leave Ethiopia immediately. However, the evangelization of the *Felasha* proceeded with the dedicated efforts of indigenous missionaries, like Beru, Michael Aregawi, and Senbetu. Senbetu arranged cooperative links between the missionaries operating in Massawa and Hamassein areas and indigenous colleagues.<sup>22</sup> Together, they distributed Scriptural and religious literature. Their cooperative efforts were so effective that thousands of *Felashas* were converted despite the tremendous hostility of the Orthodox Church.<sup>23</sup>

During the reign of Yohannes missionaries, experienced considerable difficulties because of his disapproving attitude toward any alternative forms of Christianity, which were not indigenous. There are possible explanations for his

position. First, the Emperor did not see the need for western missionaries to operate in Ethiopia for he believed that his people were already Christian enough as to not need any further evangelization. Second, he was convinced that the missionaries ought to tend to their assignments elsewhere before they decided to come to Ethiopia.<sup>24</sup> Third, he perceived the danger of national disunity arising from competing Christian communities. Last, he was suspicious of the intentions of missionaries who had links with a reform movement led by some priests in Tseazega, Hamassein (Eritrea).

This was consistent with the position the emperor took towards the Orthodox Church. Keenly aware of pitfalls of a divided church, he resolved to eliminate all sectarian tendencies and announced the *Tewahido* doctrinal faith to be the only theological position of the Church. The Emperor's idea was to bridge the religious and ethnic gaps existing in Ethiopia and promote national unity by making his country maintain a unitary religion. As his own pronounced maxim attests, "Different religions in one land only causes difficulties for the ruler."<sup>25</sup>

The Emperor gathered missionaries operating in his land to announce his decision that they should terminate their activities and leave the country. Admittedly, Yohannes had a serious concern for his nation and he might have had legitimate grounds for suspecting foreigners. His excessive preoccupation with foreigners predisposed him to have dismissive and intolerant behavior bordering xenophobia. Yohannes' religious policy, as Bahru aptly stated, "lacked the liberalism and spirit of tolerance that he had shown in the political field."<sup>26</sup> Thus, having had no chance of negotiating, the missionaries left Ethiopia to their respective countries, or else, joined the parties which had began mission work in Eritrea. Advised by Krapf, the Swedish

Evangelical Mission (SEM), otherwise known as Evangeliska Fosterlands-Stiftelsen (The Evangelical Fatherland Association), began to form mission stations along the Red Sea coast and along the Sudan corridor with the hope of reaching the Oromo inhabiting the area south of the Abbai River and bypass the troubled region of northern Ethiopia. Massawa served not only as an entry point for most missionaries who wanted to get into Ethiopia, but also became a place where optimistic missionaries settled in the hope of change of attitude of Ethiopian rulers.<sup>27</sup> The SEM commissioned L. Larnge, P. Kjellberg, and C.J Carlsson to carry out the mission work from their base in the vicinity of the port of Massawa. Their arrival in Massawa in 1866 opened a burst of missionary activities in Eritrea and Ethiopia with lasting significance.

The Swedish Evangelical Mission launched their mission work by opening stations in the midst of the Kunama population, the Hamassien region, and the Red Sea littoral. The vision of establishing mission work, particularly with the Hamassein priests, had been born as a secondary goal when the political situation in Ethiopia hampered them from reaching the Oromo areas. They were able to achieve successful communications with local Orthodox priests in Hamassein whose aid and expertise they used for launching missionary work based on indigenous agencies. They also successfully employed converted ex-slaves, mainly Oromo, to serve as local missionaries to teach the Gospel in various parts of Ethiopia. The ex-slaves had been mostly liberated boys and girls and redeemed slaves from the vicinity of Massawa. The freedmen received training in the basics of evangelism and the teaching of Bible at Imkullu, a school set up in 1872, by Lundhal to train indigenous evangelists.<sup>28</sup> Both the priests from Hamassien and the ex-slaves became influential agents in expanding



Christianity and creating evangelical Christian communities, first in Eritrea and then in Wellega.

During the reign of Emperor Menelik, missionaries began to come in small numbers due largely to the relative openness he showed toward western technicians, traders and professionals including missionaries, lay or ordained. Before he became the Emperor of Ethiopia (1889), Menelik had been constrained by Yohannes' policy towards missionaries and the specific order he had received from him to expel European missionaries or ask them to embrace the Orthodox faith if they wanted to stay in Ethiopia.<sup>29</sup> Some German missionaries made attempts to work in the southern parts of Ethiopia largely populated by Oromo, but the Orthodox priests both at the local and national levels obstructed their efforts and they were forced to abandon their plans. Menelik himself, who initially tended to be a liberal monarch, saw the danger of supporting missionary endeavors and retracted his open stance to avoid risking clerical antagonism from the Orthodox Church. However, the SEM missionary group which had originally established indigenous works in Hamassein and the Red Sea coast seemed to make significant progress in the capital city and the Wellega region, mainly through the activities of the Eritrean priests, slave returnees and converts of Oromo origin.

The Swedish Evangelical Missionaries merged their works at Hamassien and their new training site at Imkullu, from where they began sending indigenous missionaries into Ethiopia. The priests from Eritrea who were willing to serve as missionaries in Ethiopia neither surrendered Orthodox tradition nor renounced their membership to their local churches. They had embraced the doctrine of salvation,

which emphasized the position that redemption comes only through personal faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ, while they were in Hamassein. In the 1870's, they had initiated a Bible Readers movement (also known as the Bible Movement) among Orthodox adherents at Tsezega, a village in Hamassein. The persecution these priests experienced in the hands of the Orthodox clergy and the provincial rulers was intensified after the Egyptian attacks of 1875. This was mainly because the attack heightened Emperor Yohannes' sensitivity towards anything that he viewed as an external threat. It was this persecution experience that gave the priests a strong impetus to launch such a movement. The same situation also gave additional motivation for the Eritrean priests to be willing to go as missionaries in the southern parts of Ethiopia.<sup>30</sup>

The ex -slaves who were being trained for mission work among the Oromo were important reserves from whom the SEM could easily recruit indigenous missionaries. Among those who had served in this capacity was the renowned Oromo ex- slave, Onesimus Nessib. He is remembered not only for his contribution as a pioneer evangelist, but also for his translation of the first complete Bible into the Oromo vernacular language in 1899 using the Sabean/Ethiopic script. In this substantial task, Onesimus received the expert assistance of a woman evangelist named Aster Gano, an ex slave who received training at Imkullu.<sup>31</sup>

The year 1904 was significant in the rise of the evangelical movement in Ethiopia because it was in this year that the infant evangelical community in Wellega, and to a small extent in Addis Ababa, found some common objectives through the efforts of Onesimus and Dr. Carl Cederqvist, a Swedish Lutheran missionary. Onesimus arrived in Addis Ababa in 1904 and went to Wellega. They had received

permission from the Emperor to do evangelistic work as long as they did not contravene the tenets of the Orthodox Church. Carl Cederqvist, a missionary colleague of Onesimus, also arrived in the same year.<sup>32</sup> The missionary doctor had been making several unsuccessful efforts to start mission work in Wellega and Borena via Somalia since 1892, but failed to do so both because of the bad security situation in the Horn and the difficulty of obtaining permits from local authorities.

Carl Cederqvist also received permission from the Emperor to establish a mission station in the capital city through the help of Alfred Ilg, Menelik's trusted Swiss advisor in matters of foreign affairs.<sup>33</sup> The advent of Cederqvist opened the way for the realization of the dreams of Krapf. The beginning of mission work, albeit on a small scale, brought a closure to the ban on missionary activities in Ethiopia, which had virtually been government policy since the days of Emperor Yohannes IV.

The Swedish missionary built facilities, which served as a residential and educational center. Activities included a boys' school with instruction in English and Amharic and a small congregation of believers, with services in the Amharic translation of the *Geez* liturgy of the Orthodox Church. Cederqvist also used his center to function as a health station to provide medical care and other social services for needy people. Cederqvist came with rich experience from having worked amongst the "reformed" Orthodox priests in Eritrea, which he was able cleverly to integrate with his ministry in Addis Ababa, even though the situation in the capital city was different from that of Eritrea. He created networks with the leaders of the fledgling Christian communities in Wellega and Addis and laid the foundation of an evangelical movement of a national scale. His commitment to serve, which was palpably demonstrated during the Spanish

Flu of 1918, and his good contacts with high officials in the capital city, such as *Belatengetta* Hiruy, *Lig* Iyasu, and later with the young Regent, Teferi, earned him a good name. Cederqvist died in 1919 in Addis, while treating patients suffering from the epidemic disease is remembered locally as *Ye-Hidar Beshita*.<sup>34</sup> His devotion to service persuaded the monarch to be more open to missionaries, especially the Swedish missionaries.<sup>35</sup>

### ***Local Converts, Evicted Priests and their Congregation:***

Together with Onesimus and the priests from Hamassien, particularly Gebre Ewostatewos and Gebre Sellassie, Cederqvist united the scattered converts to form an embryonic community of the evangelical Christian faith. They were not alone in their endeavor since Ethiopian scholars with evangelical conviction such as *Aleqa* Taye Gebre Mariam, cooperated with them actively. It was from these scattered faith communities that the Ethiopian Evangelical Church of Mekane Yesus later emerged. Gebre Ewostatewos and his other friends from Eritrea, who had been excommunicated by local priests from the Orthodox Church in 1891, and the local Oromo evangelists, consisting of freedmen, such as Onesimus, Aster Gano and Daniel Dabala, settled in the area of Boji (Wellega) with the aim of evangelizing the Oromo of Southwestern Ethiopia working closely with the priests of the Orthodox Church in the area. They joined with the Boji Mariam Orthodox Church and continued their church spiritual association with the priests and the ordinary folks for several years.<sup>36</sup>

These new groups, who identified themselves as “believers,” did not appear to have the desire to form a separate congregation even though they shared their own

theological convictions that stressed personal salvation centered on faith and grace than work. Every Sunday they attended mass at Boji Mariam Orthodox Church also cooperating with the priests in the teaching and observance of Holy Communion. At the same time they continued meeting as fellow believers in the afternoon. They even accepted the rite of baptism as practiced by the Orthodox Church. Their evangelical convictions, which in the long run clashed with some of the religious rites of the Orthodox Church, gradually and unavoidably led to conflicts that could not be resolved easily. For instance, they openly questioned the theological basis of practices such as *tezkar*, (remembrance) feast and a mass for the dead, believed by the Orthodox Church to have the power of redeeming someone from *seol*, the Amharic equivalent to purgatory. Their insistence that it is only the work of Christ that provides complete redemption and a guarantee to heaven, led them to open collision with the local clergy. A more subtle issue was their critical position towards the long-held Orthodox priests' assumption of the intercessory role of Mary and the various saints. The group honored saints as well as Mary but did not share the theological conviction of invoking saints or Mary for intercessions or during prayers.

Not only theological issues, but language was another controversial point that compounded the differences. Onesimus, being an Oromo, desired to occasionally preach the Scriptures in the vernacular Oromo language.<sup>37</sup> The local clergy, who mainly came from Gojjam, fiercely resisted his efforts. Onesimus and fellow groups with evangelical convictions, were finally pushed out of the church condemned as heretics and apostates, followed by denial of burial rights for their deceased relatives and refusal of baptismal rites for their infant children.<sup>38</sup>

Theological disputes that gradually surfaced led to opposition from the local priests of the Orthodox Church thus obviating the possibility of the rise of indigenous missionaries from Orthodox background and their native colleagues, to work from within to bring renewal. This event prevented the group from attempting to work in cooperation with the Orthodox Church. Consequently, facing marginalization and censure the group concluded that such treatment justified launching new and separate evangelical communities.<sup>39</sup> As a whole the priests and the freed ex-slaves served indigenous missionaries and who realized the long cherished dreams of missionaries to establish a mission field in Ethiopia and opened the way for Protestant missionaries from Europe and America to work mainly among the Oromo in the ensuing years. The coming of missionaries, such as Dr. Eric Soderstrom and Rev. Martin Nordfeldt in the 1920's, re-enforced the process of the growth of a national evangelical church that was already in the making, reaching its full expression during the Italian period. It was also during this time that the church began to expand rapidly and to work toward indigineity

Missionaries from the Lutheran background, mainly from Germany and Sweden, set up stations in some parts of southeastern Ethiopia, particularly, in the former provinces of Hararghe and Arsi. Some American missionaries, like the Seventh Day Adventists also began their work during the reign of Menelik II by setting up mission stations in Wellega, Dessie and Begemeder. The Adventists founded their first congregation in Begemeder from survivors of *Sheik Zakaria's* followers.<sup>40</sup> In general, however, only mission undertakings in Wellega, led to permanent mission work and the creation of stable evangelical Christian communities.

## ***The Emergence of Local Evangelical Churches in South and Southwestern Ethiopia: 1920's- 1950's***

### ***Background Developments:***

Until the 1920's only tenuous connections existed between indigenous missionaries and foreign missions. Those who organized missions realized that in the long run the most profitable strategy of doing mission work in Ethiopia that had an enduring impact would be, first, to focus on the non-Christian inhabitants, and second to apply a strategy that combined evangelism with social work such as building schools and clinics. These were programs that the missionaries were able to accomplish easily since they resonated with the progressive reform policy of the future ruler, Haile Sellassie, who had come to power, first as a regent in 1916, and then as the Emperor in 1930.

The heyday of missionary activity in Ethiopia occurred during the reign of Haile Sellassie. His reign witnessed the expansion of Christian missionary activities and the spread of the evangelical faith. There were various mission organizations that set out to work in Ethiopia during his regency (1916-1930). Mission societies established in Ethiopia between 1918 to 1931 included : The United Presbyterian Mission (1918, US), Swedish Mission BV (1921, Sweden), Mission to the Jews (1923, British), Sudan Interior Mission (1927, US), Society for the Propagation of the Gospel ( 1928, British), Hermannsburg Mission (1927, Germany), and the Bible Churchmen's Missionary Society (UK, 1932). Overall, the geographical distribution of the operational areas of missions concentrated in the southwestern parts of Ethiopia and the

capital city, Addis Ababa. The SIM provided an exception by concentrating their efforts heavily in the central and southern regions of Ethiopia.

Haile Sellassie's modernization policy considered religion a significant component of the cultural and social life of Ethiopians. He sought to initiate changes within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church so that it could accommodate some of the policies he was initiating. One of the Emperor's critical interventions was integrating Amharic, the official language in Ethiopia, into the religious services of the Church. To that effect, he helped a great deal in the opening of a center for the work of the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS) in 1926. He gave considerable encouragement to the BFBS to promote its works, particularly, the translation of the Bible in the Amharic language. The first indigenous translation of the Bible in Amharic was completed under his support and supervision in 1934. He involved Ethiopian scholars and foreigners from the Anglican Church and the Bible Churchmen's Missionary Society in that translation process, despite the displeasure expressed by the clergy. The printing of the Amharic Bible was interrupted by the Italian invasion but came out again in 1955 in manuscript form.

The various versions of the Bible spread in many parts of Ethiopia mainly following the areas of expansion of the missionaries, an often-overlooked fact. That it sold at an affordable price increased its availability to the literate Ethiopians. An outcome of this, as explained in the previous chapter, was that Christianity in Ethiopia became more of the religion of "the Book." People took the message to their hearts and interpreted the verses according to their existential needs. As a result, the teachings and interpretations of the Scripture, which had been the exclusive preserve of priests, fell in



the hands of the common people. People could read the Bible, individually or in groups, drew messages out of their readings, compose songs from them, prayed based on the verses they had studied, and applied them to their daily life. In effect, this had the unintended consequence of diminishing the role of priests as repositories of the word of God and the only channel along which divine ideas could flow.<sup>41</sup>

The Italian occupation (1936-41), brought a complete reversal of developments prior to the war. The religious policy of the Italian colonial administration in Ethiopia aimed to establish the Roman faith as the national church, instituting a hegemonic belief system that discouraged the exercise of the Protestant faith and expulsion of Protestant missionaries. This ultimately led to the virtual halt of all foreign missionary activities in all parts of Ethiopia during the occupation. But, ironically, the Italian period saw the most remarkable growth and expansion of evangelical Christianity in areas where missionary works had begun. In Wellega , where the Lutheran missionaries had been active, and in southern parts of Ethiopia, particularly in the Welayta-Kembata-Hadiya triangle, where the SIM missionaries were functioning, indigenous grassroots Christian movements appeared.

### ***The People's Movement in the South: an Indigenous Impulse***

The history of this amazing popular religious movement in southern Ethiopia is associated with the SIM (the Sudan Interior Mission) missionaries. The SIM came to Ethiopia in 1918 when Dr. Dr. Thomas Lambie, a Presbyterian missionary from the US, started mission work in the southwestern parts of Ethiopia. Dr. Lambie entered Ethiopia called to service by one of the frontier district governors in the ravaging years

of *Ye-Hidar Beshita* (The Disease of November), a reference to the 1918 worldwide Spanish Flu.<sup>42</sup> Dr. Lambie set up his work at Sayo, Wellegea, with medical services and schools. He later expanded his activities in the former province of Illubabor. The work he initiated there eventually led to the formation of the Evangelical Church of Bethel.<sup>43</sup>

The arrival of Dr. Lambie inaugurated the modern missionary enterprise in Ethiopia by combining evangelism with social service. He later came to Addis Ababa and soon won the confidence of the Regent under whose suggestion he built one of the first modern hospitals in Addis Ababa in 1926.<sup>44</sup> The construction of the hospital brought great consternation, for Teferi experienced tremendous hostility from conservative forces of the ruling power elite and the clergy who viewed this project with great suspicion.<sup>45</sup> Lambie befriended not only the young Regent, but also the notables around the court and prominent provincial officials by providing medical care to them and their families. He used the strategy of relationship building and carefully avoided any attempt to convert them. Instead, he skillfully fostered relations of trust between him and the nobility through the preparation of festive occasions and social events to obtain their good will for mission work.<sup>46</sup> Dr. Lambie's most engaging dream was to open a mission station in the area of Jimma in order to evangelize the local population, and he made great efforts to prepare the hearts of the Regent and his close aides to launch mission works before setting out to the US to make arrangements for the task.

To advance the work of missions in Ethiopia, Dr. Thomas Lambie, together with other colleagues, Alfred Buxton and George Rhoad, set up a new mission organization

called the Abyssinian Frontier Mission.<sup>47</sup> This voluntary society soon ran into financial difficulties and did not survive long. In 1927, Lambie met Rowland Bingham, the founder of SIM, and shifted gears to become an SIM missionary and its Country Director upon his return to Ethiopia. Despite his painstaking efforts to win the friendship of the Ethiopian officials, Lambie did not find it easy to get permission to start up a mission station in the south. *Ras* Teferi, the progressive regent who was supportive of Lambie's enterprise, implored him to be patient until he was in full charge of the political affairs of the nation.<sup>48</sup> Lambie could not wait, knowing the unpredictable nature of Ethiopian politics. Hence, upon his insistence, the *Ras* wrote a carefully worded letter to *Dejazmatch* Biru, of Sidamo, in which he stated that he had allowed Lambie and his missionary colleagues to go to Sidamo to establish clinics and schools. The letter contained a caveat that the missionaries should not engage in preaching that went against the established faith of the Orthodox Church.<sup>49</sup>

Teferi, later Haile Sellassie, was very much aware of the implications of allowing foreign missionaries to open mission stations in the country. The ecclesiastical officials of the Orthodox Church had never been willing to see missionaries of other Christian persuasions operating in Ethiopia. They had been resisting even the works of Carl Cederqvist, renown for his philanthropic endeavor and his zeal for propagating the Gospel within the framework of the Orthodox Church. Teferi's caution, therefore, was legitimate, though it did not fully please Lambie. The Regent employed his political pragmatism of not offending foreign missionaries while at the same time expertly deflecting any anticipated hostility from an institution so entrenched in the society and strongly disposed to resisting innovations. Lambie accepted the grant with mixed

feelings. He was happy at the fact that the long delay and *dej tinat*, a tedious process of obtaining favor from officials through repeated visitations, was over. Yet, he bemoaned the restrictions placed on his work, because those restrictions forced him to engage more in institution building than thrusting all his energy on evangelization per se.

Dr. Lambie selected Sodo, in Wellayta, as the regional base to extend mission activities into the rest of southern regions. He set up clinics and schools in Kembata and Haddiya areas and gradually increased the presence of missionaries. For the SIM missionaries, extending social services did not mean subscribing to the then widely prevalent liberal theology of service encapsulated in the notion of Social Gospel. The institutions they were building and extending into other areas of Ethiopia had an evangelistic focus and agenda. Lambie and his supporters in America came from a conservative Christian group, for whom the fundamental tenet of the missionary enterprise was to bring salvation through direct evangelization. What evangelization in essence meant was, “reaching the lost person” through the teaching of the Gospel, leading him to the point of conversion, and drawing him to the “body of the Church”, all other things were subservient and secondary to this goal. Stuart Bergsma, a former missionary, makes this point clear when he stated, “the evangelistic, educational, and medical foundations in Ethiopia were laid by missionaries with real consecration to the fundamental task before them, the preaching of the Gospel, and with real vision toward the future.”<sup>50</sup>

The SIM began work in the south in 1928, and evangelistic activities provided the foundational explanation for operating clinics and schools. They recruited the earliest converts from Homacho and Sodo stations, respectively. The SIM, centered

mainly in the US and Canada, was an interdenominational mission-sending organization, drew support from evangelicals of fundamentalist orientations. Its philosophy of mission stressed conversion based on the preaching of the central facts of Jesus Christ's life, death and resurrection, the reality of which had to be expressed with a profession of faith and the attendant behavioral changes. Another important aspect of their philosophy was the stress put on new converts to form their own fellowships or congregations. Little is known about the identity and profile of the first converts. They may have been those working with the missionaries in the clinics and schools or aides within the mission compounds. Brian Fargher contends that the converts did not come from social outcasts or pariah groups, nor were they people who looked for material reward.<sup>51</sup> Records indicate that evangelistic outreach, at the start, included teaching the Gospel in the vicinity of their compound by the missionaries and local converts. This gradually evolved into undertaking itinerant preaching together with and supported by local converts. This later model, the one that emphasized sending out missionaries as opposed to attracting people to the mission compound, became the established pattern of the SIM missionary evangelization process.<sup>52</sup>

From the very beginning, the SIM missionaries emphasized that evangelism was to be accomplished by creating an enabling environment for local evangelists to cover as wide an area as possible. Their stress was not in depth, as was consistently demonstrated elsewhere in their mission work across different regions of Ethiopia. They were not bent on the production of local elite, including the raising of local theologians or learned pastors and evangelists. Rather, they encouraged local individual converts to witness to their friends, relatives, and neighbors by making use of

opportunities to spread the Gospel, such as weddings, funeral ceremonies, traditional festivities, market social gatherings, etc. This strategy of SIM was a strong legacy that the local converts appropriated and effectively used in the absence of the missionaries during the Italian occupation.<sup>53</sup>

The principles the SIM applied to the local church, often summarized as the “The Three Self ” (self-propagating, self-supporting and self-governing) helped initiate the beginning of independent congregations that basically had to rely on local leadership and resources to grow. The principles, which had already been developed by leading mission thinkers, Hennery Van of the Anglican Church, and Rufas Anderson of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, seemed to have a positive effect in southern Ethiopia, though it also had some constraints, taking into accounts local financial and educational contexts.

SIM missionaries taught their converts from the start that they should form their own congregations, separate from the Orthodox Church. This was unlike other missionaries, such as the Anglicans and Lutherans, who at the beginning did not see the need to create a separate institution, and therefore, handed converts to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The underlying assumption of both groups was that converts would be effective conduits to bring new light to the church by emphasizing the message of salvation. On the contrary, the SIM insisted on the separate existence of believers’ communities independently evolving into local community of believers or churches. The first SIM missionaries stressed the reality of conversion, the ethical transformation subsequent to conversion and the necessity of such converts forming a new social group.<sup>54</sup> What undergirds this position is its insistence that it is only faith in Jesus that

offers an individual the assurance of salvation; that salvation is exclusively available through the acceptance of Jesus Christ as one's savior by making a personal decisional commitment to express it. This was a view that had not been promoted by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, hence, the SIM's justification for a separate path.

This approach marks a closure to an old mission model and opens a new vision. So far, various Protestant missionaries had tried to work within the system of the national Church to effect change from within. Cognizant of the religio-political dynamics, early converts in the Southern Ethiopia (Kembata and Welayta) avoided the formation of a visible church institution. Instead, they started gathering under the convenient umbrella of *maheber*, (fellowship). The choice of such a rubric was significant for it symbolized the New Testament model of a small band of believers. It also works well with the traditional Orthodox model of socio-religious gathering formed around favorite patron saints. They also deliberately avoided the use of the term *Bete Krestiyan*, to refer to the church building, and opted instead for the term *Tselot bet*, prayer house. They also referred to themselves as *amagnoch*, meaning believers, or *Yesu mana*, followers/men of Jesus, tactically avoiding the name *Krestiyan*, meaning "Christian," at least in the beginning. This was a strategy, which believers adopted in the 40's and 50's to stave off any possible backlash that could come from the established church.<sup>55</sup> The formation of an independent congregation of volunteers without a hierarchy and an ordained priest, meeting at a house without the *tabot*, was of course, a significant departure and a paradigm shift from the known Orthodox tradition.

Though the approach of forming a separate congregation brought the inevitable consequence of partial divorce from local culture because of its extractive nature, it

helped generate an independent self-propelling grassroots movement, which eventually produced one of the largest evangelical Christian communities in Ethiopia. What partly contributed to the success was the missionaries' working among the southern peoples of Ethiopia, who had experienced some form of social and political marginalization and the legacy left by the Orthodox Church in the areas long before the advent of the SIM. Religious changes were already in train at the time of the arrival of the missionaries.

Local prophets, such as Esa Lala, from Gamu, had been preaching since 1924 at market places and public occasions on themes of repentance and submission to one God, *Megeno*, the Creator.<sup>56</sup> He had been admonishing the people to fast on Fridays and present sacrifices of honey to the Creator, and stay away from local diviners on Sundays. He did not belong to any organized institution, traditional or Orthodox Church, but he spoke from the margin with messages that have strong resonance with Christianity. Esa Lala, *Sheik Zakaria* and Kumsa Kiti in Wellega, are characteristic examples of what can be referred to as "fault line" movements. In general, fault line movements take place along fissures or cracks in established orders, caused by internally induced crisis situations or a systemic failure due to external shock that would result in the temporary decline of the power that runs the system.

There were other local "prophets" such as Gada Kao, who showed up in the late 1920's with a similar message but with eschatological overtones.<sup>57</sup> The local "prophets," who traveled far and wide delivered messages that focused on repentance and called for spiritual renewal. They bitterly attacked local religious beliefs and practices, such as worship of objects, offering of sacrifices and consultation made with the *Qalicha*, local diviners. The rise of such local prophets and popular preachers



created both an air of expectancy and openness for renewed and vigorous spiritual experience at about the time the SIM missionaries arrived in the southern regions. There was something “in the air,” which fortunately the missionaries understood and made use of.<sup>58</sup> There are interesting parallels in southwestern parts of Ethiopia, where local prophets such as Kumsi Kuti also rose up preaching eschatological messages in Geez, Amharic, and the Oromo languages. He strongly attacked the Orthodox Church for its indifference to the plight of the people.<sup>59</sup>

The new church movement that developed in the areas of Welayta and Kembata, during the Italian period, with spill over on to larger sections of southern Ethiopia, should be seen against this background. The new grassroots evangelical movement arose in the vacuum created by the absence of the missionaries, forced to leave the area by the Italians in 1937, and the de-centering of the power of the Orthodox Church resulting from the Italian interlude. The Italians spread propaganda against all Protestant missionaries, vehemently so against the SIM group accusing them of working under cover for the British and US intelligence in Ethiopia. It can however be noted that the real motive of the Italians for expelling Protestant missionaries had to do with security issues. From the perspective of the Italians, safeguarding their security demanded eliminating contenders, “to exclude all foreign influences from their newly acquired, precariously held empire in the vain hopes to establish the Catholic Church as the ‘national church’ in the country.”<sup>60</sup> The Protestant missionaries, with their connections to different western countries, presented a serious threat to the Italian rulers.

***The Italian Interlude: Converts, Persecution and the New Wave (1937-1941):***

The indigenous evangelical Christian communities, small as they were, organized themselves around key local leaders and continued the process of evangelization. As informants indicate, the converts felt duty-bound to spread the faith. According to informants, the new faith brought for the believers not only salvation but also liberation from traditional oppressive structures, healing and a sense of worth in a socio-political milieu that legitimated social inequalities. In short, it was a religion that they embraced as theirs. The informants I spoke to in the Gamu and Sidama areas observed that this was the religion they had voluntarily embraced and the one they felt spoke to their local historical and social conditions.<sup>61</sup> They considered engaging in mission endeavors as the most fundamental component of their new Christian life. They reasoned if the white men came this far to spread the secret of the Book, the good news, we must be good stewards of that commitment by following their example.<sup>62</sup> There soon emerged lay leaders and evangelists multiplying in an increasing number throughout the years.<sup>63</sup> From them emerged local missionary-evangelists who traveled far and wide cutting across various tribal groupings to preach the Gospel to diverse communities, supported by their local congregations. An interesting feature of these local missionaries was the fact that they were both farmers and evangelists. The provision the local missionaries received include financial assistance in cash, labor supports to families during farming and harvest seasons, and strong psychological reinforcement through the blessing of the leaders and recognition of services as they set out for a mission work.

The local missionaries formed small congregations, autonomous enough to move freely and duplicate themselves. What brought about the astounding growth of this movement, from a few to thousands upon thousands? Though it is difficult to find an adequate explanation, I shall attempt at least, to provide the social and historical contexts that generated and shaped the movement.

To fully understand the intriguing growth of Christianity in southern Ethiopia during the Italian occupation, one has to take into account the fissures in the old political structure and the attempts of the Italians to emphasize them through their propaganda. The Italians adopted a strategy of dismantling the Orthodox Church by condemning it as instrument of oppression and as an enemy of the people.<sup>64</sup> Though they were forced to accommodate with the influential institution at a later period, the Italian officials initially used terror, killing and torture of priests and supporters of the Church to weaken its image. They broke the Church's historic link with Egypt with the view of making it a dependent institution. The Italian officials tried to make the Orthodox Church serve their propaganda through paid and privileged collaborators. The Italians also presented themselves as champions of the oppressed people including the Ethiopian Muslims who had not been given a fair share in the political and social life of the nation. By launching their anti-Amhara campaigns they pretended to favor the historically disfranchised ethnic and religious groups, thus politicizing ethnicity and religion

The population in the south were aggrieved at the way local rulers and the pillars of the *Neftegna Gebar* system had treated them in the past. The *Neftegna Gebar* system was an exploitative land tenure relationship established between the more or

less peasant soldiers of Menelik, referred to as *Neftegna*, (gun men settlers), and the local inhabitants following conquest of the southern provinces in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The collapse of the old system due to the Italian interlude, the lifting up of the older oppressive structures and the relative easing of social conditions found in between the breakdown of the old system and the institution of the new Italians rule, created opportune moments for the new religious movement to assert itself. The decline of the power and influence of the Orthodox Church resulting from the de-centering process of the old political system, was another important condition that gave the movements more latitude to expand. In short, the disruption of the old political system and the temporary power vacuum created in the religio-political space engendered a condition of relative autonomy that promoted self-propelled initiatives.

The worth and new badge of identification that the evangelical faith conferred to the recently conquered people, whose self image had been somewhat tarnished by the condition of conquest and the establishment of the *Gabar* system was another motivation for the people of the south to jealously guard the faith and spread it to those who also shared similar historical experience.

Moreover, the legacy of the SIM, especially the principles of the “Three Self,” were of considerable significance in empowering the local people and to engage in self initiated religious movements with self generated resources. Last, but not least, a factor that should not be overlooked in the context of the new religious movement is the contribution of the Orthodox Church. Neither the local wandering missionaries nor the people they were preaching to were operating in unfamiliar religious space. The Orthodox church had already disseminated the basic ideas of Christianity. In fact, some

of the converts included men whom Trimmingham considered to have come from “nominal” Orthodox background.<sup>65</sup> The seeds of Christianity had been sown in these regions long ago. Through the centuries, there has been a steady decline in the strict observance of the Christian faith. According to Cornwallis Harris, who visited Ethiopia in the early 1840’s, the southern regions extending from Gurage, all through Kembata, Welayta further south up to Sidamo, had significant numbers of people claiming to be Christians though with visible signs of degeneration because of the absence of priests providing sustained teachings.<sup>66</sup>

We also need to consider the fact that the people of the South shared a supreme God, *Megeno*, *Tosa*, and *Waka*, and a rich spiritual foundation that supported the observation that something was already in the air. Neither the SIM missionaries, nor indigenous peoples that followed them had to start a new script on a blank sheet, into the empty face of a vacuous cosmos. That would mean that the missionaries had no need of starting from scratch to lay the groundwork of teaching about the concept of God.

The concept of “fault line” is useful to employ in this situation too. The traditional religions of the local people and the Christian faith as presented by the Orthodox Church had come into conflict; and the encounter had created a state of limbo. This situation of limbo made the Southern population in Ethiopia predisposed to the message of the missionaries. Apparently, the people of the south, in some ways, felt that the missionaries did not bring God to their lands, but their God brought the missionaries to them.<sup>67</sup> These are some the contexts within which one can view the new

faith movement and the spread of the evangelical Christian faith in southern Ethiopia in the Italian period.<sup>68</sup>

It is difficult to explain how a movement with a seemingly so little chance to become a movement, expanded so widely in such a large area, in such a short time span. For instance, there was not a strongly instituted formal leadership prior to the departure of the missionaries to coordinate a movement on such a scale. There were, however, elected elders in charge of small *Tselot bet* and *Maheber* who could potentially fill the role. The leadership had to emerge among these believers. Second, the only Scripture they had in their hand was a copy of the translation of the Gospel of Mark. Most of those who were involved in the evangelization process were men who had not gone through formal education, but quickly learned the Amharic alphabet out of eagerness to read and teach the Bible. They used leaves and plants as paper and sharpened wooden sticks to serve as pens to copy the portion of the Gospel in their hands.<sup>69</sup>

Playing one of the most important roles in the diffusion of the Gospel along in several corners of the southern region were the Welaytas. Why the Welaytas took so much interest in evangelizing others is something that needs to be carefully investigated. The fact that the Welayta language was spoken widely among the people of the south, the historical heritage of a their once powerful kingdom, and perhaps the proclivity of the Welayta people to venture out into new areas, be it for demographic reasons or as a basic feature of their social and cultural traits, may have been some of the contributing factors.<sup>70</sup> It could also be suggested that the Welayta people, who are one of the earliest recipients of the Gospel, developed a sense of missionizing others, particularly their neighbors who shared many common cultural and historical traits.

Ironically, the absence of the missionaries and their erstwhile supporters, also became a push factor for the people's movement. The messages of the Bible were re-appropriated and contextualized almost, at times, with the risk of some theological errors.<sup>71</sup> Accounts of casting out of demons, as narrated in the Bible, were taken literally and applied in the social realities of their daily lives. The local preachers' message focused on destroying the power of "evil spirits," the forces of "darkness", and freeing people from the bondage of the oppressive "dark forces" and releasing them to experience God's salvific power through grace.<sup>72</sup> They reasoned that if Jesus could deliver the soul from sin and the body from sickness, they could also if they had enough faith.

The missionaries had not seriously dealt with the issue of handling the spirit world, though it was an integral part of the daily lives of the people of the South. The SIM missionaries, with a western intellectual mind-set, had not encouraged such practices in the past. Hence, their absence became a blessing in disguise for interpreting Biblical teachings in their own local contexts. The message of deliverance from evil spirits and successful power encounters with the forces mediating them, local diviners, the *Qalichas*, and *Tenquai*, the local equivalents of witchdoctors and conjurers, had resonance with the people.<sup>73</sup> The practice of curing sickness through prayers and the laying on hands, also part of Biblical healing narratives, were also employed where found suitable.

Based on their past cultural and spiritual experience, local ministers brought their own theological perspectives to the teaching of the SIM missionaries. From the point of the local population, receiving healing, be it from physical or spiritual malaise,

through prayer, unlike the costly venture of visiting *Qalichas* was not only beneficial, but was also a concrete demonstration that the gospel was a message of deliverance, a good news message internalized with power. “Agency” is key to the explanation of how local ministers addressed the needs of the community, realistically and not abstractly. The mundane and tough world of rural life is rife with fighting countless diseases, challenging the intermediary spiritual forces, dealing with relational and social conflict situations and tackling issues of poverty. In the worldview of the rural peasant communities, these conditions are believed to have connections with the intrusive influences of the evil forces. Local ministers were influential, for they spoke to their communities in forms familiar to the people addressing their existential needs, based on insights derived from primal imagination. For them religion was the here and the now, a practical matter but hardly a pietistic approach only to life.<sup>74</sup>

The local missionaries also developed an indigenous style of preaching where they narrated gospel stories applied to the situation of the listeners through responsive chants.<sup>75</sup> Their method of communicating the Gospel was simple enough to be understood by the ordinary man for they were unencumbered by a sophisticated theology. Primarily, they preached messages that attacked sin and the devil, and insisted on repentance and return to God to avoid eternal suffering and damnation. Messages presented through song styles, and repetition of words, were easy to remember and compatible with the culture of orality, characteristic of pre-literate societies.<sup>76</sup>

Local evangelists, Mehari and Abagole Nunemo being prime examples, used testimonies of healing and deliverance from sickness and the power of evil forces to



testify to the power of God in manners congruent with local narratives. Such preaching made great impressions on the people. They also began to compose and sing antiphonal music in which the leader would sing a stanza with a Biblical message or exhortation, and the congregation would sing the refrain, an effective method of transmitting the gospel to illiterate societies.<sup>77</sup> The songs born out of local experiences, steeped in the local culture, profound in meaning, were suitable to be sung by any one. Of all the conditions that facilitated the expansion of Christianity, in the South during the Italian period, the emergence of local missionaries who preached the Gospel using popular languages and locally intelligible idioms constitute the most significant one. The local people received well the messages of the missionaries as they were taught by one of their own men who were not distinguishable in any manner from them. They could recognize that the evangelists engaged in spreading the faith at a considerable disadvantage to themselves, with out any foreign backing and without supporting mission outposts.<sup>78</sup>

For those local missionaries who chose the road of becoming itinerant preachers, whom Fargher describes as “Missionary-Evangelists,” their exercise gave them a new space for self-initiative.<sup>79</sup> Many informants from the South maintain that the popular religious movement and the conditions that gave rise to it provided new historical opportunities for self-expression and autonomous initiatives.<sup>80</sup> For the people of the South at large, the message of the Gospel was found to have a liberating significance and an empowering statement that opened for them a new vista of self expression, whose terms of reference had not been dictated by outsiders, except by the standard of the message and their own conditions of life. The teachings of freedom and

equality that the preachers communicated, the fascinating conception of the idea of new birth and the hope of eternal salvation provided the people with the resources out of which they forged a new set of values. There was freshness in the new -found way of self-understanding that led to mass enthusiasm.<sup>81</sup> Fargher points out that the Bible was one of the provocative symbols of the new liberty, which the believers discovered, a visible indicator that they had gained a new freedom.<sup>82</sup> Hence, viewed from this vantage, the new movement could not be explained in religious terms alone. They read the message of the Bible and interpreted it from the margin.

The movement's spectacular expansion drew the attention of the Italians who had no clue about what was going on, and hence, saw it as a covert expression of a resistance movement. Local colonial officials even suspected that the movement might have some kind of connections with the Ethiopian patriotic forces. Arising from this assumption, the Italians began to brutally suppress the religious movement. Church leaders were arrested and imprisoned; some were flogged and physically abused, while a small number of them were martyred. The brutal treatment concentrated on key leaders. According Bingham, they “ received lashes that tore their backs” and were kicked in their faces with hobnailed boots. The soldiers mocked the faith of the prisoners by jeering statements like, ‘Where is your God.’<sup>83</sup>

The believers had suffered persecution prior to the Italians, both by the adherents of the Orthodox Church and patrons of the traditional religion whose influence and power had been declining as the converts to the Christian faith shifted their allegiance to the new faith. Yet, it pales in significance compared to the severe persecutions the Italians inflicted on them. The Italian persecution had the unintended

consequence of multiplying the number of the Christians. Moreover, it led to renewed solidarity amongst the believers and firmed their commitment to hold on to their faith and to share it with others. The believers organized themselves and coordinated their activities tribally, locally, regionally, even nationally by networking with other evangelical Christian communities as far as the capital city of Addis Ababa and southwestern parts of Ethiopia.<sup>84</sup> This laid the embryonic structure of an alliance of evangelical Christians at the national level. According to Wondiye Ali, this persecution experience of the Christians of the South was an important factor for the shaping of their identity, both as believers and as people of the South subjected to a common experience.<sup>85</sup>

#### ***Post War Events (1941-1950's):***

When the SIM missionaries returned to Ethiopia following the restoration of independence, they visited their former missionary site. They were confounded by the amazing expansion of the congregations and increase in the number of people who had embraced the new faith. Estimates of converts prior to the departure of the missionaries, according to various sources, were approximately one hundred men and women.<sup>86</sup> This small beginning, however, had risen to tens and thousands at the time of the re-entry of the missionaries in the early 1940's.<sup>87</sup> The SIM returnees reckoned that such a mammoth accomplishment would have required a huge amount of missionary labor and resources. They could find no logical or logistical account for such a remarkable growth. Hence, they shifted their attention to spiritual phenomenon.<sup>88</sup> All things considered, it is difficult, if not impossible, to explain the spectacular growth. Consider

for instance, the lamentations and the confidence expressed by a missionary who had served in the area prior to the Italian expulsion:

As these white workers were compelled to relinquish the task, we shall come to the place where we cannot even obtain news of these little indigenous churches. Without sensational answers to prayers, without encouraging reports, without photographs and lanternslides, can we and you go on through the years upholding them before the Throne of Grace? If we can, what a blessed reward will await us. So we leave these dear Christians to the care of the Holy Spirit and to the guidance of God's Word, portions of which at least they have access to.<sup>89</sup>

This quote typifies the anxiety and deep perplexities of those missionaries who had previously been in Ethiopia. They had virtually no idea of the church's expansion, which had been taking place in their absence. Denied any communication with the natives, they used prayer, the only means at their disposal, which they did, as evident in the quote, in good faith and with a sense of anticipation.

It was this "peoples movement" that set the dynamics for the growth of an evangelical Christianity in the southern parts of Ethiopia, a ground that later expanded to cover areas as far as the former provinces of Sidamo, Gamu Gofa and to a certain extent, Kaffa.<sup>90</sup> Its momentum generated such a chain reaction that the missionaries who returned to the area followed its direction and pattern. The restoration of the old order with the return of Emperor Haile Sellassie, however, presented a temporary obstacle that stemmed the tide of the religious movement. The Evangelical Christians of the south were not prepared to relent to any pressure with respect to the exercise of their religious freedom. The pre-war social and political structure was restored in the southern regions, albeit gradually.<sup>91</sup> Local officials were recruited from the center as was the case during the pre-occupation times. The national, Church considerably

weakened during the Italian period, automatically assumed its former position in the society. Patterns of unequal social and economic relations that temporarily suffered disruption during the Italian period came back alive. The relative social autonomy the southern people experienced in the war interlude waned with the restoration of central authority. Inevitably, there developed a clash of culture and ideology, which expressed itself along religious lines.<sup>92</sup>

Evangelical Christians, though surprisingly high compared to the pre-war period, still constituted a small minority, and hence, the need to create a united alliance on a much firmer and broader basis. The endeavor to forge a strong organization required a persistent process and an increased commitment. At the regional level, the scattered evangelical Christian communities had to come together under one umbrella. This required a unified level of initiative that had to be pursued vigorously. The efforts that the various leaders made to create a common fellowship culminated in the birth of *Ye Wengel Amagnoch Andenet Maheber* (The Association of Evangelicals), which became the embryo of an ecumenical movement. On the national level, leaders of the evangelical Christians began to extend their contacts with their counterparts in Addis Ababa and elsewhere in Ethiopia. Though the ecumenical venture had an earlier precedence, it was the perceived threat of the restoration of the old order that catapulted the leaders' move to forge a stronger unity within and among likeminded faith communities.

In fact, the lay leaders who had been coordinating the movements at various levels tried to network with leaders of the various evangelical Christian communities to form a unified single evangelical church of a national standing. This was a marvelous

venture that had been initiated during the Italian period though it did not go any further than sporadic secret meetings.

Their great efforts to establish a united evangelical church in Ethiopia, which were aimed at bringing all denominations under a unified national umbrella teetered and eventually came to a standstill due to the continued opposition from the Orthodox Church and the disinterest the foreign missionaries had shown toward the idea. The foreign missionaries, whose interference at times presented obstacles, wanted to maintain their denominations; hence they did not encourage their parishioners to form a unified church for Ethiopian evangelical believers.

#### ***Ecumenical Initiatives (1941-1959):***

The impulse for establishing a united evangelical church in Ethiopia may have originated from the small but articulate group of Christians in the capital city, and from the Christian communities in the southwestern parts of Ethiopia. During the Italian period they had been subjected to similar persecutions, and also had experienced remarkable growth and expansion. In Addis Ababa, the mission work of Cederqvist, namely the English school he opened, and his medical services had produced some converts who started to congregate at his compound near Sidist Kilo under the guise of "Evangelical Association." This congregation, attracted some young educated men and soon grew into a distinct evangelical community. It was the coming of Rev. Olle Erikson in 1921 that gave renewed emphasis to the process. Unlike Cederqvist, Erikson was a missionary who pushed for the creation of an autonomous evangelical church. Actively involved in this evangelical congregation were young men like Qes Gebre

Sellassie, who served as its first pastor and *Qes* Badme Yalew, and others such as Emanuel Gebre Sellassie.<sup>93</sup> These were the core leaders of the small congregation who had been in contact with the leaders of evangelical movements in Welayta, Kembata, Wellega Illubaor and other parts of Ethiopia. They maintained links with men like Gidada Salon (father of the ex-President, Negasso Gidada), Daefa Jemo, Mamo Chorka, Biru, Dubale, Shigute and Sabron, all prominent leaders in the people's movement in the South during the Italian period. They also established some form of mutual assistance union to help out one another and express solidarity during the peak moments of the Italian persecution. It was these men who had been involved in ecumenical initiatives in earlier situations who later took great effort to bring unity within the various evangelical groups from, such as the Lutheran, Presbyterian and SIM backgrounds.<sup>94</sup>

The vision of creating a national evangelical church which drew its impulse from the late 1930's and from the exigencies of the Italian rule, carried on after the restoration of independence; and it did so with much gusto as the drive for unity increased. Key leaders representing various denominations held independent consultations in various places, in the capital city, in Wellega and other sites as of 1944. As their periodic conferences progressed, they even prepared draft constitutions and discussed modalities of structures for a united evangelical church. The committee members laid out Spiritual and Temporal Statutes, representing the rudiments of a constitution for the Evangelical Church. These statutes, which established common templates, a set of rules of admission, observances of rituals and manners of settlements of disputes, served as temporary guideposts for members representing various

evangelical groups participating in the ecumenical enterprise.<sup>95</sup> As an indigenous initiative, the leaders even considered the traditional Orthodox structure, if not its doctrine, as a model for laying out the structural setup of the church to be founded, as their various minutes indicate.<sup>96</sup> Unfortunately, the strong ecumenical movement that was building up later lost vitality and petered out as local dynamics changed. The Orthodox Church began a policy of aggressive evangelization to counter the new surge of the evangelical faith, especially after the mission decree of 1944. The return of the missionaries and the spirit of denominationalism which they fostered, was one of the new circumstances that presented major hurdles for the realization of the vision of unity among evangelical Christians.<sup>97</sup>

### ***The Emergence of National Evangelical Churches: Formation and Development 1921-1959***

#### ***The Case of the Mekane Yesus Church (MYC):***

In 1938, the leaders of the evangelical Christians from the Lutheran background in Ethiopia announced their intention to the SEM missionaries in Sweden to form an independent church. The leaders indicated that the local church had come of age and was ready to go on by itself under the Ethiopian leadership. They made this request known to the Swedish missionaries in the circumstance of the Italian occupation. The Swedish missionaries granted the request with grace. In 1941, the Evangelical Congregation, under *Qes* Bademe, its first minister reorganized itself separately from the Swedish Evangelical Mission.<sup>98</sup> This was a significant watershed for it marked the formation of an independent evangelical church, marking the birth of a national evangelical church. This event also had a nation-wide significance, for the leaders of



the church had the foresight to think on national terms to go beyond denominational loyalty to engage in the vision of creating a united church of evangelicals. The new national leaders such as Emanuel Gebre Sellassie (later Doctor) and *Qes* Bademe Yalew took great efforts to bring together Ethiopian evangelical Christians, regardless of their different doctrinal and mission backgrounds under one national umbrella. Despite some obstacles, the leaders initiated a common constituency of evangelical Christians in a form of annual conventions of leaders that adopted the Conference of Ethiopian Evangelical Churches (1944-1954). The church was officially established in 1959, under the Ethiopian Evangelical Church of Mekane Yesus (EECMY). More known by its popular name, Mekane Yesus Church (MYC), interchangeably used in the dissertation, constitutes one of the largest evangelical denominations in Ethiopia today.<sup>99</sup> MYC has a unique history of being a church that has blended in its origin a Lutheran theology of salvation with liberal views of local culture and liturgical practices and rituals of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church such as infant baptism. This position of the Church has made her more open, ecumenical, and less conservative in orientation.<sup>100</sup>

### ***The Case of Qale Heywet Church:***

In the southern parts of Ethiopia, after post-war return of the missionaries, the momentum of growth continued unabated, the increase in the number of believers and their varied geographical distribution necessitated extensive reorganization.<sup>101</sup> Hence, despite their participation in the occasional ecumenical gatherings of the Conferences of Ethiopian Evangelical Churches,<sup>102</sup> other intervening circumstances impeded the zeal

for creating a single ecclesiastical organization. This situation resulted from a shift of focus, since the main thrust of the leaders' activity became the unification of scattered Christian groups of respective denominations. It was primarily for this reason that they set up in 1963 *Yewongel Amagoch Andenet Hebert* (Evangelical Believers' Association), from which the Qale Heywet Church evolved.<sup>103</sup> Until the period of the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution, denominational unification seemed to be the main focus of the evangelical movement.

The impulse for a nation-wide pan-denominational movement gradually assumed a parochial accent as the leaders channeled their drive and energy towards consolidating their respective congregations. This considerably slighted the vision of forming a united national evangelical church in Ethiopia. What undoubtedly reinforced this new course was the role of the missionaries in reorienting the movement's goal from one of ecumenical to that of denominational emphasis. The missionaries were in favor of maintaining their respective doctrinal and denominational lines, and as such did not see the emergence of a national church composed of all Ethiopian evangelicals as a priority in their interest.<sup>104</sup>

The Evangelical Christians failed to capitalize on the opportunity for unity presented by their persecutions during the Italian period, the common experience of alienation. Had such unity in the evangelical church occurred, the possibility of making ecumenical ties with the national church would have stood a better chance. Not only that, it would also have greatly enhanced the evangelical church's ability to play a greater national role. Thus the various evangelical groups followed their own separate paths, following their denominational lines, until the period of the Ethiopian revolution,

which again forced the church to seek venues of ecumenical solidarity in order to address the challenge of the Marxist regime. Nevertheless, the ecumenical spirit that was shared among the early leaders of the evangelical movement was a heritage of noteworthy importance for its contribution to the weakening of denominational consciousness so characteristic of Evangelical Christians in Ethiopia.

I have so far outlined the evolution of the evangelical Christian community in Ethiopia in four distinct phases: by outlining 1) the early missionary enterprise of Martin Flad's which led to the genesis of the first large number of evangelical Christian communities in modern Ethiopian history; 2) the evangelistic initiatives of the SEM among the Oromo of Wellega where the evangelistic efforts of freedmen and Eritrean Orthodox priests lay the foundation for the birth of the Mekane Yesus Church; 3) the advent of the SIM in Southern Ethiopia, the contexts of the peoples movement, and the background developments that eventually led to the formation of the Qale Heywet Church; 4) the broader contours of ecumenical ventures, opportunities for unity and challenges faced.

It has been possible to identify major corridors, along which the evangelical faith produced major significant religious impacts. These corridors were: the South and the Southwestern parts of Ethiopia. It is in these areas that the largest concentrations of evangelical Christians are found. There are some parallels that characterize the development of Christianity in the south and southwestern parts of Ethiopia. First, both areas represent the periphery, in the geographic and political sense of the word, as they were recently incorporated under imperial authority. Second, they were thoroughly rural areas inhabited by local farming communities. Third, lay leadership that emerged,

at least initially, did not constitute a literati group, though the former ex-slaves and the Orthodox priest, in the case of Wellega could be an the exception, for they definitely formed a local elite core group. In both cases, the native/national strain played significant role in the diffusion of the evangelical faith. The evangelical Christian communities in both cases experienced tremendous persecutions even more so under the Italian rule.<sup>105</sup> This persecution experience was a major event contributing greatly to the shaping of their identities as well as creating the context for forming mutual associations and solidarity groups.<sup>106</sup> The growth, in both cases, was facilitated by the temporary rupture of the ancient regime and the break up of the institutional pillars that had sustained it. Discontinuity in both cases allowed relative autonomy for self-initiative and movement of ideas. The absence of the missionary factor and the fact that during the Italian occupation the local people took charge of promoting the faith under tremendous difficulties led to a truer consciousness of the evangelical faith as a consequence of being left to stand-alone. The experience offered the local people a sense of ownership of the faith, which they jealously guarded even at the cost of torture and martyrdom. This experience lent them a sense of entitlement as to the direction of its future development. A similar process later unfolded during the period of the *Ethiopian Revolution* of 1974-1991, though by then a new generation of evangelicals urban, literate, and radical with greater organizational and evangelization skill had emerged.

**The enforced moratorium, which led to the temporary severing of links between local congregations and the missionaries and the cessation of financial support from abroad taught the people the value of independence and self initiative. That experience,**

“while bracing, was often an ecclesiastical blessing in disguise.”<sup>107</sup> This sense of heightened self control was something that even the returnee missionaries had to grapple with and handle wisely.<sup>108</sup> In both the south and southwestern Ethiopia, the evangelical faith went through some process of local coloring and a measure of indigenous identity, about which the missionaries held mixed feelings.<sup>109</sup>

What can be concluded about the religious movement that unfolded in the Italian period is that it represents a major shift in Ethiopian history. The movement stands out as one of the few moments in Ethiopian history where people took en mass autonomous initiatives in religious revivals on a large scale and in their own terms. The people’s movement of the south was a mass religious movement of an egalitarian type with a blend of several voices whose decoding requires closer study.

It is interesting to note that in the southwestern parts of Ethiopia the evangelical faith grew almost by default. Pioneer indigenous missionaries did not have an explicit intent to create a rival Christian church. They started their mission activities with a vision of working within the framework of the Orthodox tradition. That did not materialize because of the conflicting beliefs about doctrine of salvation that caused the inevitable rift, perhaps prematurely. The Mekane Yesus Church that came out of this experience bears to this day some of the marks of its Orthodox heritage as reflected in its liturgy, ritual calendar and baptismal practices, since its founding members decided to integrate their past religious tradition with the new evangelical church. In the case of southern Ethiopia, we see a contrasting picture. The Church in southern Ethiopia had its start from foreign missionaries of SIM background, and hence represents a somewhat

new beginning. The SIM missionaries definitely sought to create a separate congregation distinct from the established Orthodox Church.

Whatever the differences or the common ground evangelical Christianity in Ethiopia had its roots in the rural area amongst farming simple unlettered communities, in areas that, relatively speaking, were politically and economically marginal. Efforts to direct the movement towards unity, sought for by the nationals, did not materialize. As result, the development of evangelical Christianity in Ethiopia was limited to outlying territories largely remaining an ethno-religious phenomenon.<sup>110</sup> There were new dynamics that transpired in the 50's and 60's that set the stage for pulling the center of the movement from its rural home base to the urban areas. It was from these secondary developments that a new national strain of the evangelical movement emerged.

It is not easy to reconstruct the history of this new secondary development and capture its full dimensions as it has no single regional locus. Nor is it easy to trace and clearly identify the various forces and the agencies involved, for they were multi-layered in nature. It was the confluence of several factors that generated the spark. A brief presentation of the various factors that have contributed to this development is in order.

### ***Emperor Haile Sellassie I Post-Restoration Developments (1940's-1960)***

#### ***The 1944 Mission Decree and it's Contexts:***

The Italian interlude, albeit brief was both intense and decisive. It presented one of the most defining moments in Ethiopian history. Their ethno-centered colonial policy, which rhetorically claimed to appreciate linguistic and religious diversity stood

in complete reversal of the policy of the previous regime. Emperor The picture of Ethiopia was much more different during his return than when he had left it. It was imperative for Haile Sellassie to confront the challenge by introducing a new political discourse that would allow him to engage in an extended conversation with the changed socio-political reality of his country. In other words, he had to establish for his people a somewhat progressive and a much more enlightened sense of Ethiopian nationhood that implicitly acknowledged diversity and reinforced his own image as a great father.

Following his return from exile, Emperor Haile Sellassie embarked on a program of rebuilding his war-torn nation. There were several missionaries who wanted to take part in this reconstruction process. The Ethiopian government initially allowed entry only to those missionaries who had been operating in Ethiopia prior to the Italian interlude and temporarily suspended the entrance of new ones until the dust settled and a mission policy was formulated. Haile Sillassie saw the potential contribution of the foreign missionaries towards the expansion of education and medical facilities in Ethiopia. The status of modern education prior to the time of the restoration, to say the least, was lamentable. The national church, which had for centuries been the main purveyor of education, showed no interest in advancing the idea of a modern education and in building new scholastic institutions. For its part the government had limited financial resources to engage in school buildings in a predominantly illiterate society. In this situation, the missionaries had expressed interest in promoting education as a medium of entry for their evangelistic agenda. In fact, while still a regent, the Emperor had appreciated the services of the missionaries for his people and encouraged them by offering them land grants and financial subventions for establishing hospitals and

schools, despite the growing suspicion of the Orthodox clergy.<sup>111</sup> Haile Sellassie recognized the input of evangelical missions, and by showing interest in their welfare, he gave them an unprecedented standing in the country.<sup>112</sup>

The Emperor saw the need to establish the legal status of foreign missions. This stemmed from the pragmatic style of his leadership. He took stock of both his Orthodox constituencies that were openly hostile to foreign mission and the rising interest of missions to work in Ethiopia. On August 27, 1944 the Ethiopian government issued a mission decree that was to guide expatriate mission activities in Ethiopia. The imperatives for issuing the decree were two-fold: 1) to effect closer collaboration between the various agencies of the government and missions; and 2) to channel mission efforts into non-Orthodox Church areas to avoid overlapping.

According to the decree, the country was to be divided into two parts, “Closed Areas” and “Open Areas.” The so called “Closed Areas,” which were the exclusive preserve of the Orthodox Church, were areas located mainly in the north and central regions of Ethiopia. Places designated as “Open Areas,” mainly refer to the southern and the southwestern parts of Ethiopia, where the influence of the Orthodox Church was either weak or non-existent. “Open Areas” also include the lowland regions of the east and northeastern parts of Ethiopia where Islam was the predominant form of religion. In the first category, missions were also allowed to work provided that they engaged in activities that promoted social services. They could also offer religious instructions from the Bible as long as their messages were centered on the common elements of all Christian faiths and not reflect the view of a particular sect. The



missionaries were not allowed to engage in intentionally proselytizing believers who considered themselves to be adherent of the national church.

With respect to the areas designated as “Open,” interested missionaries operating in these regions could teach and preach the Christian faith of their own denominations without restrictions. This was a significant concession made to the missionaries compared to the one, which Dr. Lambie received in 1928. There were some limitations made nonetheless. One such limitation was that the missionaries should not engage in teachings against the foundational creeds and practices of the established Church. Language was a major concession, which missionaries had expected, but the decree made it clear that Amharic was the official language and hence was the only medium of instruction for teaching secular or religious education in Ethiopia. The decree explicitly forbade translation of the Bible into other vernacular languages. This policy remained in effect until the period of the *Derg*.<sup>113</sup> A significant concession made by the government to the missionaries was the designation of the capital city, Addis Ababa, as an “Open” area to all missions. The fact that the capital city was declared to be an open sphere for mission was a major advance that mission sources have not appreciated. Addis Ababa is not only a geographic and political center, it was the capital of ideas and new thinking too.

All things considered, the mission decree was of a great significance because, for the first time the mission situation/missionary factor received official state acceptance, in a society that had been unwilling to welcome missionaries. This was important all the more so, especially after the Italian invasion, since popular suspicion towards mission heightened following the revelation that certain Catholic priests had

been providing information to the Italians serving under the guise of missionaries.<sup>114</sup> Though the state placed certain limitations, missionaries for the first time in Ethiopian history obtained legal recognition to open development works, combining them with evangelism in the so called “Open Areas.” Not only that, allowing foreign missionaries to work even if with some qualifications is an acknowledgment of the dearth of local missionary energy and the implicit acceptance of the “civilizing” endeavor of Western missionaries. No doubt, this legal recognition did not mean that the missionaries operated without encountering hurdles at the local levels where the rubber meets the sand. Local religious and political dynamics presented challenges to the smooth functioning of the decree’s provisions as provincial and local rulers had little knowledge and understanding of its spirit and its application.<sup>115</sup> The decree also had the indirect effect of boosting the morale of the evangelical Christian communities in Ethiopia. The recognition given to mission work also signaled the acknowledgment of the existence and legitimacy of a Christian community that had resulted from earlier mission works.

On its religious side, Haile Sellassie’s long term interest was to establish the Christian faith, the religion of the Cross, as Abebe Fisshea calls it, over other forms of religions, especially Islam that has gained considerable boost during the Italian interlude. It also appears that the Emperor sought to instill new missionary zeal in the National Church by emulating the western evangelistic model that combined proclamation and development projects to reach new areas and cleanse Christianized areas from syncretistic practices.<sup>116</sup> On the other hand, the other parallel concern of the

emperor was to use the presence of missionary agencies in his country and to encourage them to fit into his plan of nation building.

The goal of the missionaries was also very clear. Both parties knew each other's interests and expectations. Yet, Haile Sellassie could not fully satisfy the interests of the missions and he was fully aware of its dangers and implications. The Orthodox clergy had not given their blessings to the advance the Emperor had made to the missionaries. It appears that echelons of the clergy groups grudgingly accepted the measure and accepted it reluctantly, since it was an imperial decree. The vague nature of the designation of "Open" and "Closed" areas provided some loopholes for local priests and local officials to interpret the provisions in their own terms and interfere with the activities of the missionaries.<sup>117</sup>

Haile Sellassie had to placate the clergy and members of his own cabinet with conservative leanings, particularly *Dejazmatch* Mekonnen Desta, and to a certain extent, Aklilu Habte Wold, who was closely connected to Mekonnen. The Emperor aimed at defusing the concerns of the clergy by stipulating some restrictions on the activities of mission organizations. In view of the prospect of opposition both from his cabinet and the clergy, Haile Sellassie agreed to make some compromises and endorsed regulations, which took into account his liberal perspective, the positions of the conservative forces around him, and the concerns of missionaries.<sup>118</sup> As has been aptly commented by, Grenstedt, the decree "acknowledged the Ethiopian Orthodox Church's priority over other churches but at the same time gave room for other churches in Ethiopia too."<sup>119</sup>

It is interesting to note that the decree makes no reference to the local evangelical Christian community in Ethiopia and their legal status. Hence, it can be said that since the decree gave more affirmation to the foreign missionaries than the nationals, it was also an exercise of image building in the international arena, for the focus was more outward rather than inward. Perhaps a fringe benefit of the government's recognizing the missionary enterprise in Ethiopian was the psychological boost it gave to the various leaders of the evangelical churches who sought to use the moment to increase their visibility by speeding up their ecumenical endeavors.

***The Advent of New Missionary Groups (1944-1960):***

Quite a number of missionary societies began work in Ethiopia after the passing of the mission decree that opened the door for their entries. Among the several mission organizations that came to Ethiopia in the 40's and 50's, I will consider the activities of those centered around urban areas that significantly affected the youth and the rising educated class with their specialized programs.

***The Bible Churchmen's Missionary Society (BCMS):***

The Bible Churchmen's Missionary Society set up a mission station at Mersabet along the Kenyan border to evangelize the semi-nomadic tribes of the Burji, Gebra and the Somalis. The principal figure behind the activities of the BCMS was Alfred Buxton who had been a missionary colleague of Dr. Lambie in the Abyssinian Frontier Mission. The Bible Churchmen's Missionary Society started work in Addis Ababa in 1934 with programs that sought to stimulate revival in the Ethiopian

Orthodox Church through the propagation of the Scriptures in the vernacular language and the training of young men and priests. BCMS restored its activities in the 1944 after it had been forced to leave the country by the Italians.

The works of BCMS missionaries essentially centered on training young men by opening Bible Schools. They had attracted many students in the capital city and other areas. In fact, the young Ethiopians who became associated with the missionaries' program formed a society known as, "The Society of the Followers of the Apostle" whose members engaged in evangelism in Addis Ababa and in the surrounding countryside. The Society began in 1944 with the purpose of establishing an indigenous band of evangelists to carry out Apostolic mission work in Ethiopia, the rationale of which was to raise native ministers who would engage in evangelistic activities more effectively than foreigners.

The practice of lay evangelism was a new approach that the BCMS were initiating in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. As David Stokes, a missionary from the BCMS admitted, "A foreigner cannot do the work of a national. It is essential that Christianity, even evangelicalism in a Christian land, should spring from the people themselves and not to be an imported product. Any reformation in the Church of Ethiopia must be brought by the people of Ethiopia themselves acting not at the bidding of foreigners, but on the impulse of their own enlightened convictions."<sup>120</sup> BCMS made it an obligation for the students to take Scriptural tracts and preach by going to distant villages as part of their training program.

The BCMS established various mission stations in Addis Ababa and other sites in the provinces. In Addis they set up schools for the sons of chiefs and dignitaries. In

Fitch (Shoa) and Hirna (Hararghe), they built Bible schools for men and women. In Asbe Teferi (Hararghe), BCMS established women-based evangelistic center. In Ticho, (Arsi), BCMS missionaries developed a Bible school with a dispensary attached to it. The principal thrust of the Bible schools was to provide foundational education on a systematic study of the Scriptures. The programs included supportive lessons such as devotional Bible reading, the study of the Bible book-by-book, basic Christian doctrines, church history, including the history of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, and church music.<sup>121</sup>

Closely working with the Orthodox Church, attracting young students, and training them on the basics of the Scriptures, the missionaries equipped many to be evangelists and itinerant preachers to an audience of the Orthodox Church.<sup>122</sup> By training laymen to be evangelists and catechists, the BCMS gave a new lease of life to the church's mission endeavor. Evangelism, the most important vector of church growth, was an office that has not been clearly spelt out in the tradition of the Orthodox Church until late in the 60's.<sup>123</sup> This is true of even in the former monastic tradition.

Ethiopian evangelists trained in the BCMS's Bible Schools were divided into two categories: preachers and workers. The preachers worked mainly in Addis Ababa while the workers were scattered in the countryside. The City Mission, which assigned preachers in Addis Ababa, sent evangelists in pairs into selected sections of the city. The preachers carried with them a handful of books and tracts for sale or free distribution. Though the speakers were expected to learn *Geez* and learned it at the training school, they were supposed to preach in Amharic, since it was the official language and the one most people would understand. A successful strategy they

employed was using public occasions such as the celebration of saints and religious holidays, important traditions observed by adherents of the Orthodox Church.<sup>124</sup> Observance of religious holidays and commemorative events of saints usually drew large crowds. They also used Market sites, street corners and churchyards as venues of preaching and pulpits.

This original experiment of BCMC, which Buxton calls “New Approach”, with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, however innovative, did not seem to have a major impact. In the first place, it did not receive the backing of the Patriarchate. The suspicion Ethiopians in general evinced towards foreigners, especially following the Italian invasion, also had a spillover into the activities of this particular missionary group. Their unusually creative approach of evangelization offended the sensibilities of the priests and the clergies who viewed the young evangelists with increasing suspicion and a sense of jealousy.<sup>125</sup> A new young group with modern education with a new genre of teaching emerged into the scene. The priests feared that those preachers and workers were going to undermine their privileged positions in the society. According to Stokes, the evangelists “met ridicule, curses, threats, and organized opposition; they are sometimes called before the authorities, civil and ecclesiastical.”<sup>126</sup> Stokes, who lived in Ethiopia for many years, as an eye -witness reported that the men even suffered social abandonment from relatives and including their own wives due to family pressure.

Over the years, interests to join Bible School flagged as the opposition continued, and as a result, the BCMS could not pursue their program effectively as originally designed. It is not really clear as to what happened to the young Ethiopians

who were trained and recruited as missionaries to serve in Addis and the rural villages. According to informants, some joined the Mekane Yesus Church because of the resemblance of some of its traditions to that of the Orthodox Church. Others joined other evangelical churches. Yet, a significant number of them seemed to have decided to remain in the Orthodox Church determined to stand for their commitment of bringing revival within it.<sup>127</sup> There are also those who became committed Evangelical Christians and joined some missionaries to serve as evangelists.<sup>128</sup> The young men who had come into contact with the BCMS in Mersabet training station, along the Kenyan border, became local evangelists recruited by the Norwegian missionaries who started mission stations in Borena and the surrounding areas following their expulsions from China in 1948.<sup>129</sup>

It is difficult to assess the impact of the BCMS upon the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the Ethiopian youth in general. There are some evangelical Christians who acknowledge that the services of the young Ethiopians and the missionaries had considerable influence on their lives. Informants point out that, their most popular magazine, *Mesikere Berhan*, enjoyed respect and a wide readership.<sup>130</sup> The missionaries had produced a wide variety of literature in Amharic as a critical component of their strategy of renewal.<sup>131</sup> It should also be added that the Ethiopian Revolution also gave the last straw to the BCMS activities. The missionaries left the country because of increasing government pressures and members of the Ethiopian Army of Jesus could not stay as distinct communities.



### ***The Coming of the Mennonites-Urban Missions:***

The next group that we are going to consider is the Mennonite missionaries from the US. What brought the Mennonites to Ethiopia was the need for relief assistance in the aftermath of the war. The Mennonites, as pacifists had not taken part in direct combat activities during World War II, but gave service for the war years in relief related works at home. This created a desire on the part of the Mennonites to prove to their fellow citizens and the world at large that they could help out others by going out into other countries far from their familiar zones. The Mennonite Relief Committee, Elkhart, Indiana, and Mennonite Central committee, Akron, Pennsylvania, sent short- term workers such as doctors, nurses, and administrators. The relief workers treated patients and trained health assistants, dressers, as they were known, to work in hospitals and smaller clinics in the rural areas.

The first crew of Mennonite missionaries arrived in 1945 bringing a shipment of clothing and medicine to Nazareth, a strategic town close to Addis Ababa. In 1946, a five-year contract was agreed upon with the government as a result of which a hospital, named after the famous Ethiopian patriot, Haile Mariam Mamo, was established. The Mennonite missionaries also served as teachers in government schools as early as 1948 due to shortage of skilled instructors in the country. Daniel Sensenig and Dorsa Mishler, amongst the first crew of the Mennonites relief missionaries, solicited permission from the government to begin mission work instead of relief, including teaching the Bible with an evangelistic emphasis. During one of his visits to the town, the Mennonites verbally expressed their request to the Emperor. The Emperor agreed to

give the missionaries an audience for further consultation. One of the Mennonite missionaries who met the Emperor observed, “The assuring smile, which the Emperor had given us when our desire for a mission work was mentioned was very important to all of us in our Relief Unit. This was the first tangible encouragement we had received for the establishment of a Mennonite mission in Ethiopia.”<sup>132</sup> This was communicated to the Secretary of the Mission Board whereupon the Mennonite Eastern Board composed an official letter that indicated the need of the mission to “enlarge their present program to include an evangelical mission service.”<sup>133</sup> On June 7, 1948 the two missionaries received a private audience with the Emperor at the end of which they received his assurance that he was prepared to give them mission status on a long-term basis.

A vexing concern of the Mennonite missionaries was where to start the mission work in Ethiopia. By the time the Mennonite missionaries were beginning mission work, the areas designated as “Open” had already been carved out by an arrangement, called ‘Comity’. The Comity worked between the government and the various mission agencies operating in Ethiopia in 1945. The arrangement assigned specific areas to specific missionaries so that there would not be activity overlaps and a duplication of services. The purpose of delineating spheres among the various missionaries was mainly to avoid encroachments and unnecessary strife and competitions among various mission. By and large, the southern and southwestern regions had already become the operational grounds of Lutheran, SIM and Presbyterian missionaries.<sup>134</sup>

The Mennonites, having limited alternatives, explored all options in the Muslim inhabited region of Hararghe provinces. They visited sites along the Ogaden region, and

finally settled in the highland regions of Deder and Bedeno, and later including Dire Dawa, one of the most strategic towns in Eastern Ethiopia. Thus began the official mission work for the Mennonites in Ethiopia with specialized programs that primarily took into account the contexts and needs of urban situations.<sup>135</sup>

In 1950, the transfer from Mennonite Relief Committee to Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities was completed and the government granted the mission permission to expand beyond relief and medical services the year after. The grant included education and evangelism, which was not full mission privileges as such, but a legal permission to teach the Bible to the hospital's medical assistants, paving the way for Ethiopia to be one of the largest fields of the Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities in Africa.

The town of Nazareth, which the Mennonite chose as their primary station, is one of the strings of towns along the railway forming a secondary hub through which grain from the former provinces of Arsi and Bale flowed to the terminal markets of Harar and Dire Dawa. It is a gateway to the south and a junction point of many ethnic groups. Nazareth and the surrounding areas fell in the category of "Closed" areas, forcing the Mennonites to adopt a cautious approach of accomplishing their missionary objective in this town of vital significance. The mission stations set up by the Mennonites in Deder, Bedeno, and Dire Dawa, however, were located in the eastern parts of Ethiopia. As these areas were predominantly inhabited by Muslims, they were also classified "Open" areas, where the missionaries had permission to do evangelism. They established schools, clinics and rural community projects. Overall, the Mennonite missionaries working in these areas did not achieve significant impact in terms of their

main mission goal of evangelization and church “planting.” In a report composed in 1975, Carl laments the fact that “after 29 years of Mennonite mission activities at Bedeno there are only about 12 church members, mostly Amharas, and all are employees of institutions associated with the church.”<sup>136</sup> Arguably, there had been a small number of converts, especially from the Deder station and its vicinity, who later succeeded in becoming fine scholars and church leaders, examples of whom are such men as Million Belete, Tsega Wolde Mariam, Engeda Asfaw, Negash Kebede and Tilahun Beyene.<sup>137</sup>

In 1959, the Mennonites missionaries took over the bookstores that had been set up by the SIM missionaries and expanded their services. The bookstores, which operated under the name of Menno Bookstores, in Addis Ababa, Nazareth, and Dire Dawa, were extended with the intention of using them as critical corridors for the Mennonite evangelistic enterprises. These bookstores (locally known by their shortened name, *Menno*), located in strategic towns and sites, had one of the best collections of educational and spiritual resource material in Ethiopia. The missionaries hoped that they could serve as powerful magnets and tools to attract the Ethiopian youth. The Ethiopian youth, by this time, were developing insatiable appetite for both spiritual and secular reading material.<sup>138</sup> The generation of the 60's, demonstrated a remarkable quest for knowledge and guiding ideas, and reading constituted part of their new intellectual culture. Members of this educated generation looked upon books as major sources of enlightenment as well as pastime, and more importantly, useful tools to advance their educational and academic careers.<sup>139</sup> The *Menno* bookstores, the only Christian bookstores in Ethiopia, gathered high quality collections, judged by the

standard of the day, which enjoyed a high rate of popularity amongst readers. Million Belete, a man who had long connections with the Mennonites and who had inherited their legacy by establishing *Raei* bookshop, noted that the Christian bookstores had contributions beyond measure in distributing Christian literature, and consequently, the Christian faith among the emerging elite. Million acknowledged that he and many of his close friends, like Tsega Wolde Mariam, a prominent engineer who later became Director of the East African Office of World Vision, were its chief beneficiaries.<sup>140</sup>

The Mennonites were engaged in the establishment of significant institutions. In 1952, they founded a vocational and academic school for the blind known as *Merha Eweran* (center for the blind), in Addis Ababa. The center provided excellent academic and vocational training for blind students, consequently, many blind people had become successful in life through their education. It also became one of the places for young evangelical Ethiopians in Addis to congregate at a time when there had not been a common meeting center for like-minded believers. The Gospel choir organized by converts from the center broke new ground as they produced sacred songs that creatively fused modern and traditional elements in terms of melody, composition, and the instruments used.<sup>141</sup>

Another noteworthy achievement of the Mennonite missionaries was their involvement in the setting up of the Good Shepherd School together with the Lutheran, Presbyterian and Baptist missionary organizations. The Good Shepherd School, established in Addis Ababa in 1960, mainly catered to missionary kids as there were no major educational centers for them apart from the Bingham Academy of the SIM. The school established facilities and curricula that were compatible with the needs of the

children of for foreign communities.<sup>142</sup> It was a major contribution of the Mennonite in the area of institution building, despite the limitation of its scope and objectives. Until confiscation by the *Derg*, it continued to be a major educational center for raising kids of various missionaries and other expatriate staff in Ethiopia.

Though each of the above institutions made their contributions to the success of the Mennonite's mission in Ethiopia, they pale in significance compared to what they had been able to accomplish in Nazereth. It was in this strategic town that the Mennonites were able to make a notable impact in their mission history in Ethiopia.

In addition to the Haile Mariam Mamo Memorial Hospital, which the Mennonites had built as part of their relief objectives, they extended their work of creating modern institutions by setting up new centers for training health assistants in the Hospital's compound. The training institute, named Nazareth Dresser Bible School, opened in 1952 after obtaining a grant from the government for teaching the Bible alongside the medical courses. In the new institute, students could learn the Christian faith and its principles as a guiding foundation for giving care to the sick. The school had an innovative curriculum combining medical subjects, language instructions, carpentry, world religion and personal development designed to internalize evangelistic convictions among the students. In stressing the evangelistic thrust of the initiative, Chester Wenger, the missionary who advanced this new approach candidly stated, "May we never forget that, more important than healing bodies, is the saving of souls." <sup>143</sup>

The evangelistic purpose for beginning the training center was persuasively stated in a letter Rohrer Eshleman wrote to his supporters in the US: "...you can

readily understand how we covet these young people for the Lord. Our efforts here will be in vain if these eager youths do not consecrate themselves to the Lord....With your prayers, there can be a tremendous testimony to spread out over this country when the students graduate.”<sup>144</sup>

The school was open to all students who were interested in becoming health assistants, regardless of their religious affiliations. The Dresser School not only produced fine health assistants by the thousands, but also converts who took their faith across the empire. As attested by my informants, many of the students who were enrolled in the program became believers and this included Muslim converts like, Abdela Osman, Kalifa Ali, and Shemsudin Abdo, who also became effective conduits in the spread of the faith among their circles of friendship, kinsmen and their colleagues in their work places. As these young graduates went to different villages and towns many gave personal witness of their faith, passed on spiritual books and distributed tracts. Graduates of the dresser school received such good training that most of them became very successful in their medical as well as educational career. Some had even risen to the positions of prominent leadership, not only in Mennonite affiliated churches, but also at the national level. Witness the case of Dr. Tesfa Tsion who played a conspicuous role in the creation of the Fellowship of Evangelical Christians in the crucial years of the Ethiopian Revolution.<sup>145</sup>

The students received training to be health assistants or medical dressers as they were commonly called. Because they had good training, they also found it easy to obtain good work positions as dressers at the Wonji Sugar plantation. The Wonji Sugar plantation was established by the Dutch in 1952 and was followed by another one in

**Metehara near Nazareth town. The two estates, which were founded near Awash river for irrigation purposes, attracted thousands of migrant laborers across the country, mainly from the densely populated regions of the South where the influence of the SIM had been strong. It seems that the Mennonites had given considerable attention to the concentration of such a high number of migrants in a modern plantation farm with respect to their evangelization program. That was perhaps one of the main reasons that they encouraged students from the Dresser's school, even while they were on training, to go to the plantation to engage in evangelistic activities, such as witnessing, distributing Scriptural literatures, teaching and organizing small fellowships.<sup>146</sup>**

**The dressers played a key role in spreading the evangelical faith amongst the immigrant workers. They were able to convert a sizable number of the workers and organize Christian fellowship groups that evolved into churches in the early 60's. The migrant workers, who came from the south with SIM background, were very susceptible to evangelization or re-evangelization, as the case may be. The Christian workers from the SIM background significantly facilitated the efforts of the dressers in spreading their Christian faith in the Sugar plantations.<sup>147</sup>**

**The largest educational establishment, and the one with the most significant evangelizing impact was the Nazareth Bible Academy, built by the Mennonites in 1959. Again, like the Dresser School, the Bible Academy was the brainchild of Chester Wenger, who envisioned the Secondary School to be a place where students would learn not only academic subjects, but also moral lessons and vocational skills to enable them to make a successful living without being dependent on incomes derived from the state. The Bible Academy offered one of the best quality educational programs in the**



country; therefore, it attracted a large number of young people from all over the nation. A research done by one of the faculty members in 1982 showed that most of the graduates of the school enrolled in the university system and were able to gain respectable positions of leadership in the higher levels of Ethiopian society. The research disclosed also that many Bible Academy students made serious commitments of faith while in school. Moreover, the finding showed the commitments of the graduated remained intact through active involvement in the church.<sup>148</sup>

The Bible Academy, like the Dresser School, proved to be a major venue of evangelization. The two institutions had effectively served the main purpose of the founders. They became significant recruiting grounds for converts until they were taken over by the military regime.

Informants report that between the years 1946 to 1948, there had not been local converts in Nazareth. Missionaries like, Mishler and Sensenig were very careful to comply with the 1944 mission decree.<sup>149</sup> Following the establishment of the two educational institutions however, things changed. By 1959, according to some missionary reports, young men and women made up the greatest parts of the congregation in the regular services of the missionaries.<sup>150</sup> The Bible Academy became a convention center for the gatherings of revival meetings organized under Young People's Christian Life Conferences of the Mennonite church, which ran from the mid 1950's.<sup>151</sup> These special meetings became an integral part of the annual youth conferences held in the same compound drawing hundreds of young believers across the country. Later, in the 60's, the center extended its service to host revival conferences alongside its counterparts in Awasa, which later became a revival center

for young Pentecostals.<sup>152</sup> In keeping with this tradition the Academy also became a convention center for the ecumenical Pastors' Conferences, which sought to pull together leaders of the various evangelical churches during the hard days of the *Derg* until it was stopped by the threats of local political authorities.

***The Birth of a Local Church: The Meserete Krestos Church (1959-1971:***

Beginning in the early 1950's a small number of Ethiopians who had committed themselves to the Christian faith began to congregate with the missionaries in their Sunday worship services. For the most part, the early converts were employees of the Memorial hospital or those who worked as guards, kitchen workers or aids for the missionaries. The number increased as converts from the various training institutions and staff workers from evangelical background, mainly from the south, joined them. The mission station also established outreach programs by sending Christian students in groups to go out to evangelize under the sponsorship of the Young Peoples Christian Association. The students assigned on such missions would travel to the rural areas, to selected sites of the town, and to the surrounding sugar factories and preach the gospel on a regular basis.

The most successful outreach program that was of tremendous attraction to the youth in Nazreth was the Sunday School services, which had diversified activities for kids and the older youth. Activities of the Sunday School included art/drawing, crafts, music, recreations, English lessons, film shows, etc. The youth, especially from the neighborhood of the mission stations, were very much attracted by these programs and became regular attendants. As a consequence, a considerable number of them came

under the influence of the teachings of the evangelical faith and were gradually led to embrace the evangelical Christian faith, through the witness of the missionaries or through the influences of Ethiopian friends.<sup>153</sup>

Among those who made new commitments to follow and practice their Christian faith, some became preachers and evangelists. Some made their way into higher learning centers including the National University, playing pivotal roles in forming Christian youth groups and student fellowships. A limited number of them entered into academic pursuits and became distinguished scholars both in the fields of art and science. The latter charted out their lives along various paths as they progressed in life.<sup>154</sup>

What needs to be noted is that most of the young students came from the Orthodox family background. Some of them came from famous priestly families in the town. For instance, the fathers of Solomon Kebede, who later became a leading proponent of the Pentecostal movement, and Tilhaun Yilma, a leading scientist now residing in the US, were well known priests in the town of Nazareth.<sup>155</sup> Some of the young people who were converted through the various youth-oriented programs had even been serving as deacons of the Orthodox Church (example *Mariam Bete Krestiyen*) in Nazareth.<sup>156</sup>

There were both “push” and “pull” factors operating in the lives of those young men who were attracted to the faith. The pull factor was the modern services the young students received in the facility of the mission compound. Learning English or improving one’s skill in speaking English, for instance, was a strong motivating factor. The teaching of the Bible conducted in simple story styles both in English and

Amharic, the methodical study of the Bible which promoted participatory discussions allowing interpretations, the joy of friendship derived through the communal experience of singing new hymns and studying the Bible were other sources of attraction. There were also other life enhancing activities that were offered in the program that were of considerable lure to the youth. For example, value shaping lessons that stressed a good moral life and sound ethical conduct were found to be character-shaping for the youth of Nazareth who were facing the challenges of modernizing, new urban culture with all its disorienting influences.<sup>157</sup>

Conformity with disciplined life, which the evangelical faith demanded, contributed to a shift of life style which helped many young students concentrate more on their studies and thus excel in their academic performance. The radical character transformations exhibited by those who committed their lives to the new faith, especially those who had been notorious in the society for their anti- social activities, such as delinquents(*durie/rebeshegna*), alcoholics and drug addicts, had inspirational importance to the young boys who were looking for role models.<sup>158</sup>

Considering the “push” side, informants are of the opinion that they had been dissatisfied with the religion they had inherited from their parents.<sup>159</sup> The *Geez* language for them was something that reduced their faith to irrelevance. The teachings of the Bible, known as *Metshaf Kidus*(the Holy Book), had not been explained to them, and hence, the youth felt that they were inadequately informed about their faith. According to informants, they were also keen to notice the corruption and infighting going on within the clergy, the level of poverty of the priests, and the poor insight and lack of depth of the *debteras* (church literati) concerning Biblical teachings. Most of all,

the youth were offended by the moral laxity, lack of fervency of faith, and the absence of distinct marks in the life style of those who traditionally called themselves Christians. Some of the new features of life shown by converts to the evangelical faith were: disciplined life, the observance of strict moral rules and principles, abstention from alcohol and sexual misconduct, mutual love and solidarity expressed amongst each other. The latter provoked some questions to which they had to find some answers. Obviously, the views of the youth had already been tainted with modern thoughts gained from schools and the new variant of Christianity they had observed through the missionaries and their Ethiopian converts. Hence, their understanding of their own social and religious environment was based on shifted attitudes and an affected sense of perception.<sup>160</sup>

The Nazareth youth, for example, compared themselves and their situation with the claims of the missionaries and the local evangelical Christians concerning their faith and the way they applied its principles to organize their lives. They felt that there was a huge gap between the claims of their own faith and the experience of their lived every day life. According to informants, this perceived discrepancy was something that deeply grieved their religious sensibilities.<sup>161</sup> Hence, for the most part there was an element of intentionality and rational choice in the decision of the young folks of Nazareth who turned toward the “mission religion,” a popular designation of the evangelical faith in the 50’s. As many informants expressed, they did not want to stay locked in ignorance and poverty of religious ideas. From this perspective, therefore, they decided to choose knowledge, instead of ignorance, by which to guide their lives.

<sup>162</sup> This element of choice and freedom, applying one’s scruples based on the spiritual

archives of the past and the new insights gained, which the Pentecostal reinforced later on the late 60's, was a new element in the Ethiopian Christian tradition, that also fit well with the assertive mood of the day.<sup>163</sup>

When paying attention to the historical context in which this development was unfolding, one realizes that this was the time when the Ethiopian society was passing through social and cultural changes. This was a time when a literate force, educated outside the parameter of the church, had come into the social scene. The modernization of Haile Sellassie was affecting, though unevenly, many aspects of the Ethiopian society, particularly in the urban areas. In particular, the youth in major urban areas felt the intensity of the impact, because of their exposure to new ideas and new thinking patterns resulting from their modern education and encounter with new ideas through the media of print and films as well as contacts with foreigners. What the American sociologist Berger raises concerning modernity and its discontent in his various works holds some relevance to the situation of the Ethiopian youth in the 60's. The notion of social anomie, which he extensively deals in his *Homeless Mind*, is a useful one, for it provides partial explanation as to why the youth sought to navigate new routes to guide their lives in a cultural paradigm that was in transition due to the process of modernization and its attending stress.<sup>164</sup>

Modernity showed them what they lacked not what they had, and it gave the youth a new mind to see what they considered to be their weak point. **Lack** is a very useful concept to explain the transfer of allegiance of most of the Ethiopian youth from their former faith to an alternative faith as long as the alternative was present.<sup>165</sup> The drawing of the youth towards the evangelical faith was a lack-propelled initiative.

There is an Amharic proverb, which says, *alsheshum zore alu*, literally, they did not go far away, they just turned around. According to the perception of the youth, the transition was from a traditional faith they had to follow conventionally, to a faith that had more clarity, meaning and was perceived to be rational. They gave it a new accent, but did not turn against it. In essence, what had transpired was the kindling of elements of faith that had been latent or shadowed by tradition and ritual. As a participant of this transition in the early 60's aptly summarized, this definitely was in accord with the temper of modernity, a critical outlook fed by new ideas, in an impressionable age.<sup>166</sup> The newness that was felt in experiencing conversion, the shift of life that accompanied the decision to become a Christian, were things that did not exist in the past religious tradition. For Solomon Kebede and his friends, these decisions and experiences became marking points and served as constant reminders to keep their faith going and be accountable for a life style that it demanded.<sup>167</sup>

I would like to stress the fact that the missionaries who worked amongst the youth did not write on the blank face of an empty cosmos, but they built upon the spiritual experience bequeathed to the youth from their past. For the youth, it was the revelation of "the God they knew little about "the discovery of the secret of " the Book," that drew them to the faith.<sup>168</sup> They shifted away from the faith of their youth, essentially, because of their perception that so much was lacking in it. Solomon makes the observation that the youth were tired of repetitive rituals, the unexplained dogmas, restrictive taboos, and fasting restrictions placed on them without sufficient explanations. They were very critical of the slothfulness of local clerics, idleness the church had sanctioned through the veneration of saints among its adherents, especially

the rural population that forced people to abstain from work, and the Church's association with the certain saints.<sup>169</sup> All of these things meant a lot for a generation that was seeking changes in the socio- cultural, economic and political realms. The young generation was looking for something to guide them, a socio-moral compass and pragmatic template to cushion their transitions. The young generation in the 60's was seeking for a grand idea, and expressive faith, or philosophy of life, in short a redemptive uplift that would help them envision new possibilities of life, a meaningful faith, as opposed to standardized dogmas. If one summarizes the mood of the time, the youth were raising new voices which stressed a voluntary approach to adopting faith, which is based on personal freedom, choice and even convenience, as opposed to the obedential and communal approach, socially determined a-priori.

The Nazareth Evangelical Christians, who were a few in number at the beginning, formed a small fellowship in the early 50's. By 1958 the fellowship consisted of approximately 150 men. Eight years afterwards, the number rose to 700. There were also a small number of believers who formed small congregations at the four locations where the Mennonite missionaries were operating, namely: Addis Ababa (School for the Blind), Dire Dawa, Deder, and Bedeno. Besides these, there were similar congregations formed in the neighborhood of Nazareth. The ones located at the sugar plantations of Wonji and Metehara, which had been targets of local missionary activities sponsored by the Mennonites since 1958, can be cited as additional examples. The various fellowships, which were interacting and conducting outreach programs through their leaders, sent their representatives to the General Church Council that took place for the first time in 1958. Participants of this Conference elected an ad hoc



committee to promote contact among the various fellowships and to stipulate terms for strengthening their common bonds. They stated conditions for the creation of a national forum. The Participants also passed a resolution to meet twice a year.<sup>170</sup>

Another major conference convened in June 1959, brought representatives from the various local stations and missionaries from North America. The Conference that took place in Nazareth between June 17th and 19th, was a landmark for it laid down the principles and structure of establishing a national Mennonite church in Ethiopia. It was also at this conference that the name Meserete Krestos, literally, Christ's Foundation, was suggested by the Ethiopians to be the official name of the new church.<sup>171</sup> The first formalized General Church Council met on September 22, 1962 with 16 Ethiopians and six missionaries present as members. Initially, members of the executive committee, who served as leaders for the new Church, were composed of expatriate missionaries and Ethiopian nationals. This was only a transitional arrangement and by the year 1965, the local leadership was given full responsibility under Million Belete, Chairman, and Beyene Mulat, Secretary. A suggestion made by the Ethiopian leadership to relocate the church from the mission precinct gave rise to the idea of land purchase. The leaders presented a formal request to the government to obtain a legal permit to purchase land. In 1971, after significant delays, the leaders received an official grant that allowed them to erect a new church building.

This was a landmark for the emergence of a local church for it made MKC appear to be more of a national church and less of a mission captive institution. The stigma, however, lingered on for a long while. In the same year, the ordination of Ethiopian ministers, a critical component of the indigenization process, received due

consideration. Consequently, Million Belete was ordained as the first “pastor” of the church.<sup>172</sup> This was a major step in the history of the MKS, and even in the larger body of the evangelical church in Ethiopia. The ordination of local pastors was something that the missionaries had not paid attention to. Informants observed that they do not recall the existence of Ethiopian pastors, except a few of them, such as Pastor Bekele Lakew of the Baptist church, prior to the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution.<sup>173</sup> Later, similar ordinations on a lower level were conducted for local congregations, such as Daniel Lemma for the Dire Dawa congregation.<sup>174</sup> This represents one of the best models of smooth transitioning of church leadership from the hands of foreign missionaries to an indigenous team.<sup>175</sup> The desire for the transition came from both sides, the Ethiopian nationals as well as the missionaries, even more so from the latter side, according to Paul Gingrich.<sup>176</sup>

Leaving aside institutional history, the Nazareth center is important from the point of studying the evangelical movement in Ethiopia, for it became a center for the revivalist meetings where the Ethiopian youth across the empire met annually from its beginning in 1955. The revival conferences, as they were known then, were led by able youth leaders who later became distinguished scholars like Professor Beyene Chich Ayebelu, Dr. Daniel Lemma and Professor Negussay Ayele, Ingeda Asfaw and Million Belete. The young Ethiopians not only organized and directed the annual meetings, but also preached the Gospel. The messages they delivered were inspiring and appropriate to the needs of the youth. The young Ethiopians planned these significant conferences on the hospital compound and invited interested people from all corners of the country. In the three-day conferences, people came in hundreds to the center to “sing, study the

Bible, and hear sermons of salvation and revival.”<sup>177</sup> Participants stayed together sharing meals jointly, sleeping in the same hall, chatting exuberantly, exchanging life experiences, ruminating over new insights gained. In short, the center created a new associational space that the Ethiopian youth needed during this transitional period of their society. The older forms of associations of their fathers and mothers such as *maheber*, *senbete* and *edir* remained to be adult-oriented where the young and the educated had little space to participate. Such revivalists meetings in a way provided the niches for the youth to meet, interact and share their lives. There were also other associational spaces being forged along interest lines, be it for pleasure purpose such as parties or various clubs or political talks.

Young people actively involved in this conferences held optimistic views that they could evangelize Ethiopia by establishing an Ethiopian mission base, modeled along the plan used by the western missionaries but with an indigenous accent, resource base and visions. As Nathan Hege succinctly summarized, “the annual conferences at Nazareth became a highlight for people as far away as Asmara” providing a new bond of relationship to the battered youth. They had become victims of the bewildering influences of an ill-planned and ill-managed process of modernization, which according to Messai Kebede, lacked clarity of goals and social articulation, and hence created confusion and conflict in the mind of the young generation.”<sup>178</sup> The revival conferences provided special forums for the youth to exercise leadership skills that were going to help them later when they were placed in key leadership positions in their respective churches and in places of public service. Informants are of the opinion that there were several young people who committed their lives to become Christians in these annual

meetings and who later became key players in the spread of the evangelical movement in various parts of Ethiopia.<sup>179</sup>

Another significant outgrowth of the revivalist conferences was the development of music in the form of choirs in which the youth were involved. Alice Snyder, a missionary who was the secretary of the *Menno* Bookstore, organized a choir from the School for the Blind. During the annual gatherings of the youth in Nazareth, this choir group came to sing and added a special warmth and festivity to the gatherings. They chanted new songs translated from English into Amharic. The song collection, which was later compiled into hymns under *Mahelete Egziaber*, became so popular that choirs were being exchanged from one youth fellowship to another. Thus, the choir members introduced a new tradition of singing in the evangelical churches of Ethiopia. The new tradition of choir singing among the Ethiopian youth, a tradition that was significantly advanced and perfected when the Ethiopian Pentecostals came into the scene in the 60's, was a landmark. It gave rise to the development of authentically Ethiopian songs and a new genre of hymnology that gave a special mark to the evangelical faith in Ethiopia.

The other important development of crucial importance for the issue under discussion is the formation of a new group of young students at the Mennonite church in Nazareth, mainly from *Atse* Gelawdios School. Students from *Atse* Gelawdios School had formed a prayer fellowship of Bible study group meeting regularly at the school's compound. They spent their spare times and evenings in reading the Bible and praying together and in the process most of them made faith commitments, which in the parlance of evangelicals is known as the "born again experience," something different

from the Orthodox tradition. Though the missionaries or the local Evangelicals may not have been directly involved in the process, their influences could hardly be ruled out. In fact, there are some sources, which indicate that as of 1962 the group started to meet with Dr. Eshelman who was teaching English to them upon their request.<sup>180</sup> The American missionary delightedly took the opportunity to teach the youth the English language based on Bible stories using the Bible as his instructional material. As the number of the students joining the group increased and their prayer and study time deepened, they began to display some distinct signs that appeared to be odd to their friends. As a result, they started to experience some public ridicule and oblique insults. This soon led to a conflict situation in the school, which at times flared up into open clashes. As hostilities toward the group mounted, they were no longer able to meet in the school compound and had to look for a place outside. It was this need that brought the group in contact with the Mennonite missionaries. The Mennonite missionaries offered the students assistance by paying monthly house rents for them.<sup>181</sup>

The group which identified itself as *Semay Berhan*, Heavenly Sunshine, undertook meetings at a rented house, where in a much freer atmosphere than the school compound, they could meet as frequently as they desired for prayer, Bible studies and other social activities in a more structured manner by having some of the active members act as leaders and coordinators. Some of the members of the *Semay Berhan*, attended the annual revival youth meetings, to which a few Pentecostals from Addis also came. It might be in one of these revival youth meetings that the influence of Pentecostalism had found its way among the groups. Though it is hard to trace exactly how the Pentecostal experience made inroads into the *Semay Berhan* group, we

know for certain, that it was not effected from the outside through foreign channels or direct external inputs. Surviving members of the group maintain that they heard about the power of the Holy Spirit and its transforming influence upon the lives of those who experienced it. They read voraciously from the Bible about it and ceaselessly prayed for experiencing the power of God. Contacts made amongst the youth during the annual revival gatherings, in which young Ethiopian Pentecostals from the Finnish Mission were participating, might have been a possible channels along which new insights concerning the Pentecostal experience might have been communicated.<sup>182</sup>

Members of the *Semay Berhan* not only studied literature on the Pentecostal experience, they also read the Bible, prayed many days for the experience of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. They fasted out for the gift of the Holy Spirit and for the “divine power to reaching out to others with the message of salvation.”<sup>183</sup> In other words, they desired to experience God directly, personally and more powerfully. It was in the midst of these quests that some of its members experienced what they described as the “touch of the power of God” that led them to speak in languages they did not understand followed by an ecstatic joy.<sup>184</sup> According to informants, the experience not only added fervency to their faith, but gave them courage to preach and witness. It also lent special warmth to their small congregation as it allowed freedom of worship, characterized by shouting, loud prayers, singing, and the exercise of experiential faith through the hearing of prophecies, exorcising of evil spirits, and deliverance from sickness through healing prayer services. This demonstrative expression of faith had its own blessings, but also had its downsides. Its growing appeal to the youth was suspect by the public. Some of the “strange elements” observed in the Pentecostal experience

also created a public stir in some quarters of the Orthodox Christian community for it was looked upon as travesty of religious expression.<sup>185</sup>

The population in Nazareth, especially the youth from the Orthodox church, could not tolerate the new style of faith and began to put pressures on them to stop. On the contrary, the group grew in size as the charismatic experiences of enthusiastic worship, the interactive nature of their fellowship, the healing services and the casting out of demons became a source of considerable attraction for the youth. The growing participation of young students from the traditional Orthodox Church, raised the hostility of the hard line members of the Orthodox Church in the town who developed a negative attitude towards the group. As the pressure from the public mounted, members of the *Semay Berhan* extended their contacts with the Meserete Krestos Church in the town while at the same time maintaining a safe distance to keep their identity as Orthodox Christians and allay suspicion of links with missions. The American Mennonite missionaries did not see the Pentecostal experience disapprovingly, though they found it strange. According to Paul Gingrich, the group's dedication and love for their faith demonstrated by their long prayer hours, and keen interest in evangelism, convinced them that they were sincere in their faith and began to stand with them. In fact, some of the missionaries who built closer ties with them experienced elements of the Pentecostal faith together with the students.<sup>186</sup>

The MKC leadership also expressed considerable sympathy to the young students who were facing so much pressure from school, government officials and the Orthodox Church. They were also concerned about the fate of the movement without a sound leadership that would provide able theological guidance and direction through

the rough road ahead of it. Hence, the MKC leadership decided that the church should forge closer relationships with the group and to that effect, they appointed Gebre Sellassie Habtamu, one of the leaders, to serve as a liaison between the group and the church. The man appointed for the task happened to be a well-respected person among members of the *Semay Berhan* group. Part of Gebre Sellassie's strategy of bridge building was meeting the group leaders and taking active part in their prayer and Bible study sessions. Eventually, however, Gebre Sellassie himself ended up in experiencing the baptism of the Holy Spirit, thus becoming one of the first Mennonite Pentecostals.<sup>187</sup> The initiatives taken by the Mennonite missionaries to forge closer relationships with the students, and their receptive attitude greatly influenced the desire of the group to join them. This, according to informants, however, was not easily accomplished. It took days of agonizing deliberations and prayers<sup>188</sup>

The 1972 persecution, which the Ethiopian Pentecostals experienced also affected the *Semay Berhan* group. They suffered arrests and beatings like other Pentecostals in the country and their association was outlawed. Again the MKC and the Mennonite missionaries expressed solidarity with them by providing them with material, spiritual and psychological supports, such as visiting them while they were in prisons and supplying them with food and other necessities. The sympathy and solidarity the missionaries and the MKC members expressed in this trying moment encouraged the *Semay Berhan* group to take further initiatives towards forming closer ties with the church.

The young students appreciated what the missionaries and the MKC had done for them, but were hesitant to identify with them fully. They were proud of their



Orthodox heritage as well as their new identity gained from their Pentecostal experience. The *Semay Berhan* group was a self-reliant and self-conscious group that maintained various spiritual programs in the city by resources raised from their fellow members, who by and large, were students. When the MKC leadership put forward the idea of unity it deeply troubled members of the *Semay Berhan*.<sup>189</sup>

There were some circumstances that had strongly influenced the leaders of the - *Semay Berhan* group to consider forging closer union with the MKC and the Mennonite missionaries. The strong backing the group received from the MKC, the good will and cooperative spirits that the leadership extended, the integrity of Gebre Sellassie and his able mediative role, were factors that weighed in their considerations. On top of this, the willingness of the leadership of MKC and the missionaries to accept the *Semay Berhan* group as they were with full respect to their Orthodox as well as their Pentecostal orientation, was a strong incentive for the group to join hands and work with them together.

An interesting question to raise here is: did the Mennonite missionaries harm a budding youth movement and deflect its direction, or did they help it from being arrested? It is hard to make any kind of speculation. It is even futile to attempt answering it, for we do not know and cannot tell what would have happened.

What happened following the merger of the two is a pertinent issue for our discussion. Members of the *Semay Berhan* who joined the MKC were very assertive, articulate and influential people. Most of them, as they later proved, were highly competent students who made their ways through the university system with impressive academic accomplishments. Not only that, their commitment to evangelize and reach

out to all Ethiopians, particularly the youth, through the message of the Gospel was very strong. As many admit, the infusion of new blood from a new pool, brought a new stream of spiritual life to the MKC.<sup>190</sup> This group was not a group raised within the borders of the mission compound, though the influence of the missionaries cannot be discounted. They represented a force of a different kind of influence and scale.

Apart from being indigenous, they were very expansive, highly nationalistic in their evangelistic zeal and agenda, and above all Pentecostals. With the joining of the new groups, an increasing number of the youth in Nazareth began to be attracted into the MKC and the youth related activities of the church expanded. Their Pentecostal experience also began to affect members as well as leaders of the MKC church, and intriguingly even some of the Mennonite missionaries. Students leaving the town for higher education carried with them their new religious fervor and became agents for the diffusion of the Pentecostal experience in colleges and other training centers. The members of the *Semay Berhan*, especially its coordinators eventually became not only leaders of the MKC, but also leaders of the Pentecostal movement at the national level and provided ecumenical guidance to the evangelical churches in the period of the brutal Marxist regime.<sup>191</sup>

One of the most significant contributions of the *Semay Berhan* group was the impact they made on the Bole MKC. One of the leaders of the movement, Dagne Assefa, began to serve as an evangelist of this church located in the strategic residential area of Bole district in Addis in 1973. His coming, and the influx of a persecuted choir group, known as *Tsion*, from the fledgling Pentecostal movement brought fresh streams of revival in the church, as result of which young men were drawn into the church in

hundreds and committed their lives to becoming Christians. During the days of the *Derg*, its spectacular healing services attracted even top officials of the government including high-level party members.<sup>192</sup>

The reason why it has been found so important to tell the story of the Mennonite missions that started in the vicinity of Nazareth in particular is to underline the significance of the new component, in fact the dynamic component, of the evangelical movement that arose out of their various urban based mission programs. The new force, unlike the ones generated in the rural areas, emerged in an urban socio-political landscape, constituting young men and women, an emerging elite group, highly assertive and enthusiastic about their faith. This elite force had the expertise and creative power to organize, network and move across different areas to impact diverse sectors of the Ethiopian society. In short, it represents a new strand, a new pool within the evangelical faith community in Ethiopia that was conscious of itself and its mission. It is this new creative national movement together with others that developed elsewhere along similar lines that gave the evangelical movement its dynamic and national visibility. It is this force that succeeded in penetrating the so called “Closed” regions, where Western missionaries had virtually no influence, and who opened new frontiers without the benefits of the rich resources the missionaries had at their disposal to establish schools and clinics.

It is very hard to offer an adequate explanation regarding the expansion of Evangelical Christianity in Ethiopia unless these developments are taken into serious account. The central argument I would like to advance is this: what lends evangelical Christianity its dynamism, growth and its defining character in Ethiopia is the new

impulse that emerges from the new social and geographical base. This claim does not invalidate the contribution of evangelistic activities in the rural areas, traditional rural home base of missionaries, to the expansion of the evangelical faith. However, my contention is, viewed at a national level, the rural strain does not seem to constitute the most vital link in the chain.

### ***Pulling the Strings-the Synergetic Factors (1950's-1960's)***

There are other developments that have transpired at the national level that merit attention. These developments, as we shall see below, laid down the basis for the synergy that was needed to catapult the spread of the evangelical movement. I will provide a brief outline of these developments below.

### ***The Translation of the Bible and its Significance:***

A factor that has received very little attention in relation to the expansion of the Evangelical faith in Ethiopia is the role of the distribution of Scriptural literature above all, the Bible. The Bible was first translated into *Geez* in the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD based on Syriac translation in conjuncture with the Greek text.<sup>193</sup> There have been attempts by various missionaries to translate the Bible into Amharic since the days of Peter Heyling. Martin Flad, who initiated missionary activities among the *Felashas*, developed literature distribution in northern Ethiopia through the dissemination of portions of the Scripture and other books. Following his steps, others made great efforts to bring the Bible to many Ethiopians through translation. Krapf, for instance, revised Abu Rumi's Amharic Bible, but its circulation seemed to have been limited mostly to the

Protestant missions and the churches that came into close association with them.<sup>194</sup> Yet, the Bible remained at large in the Ethiopian society, intriguingly so in the highland regions of Ethiopia, considered to be bastion of Christianity.

The first major attempt to translate the Bible into Amharic was made in the 1930's when the Emperor Haile Sellassie found it imperative that the people should have an informed basis for their faith. The Emperor was wise enough to appreciate the fact that the Bible, or versions of it so far translated in Amharic had not been accepted by the priests, for it was looked upon negatively as it was viewed to have been created by foreigners.<sup>195</sup> As early as 1907 Ethiopian scholars like *Aleqa* Taye Gebre Mariam, had been insisting that the Bible be translated in vernacular languages so that the Gospel was preached in the language people understood.<sup>196</sup> The emperor organized a team of scholars composed of 12 Ethiopians and six expatriates with scholarly and technical expertise to translate the Bible into Amharic. Among those selected to be part of the team were *Belata* Merse Hazen Wolde Kirkos, Araya Sellassie, Matthew of the Anglican Church and Graham of the SIM.

The work was interrupted by the Italian invasion, but continued afterwards. In 1955 a large typo edition of the New Testament was printed in Addis Ababa. By 1962, the entire Bible in smaller size edition was printed in London and became available in Addis Ababa.<sup>197</sup> Since then the Bible has been printed in many revised editions and distributed to the people by various missionary societies and para-church organizations. Both the Gideon Bible distributing agency and the Open Door exerted Herculean clandestine efforts to get the Bible into the hands of the people, especially during the

period of the *Derg*. Moreover, the Bible was sold very cheaply or given away free so that many Ethiopians would have access to it.<sup>198</sup>

The availability of the Bible in mass was considered crucial by both the leaders and members of the modern Evangelical movement. As Million Belete, a man from an Orthodox background and a leading participant of the evangelical movement since the 1950's, observed, "Notwithstanding its significance as a source of instruction to Christian life, the Bible had never been a familiar book for many Ethiopians professing the Christian faith."<sup>199</sup> S. Bergsma also notes, "It is an amazing and depressing thought that Ethiopia has had the Bible for almost 1500 years and has done little with it."<sup>200</sup> The point that Bergsma wanted to emphasize is the fact that although the Ethiopian Orthodox Church had the Bible, first in *Geez*, and later in Amharic, for years it has done little to make use of it as a basis of its teachings and effective tool to transmit the Gospel to the Ethiopian people at large.<sup>201</sup>

Informed observers from the Ethiopian Orthodox background acknowledge that the National Church has not encouraged the use of the Bible even for the folks who were able to read. Scriptural knowledge was reserved only for the priests and was not considered to be a matter of public knowledge<sup>202</sup>. It appears that priests were the only privileged group permitted to read, interpret and convey the message of the Bible to others. Embedded in the thinking of the clergy is the idea that the Bible, looked upon as a sacred book, should not be left to the reading and interpretation of the ordinary believer. Waldmeier provides an interesting instance where priests interrupted a man who was using the Scripture in Amharic to teach a group of people by observing:

You do wrong by expressing the holy Christian religion and the Word of God to the public. Religious books and the ladies of our country must be kept secret, behind the curtain, for as soon as they get revealed to the public they will grow profane. You degrade our most holy religion by reading and preaching the Gospel in the common language of the people.<sup>203</sup>

By and large, this has been the attitude that has shaped the mindset of many of Ethiopian Orthodox priests. To a large extent, even to this day, the word *sebkēt*, literally, preaching, has a negative connotation in public conversations for it carries with it the idea of indoctrination.

Trimingham reported that in 1924 one had to obtain permission from *Abune Mathewos*, the Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, in order to sell the Amharic Scriptures.<sup>204</sup> It was not something that any body could get it or purchase it from anywhere and use it for his own consumption. Haile Sellassie was breaking this closed tradition when he encouraged the International Bible Society to establish an office in Ethiopia. He even attended its opening ceremony on May 13, 1926.<sup>205</sup> In general, the Bible had not been allowed a place of prominence amongst the Orthodox Christian community in Ethiopia. It had for the most part been considered to be the property of foreigners. Hence, it has been associated with outsiders. In fact, carrying the Bible, or using it, for personal inspirations was more of an exception than the norm. Since carrying the Bible has constituted an important feature of Evangelical Christians, even in today's Ethiopia, a person carrying the Bible will automatically be considered a *Pente*, originally a short and derogatory reference to the Pentecostals but a generic name for all evangelical Christians.<sup>206</sup>

The distribution of the Bible, in its partial or full translations, has been on the rise since the 40's. For instance, Trimmingham records that in 1947, 4,061 were distributed by the British and Foreign Bible Society. The number reached a record level of 13, 370 in only one year.<sup>207</sup> The number does not take into account distribution carried out by other mission organizations. The distribution of Scriptural literature increased considerably during the 60's because of the intensified activities of the missionaries and as a result of the growing needs of young Ethiopians whose eagerness to learn more about the foundation of their faith had been rising. One of the main conditions that allowed for rising interest in the Bible was the availability of the Bible itself. People could obtain it more easily because it was being printed in large numbers.

Lamin Sanneh, the distinguished Historian of African religion, has reminded us that the translation of the Bible in vernacular languages has had the unintended consequences of empowering African native Christians, thereby speeding up the Christianization of Africa as well as the Africanization of Christianity. A number of African scholars have noted that the translation of the Bible into local languages has been a decisive factor in the appropriation of Christianity by Africans. A number of scholars of various disciplines have studied the phenomenon of the African Independent Churches(AIC). Various theories incorporating social, political, economic and cultural factors have been offered for their rise and growth. The studies, however, have slighted the impact of the translation of the Bible in the scenario. Recent studies point out that the growth of the Independent churches in Africa is strongly linked with the translation and dissemination of the Bible.<sup>208</sup> David Barrett also claims that the Bible has become an independent reference authority that African Christians were



quick to seize.<sup>209</sup> According to John Mbiti, a noted African theologian, the Bible provided a new light and a fresh opportunity for understanding and interpreting one's faith privately and collectively. "It was the most directly influential single factor in shaping Christianity in Africa."<sup>210</sup>

What needs to be underscored along with the provision of the Bible is the role of the African preachers. The Bible, in their hands and in their own vernacular languages provided, the basis for new spiritual insights and interpretations that were communicated far and wide in indigenous forms to a largely illiterate community. African preachers appropriated and nuanced Biblical instructions for the level and conditions of their local audience. Here, I want to emphasize the significance of the Bible beyond the vernacular com translation postulate, by stressing the consequent development, the role of the local preachers who could now take Biblical messages into local frontier situations, repackage them according to their understandings and deliver them to their specific audience.

What significantly explains the growth of the local churches in southern and south western Ethiopia during the Italian period, as seen above, is the availability of Scriptural literature, even if scant, and how the local preachers used the texts, and modified their presentation in such a way that it resonated to the local culture and conditions of their times.<sup>211</sup> The same is true of the Bible Reader's movement that arose in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century among the Orthodox priests in Eritrea, which eventually precipitated the birth of the evangelical movement among the Oromo of western Ethiopia. In more recent years, the Bible translated in vernacular languages has provided inspiration for many Ethiopians, not only to develop their own homiletic

traditions but also to compose hymnologies, which have served more than any evangelistic tool in a culture of orality to extend the influence of Christianity. Gospel songs strengthened the reciprocal relations between the mind and the heart for which Ethiopians were favorably disposed. Gospel music, composed in vernacular languages, also served as theological texts for the ordinary Ethiopian. The fact that they were not only transposed texts from the Bible, but enriched by life's experiences, reaching the ears and hearts of millions takes the conversation of vernacular com translation issues into another level and newer dimensions. This is another level of the significance of the translation of the Bible. In fact, the ripple effects of the development and use of hymnology has not been fully captured or elaborated by Sanneh in his book, *Translating the Message*.<sup>212</sup>

The availability of the Bible, and its increasing use also had bearings upon the Ethiopian youth of the 60's. The Bible became an important book for many young Ethiopians who were searching for spiritual truth whether Orthodox Christians or evangelicals. This was the time for most of the young Ethiopians, at least in the urban centers, during which collective religious identity established by tradition was not found to be helpful in the face of the unsettling influences of the country's social transformation. Faith, as Sundkler noted, had to be possessed, as one's very own, through the readings of Scriptural material that were considered to provide inspirations and solutions to their existential needs.<sup>213</sup> The perception of the youth of the 60's, seems to embrace the view that it is always better to see with ones own eyes than through other people's lenses.

If one seriously considers the origin of the various reform movements that arose in the 50's and the 60's, both within the Orthodox church and outside of it, including the Pentecostal movements, it can be observed that they were all influenced by the ideas and inspirations they drew from the Bible. In fact, according to Million Belete, most young Ethiopians have been more influenced by their own reading of the Bible than the preaching received from missionaries or clerics of the National Church.<sup>214</sup> What missionaries had not been able to accomplish through their personal involvement, they succeeded through the print material. Through the distribution of the Bible, missionaries succeeded in penetrating the so- called "Closed" areas because of its growing influence as its readership increased with the rising number of a new generation of elite. When one considers the missionary factor in the context of Ethiopia, the thesis that is more fitting to inform our perspective is that of impact, rather than of agency. Though the two are interwoven factors, for there cannot be effect without a cause, the missionaries in Ethiopia did more service to the expansion of the evangelical faith by their contribution in the production of Scriptural literature, mainly the translation of the Bible and its dissemination, than their mere physical presence (and their accompanying programs) in various mission sites. The resultant impacts of these developments are important issues that should be highlighted in any discussion dealing with the missionary factor in Ethiopia.

### ***The Advent of University Campus-Oriented Missionary Activities***

An issue of major significance that must be raised in connection with the congruencies of factors that enhanced the evangelical movement is the development of

mission ministries specifically designed to capture the attention of the youth around the university systems. I shall provide a brief account of those activities of missionaries that had major impact on the university students.

***The SIM Youth Center:***

Missionaries set up various para -church organizations with evangelistic purposes and programs. The Youth Center, established by the SIM missionaries had significant impacts upon the university students of the 1960's. The Center that was founded along the strategic road joining the twin Arat Kilo and Sedest Kilo campuses, was set up by the Canadian couple, Albert and Evelyn Brant, who came to Ethiopia as SIM missionaries in 1946. The couple served for 14 years in the southern parts of Ethiopia, first in Shashemene and later in Dila. In 1960, the two moved to the capital city vested with new administrative positions at the SIM headquarters. It was during their stay in Addis Ababa that they saw the need to establish a youth center in the midst of the new national university that was formally instituted in 1961 and staffed by the Jesuits. According to Evelyn Thompson, she and her husband Brant saw students roaming in the streets during their spare time and weekends.<sup>215</sup> They wondered if they could establish a center for the students patterned on the one in Canada in which they had a part to play prior to their coming to Ethiopia. They finally decided to found a center at a key location adjacent to the Patriarch's quarters and *Qidist Mariam* church. The location was also significant because it was in the strategic belt between Arat Killo-Sedest Kilo University campuses and the Menelik II boarding school. The couples quickly moved into the new site to launch their programs. After renovating the

building, they partitioned it into a library, a large lounge and game rooms and, a counseling room.

It was in this Youth Center, with small beginnings that the couple launched various activities to attract the youth in the neighborhood. Within months, as Evelyn Thompson reported, students from Haile Sellassie University began to attend one or another programs, which they had specifically designed to meet the student's needs. The Sunday services conducted in their salon rooms were teeming with students, mainly Christians from various denominational backgrounds. Their Sunday messages were prepared with due tact so that they did not stress denominational biases. At the end of the Sunday gatherings, the missionary couples would serve teas and snacks to encourage warm interactions and fellowships between the students. According to Evelyn Thompson, it was not easy to run the center because in those days it was not popular in Ethiopia to be "*misyon*" (missionary) or identify one self with missionary organizations.<sup>216</sup>

The Center initially served as a meeting center for Christians from evangelical backgrounds who came from several corners of the country. They found each other in the center as they continued interacting while attending the various services offered at the Center. The Youth Center served as learning and fellowship venue for strengthening their ties and deepening their collective identity as evangelical Christians. The evangelical Christians, having come from their small world, felt that they were not alone, as Evelyn described, "in this big metropolis" hall of learning. Gradually, the engaging programs creatively designed by the Center which included : film shows, panel discussions, public lectures, group singing, various recreational activities, library

service and counseling sessions offered for those who had adjustment problems and academic difficulties, pulled a growing number of young students from the university. The friendly atmosphere of the center and the new associational space it provided drew students even from non-evangelical backgrounds. There were many students, especially from the radical wing of the university, the so-called Crocodiles in particular, who evinced hostile attitudes towards the missionaries. By and large, however, student visitors were receptive to the programs the Center was providing.<sup>217</sup>

Informants, Ethiopian as well as expatriates, report that the Youth Center had become a significant Christian recruiting ground for some students from HSI University to embrace the evangelical faith. At the Center, the students found Christians who were very friendly and eager to welcome them into their midst. It was through these Christian students that they were able to learn more about the Christian faith that enabled them to make considered decisions to be committed Christians. Berhanu Negash, a student from Gonder attending the Menelik boarding school adjacent to the Center, recalls that he went to the Youth Center just as a pastime experience in the evening to play games and watch films. Over the years, the contacts he developed with the evangelical Christians and the influences that came through the various programs of the Center led him to “accept the Lord.”<sup>218</sup>

The Youth center drew young people in a way they could not be reached either on a typical mission station or in one- to-one encounters. *Lij Kassa Wolde Mariam*, one of the former Presidents of the HSIU, told Harold Fuller that the Center’s work has been one of the greatest contributions to the spiritual life of the students.<sup>219</sup> Evelyn reports that in her later travels in the various part of Ethiopia she was surprised to be

greeted by several “government teachers, clerks, medical personnel who confided to her that they “had found salvation” in the Youth Center.<sup>220</sup>

The SIM missionaries who served in the Youth Center after the original founders left, recalled that the Ethiopian students were very responsive to their evangelistic programs and trusted Jesus sincerely from their hearts.<sup>221</sup> As Albert Manzke, the man who replaced Brant as the Director of the Center reflected, “ It seems that the young Ethiopians had a great capacity for this, we found many of the Ethiopians strong in their determination to follow the Lord, even though it meant persecution. I believe the church grew out of such love and strong resolve, not from external inputs.”<sup>222</sup> The young Ethiopians were involved in organizing some of the activities of the Center, in leading some youth related programs, in translation of songs from English to Amharic, in choir singing, etc. Through their participation in these activities of the Center, the students drew important experiences and skills, such as networking and organizing outreach programs, which they were able to use effectively in their own evangelistic enterprises upon graduating from the university.

We are not precisely sure, at this stage, when the fellowship of Christian students of the Haile Sellassie I University was founded.<sup>223</sup> The Youth Center, which significantly contributed to the strengthening of fledgling ties among the students, provided one of the most influential sources of Christian learning and supplied a strong impetus for the creation of a Christian Student Fellowship.<sup>224</sup> The student fellowship, in turn, played a critical role at the evangelical movement in the university and elsewhere. As will be discussed in the next chapter, it was from this Christian organization that

leaders emerged during the military rule and which provided cutting edge leadership to the church.

One of the most enduring legacies of the activities of the Youth Center is the birth of *Hebret Amba* a fellowship of Ethiopian evangelicals which first emerged as an independent church and later joined the larger Qale Heywet church. This charismatic church has been founded entirely by Ethiopian students mostly from Haile Sellassie I University. It was the upshot of the outreach program of the SIM launched through the Youth Center. As the number of students participating in the various services of the Center increased, and as the number of converts gradually rose, the students began to develop a sense of affinity with the Center. This was more true of those who decided to be committed Christians as a result of their participation in the various programs of the Center. Students who had some active role by helping the missionaries in the setting up of the programs, particularly those who wanted to move beyond that role, wanted to form an independent fellowship. Such a desire soon led to plans for establishing a congregation as soon as the number of attendants seemed adequate. The SIM missionaries associated with the Youth Center had not envisaged the idea of planting a church. They had, however, a clear aim of reaching the university students with evangelistic oriented programs.<sup>225</sup>

When young students expressed their desire to form an independent congregation, the SIM missionaries gave them their blessings. *Hebret Amba*, literally, a citadel of fellowship, located in the vicinity of the Sedest Kilo Campus of Haile Sellassie I University, became a church for the university students and the youth in the neighborhood.<sup>226</sup> The charismatic character of *Hebret Amba* has significantly



influenced the Qale Heywet church, which had in the past been known for being very doctrinaire and not open to Charismatic influences because of its association with the SIM missionaries. Since the SIM missionaries did not come from the Charismatic background, they were in general not inclined to espouse it.

This “indigenous” church, attracted top-level students from the National University who actively participated in organizing the new church. Shiferaw Wolde Michael, Getachew Chiku, Yohannes Yegzaw, Seyum Weissa, Alemu Biftu, Berhanu Negash, and Mulatu Belachew, were among those students who actively served the church and significantly contributed to its growth. Some of these men later became university professors, prominent church leaders and evangelists with international standing.<sup>227</sup> Shieferaw, in particular developed a distinguished career as a law school professor in the University and served as the Minister of Justice during the difficult years of the military regime while continuing to provide much sought after leadership for the beleaguered church.<sup>228</sup>

A good working relationship developed between the leaders of the new church and the SIM missionaries, particularly Jerry Hamilton, the man who was in charge of the Center during this transition. The smooth relationship that existed between the two parties allowed the crafting of spiritual programs in Amharic and English on Sundays based on a shift system. The first Sunday morning shift would begin in Amharic, and the English service would follow it. According to Berhanu Negash, the latter service attracted a considerable number of expatriates (Indians, Philipppines, Germans, Canadians, and Americans) as well as students from the university, and as a result assumed an international character.<sup>229</sup> A key aftermath of the cooperation of the

Ethiopians and the SIM missionaries was the latter's willingness to hand over the administration of the Youth Center entirely to the *Hebret Amba* church leadership.<sup>230</sup>

The significance of this transition lies in the fact that the students began to launch innovative programs such as weekly film shows for the youth in the Orthodox Church compounds which the missionaries could not have envisaged or dared to conduct. According to Berhanu, the sites selected for the pilot project were: Trinity Cathedral, St. John and Gofa Bisrat Gabriel churches. Berhanu does not tell us how these programs fared and what kind of challenges they had met but only notes, "We have seen some fruit of the film shows. Dr. Tilahun and his group came to the Lord from the service of St. John's church and Dr. Tilahun became a member of the fellowship."<sup>231</sup>

Another good strategy adopted by the leaders of the *Hebret Amba* was the explicit mention of the term "fellowship" (*Hebret*) and the principle they followed regarding converts. Leaders gave new converts choices to be members of their group or choose other evangelical churches or even remain in the Orthodox Church, if they happened to come from that background. The leaders emphasized that no matter what the converts chose, their fellowship remained solid. This was an ingenious step that made "seekers"(those who have not made decisions to fully commit themselves to become Christians) as well as converts feel at home for it involved no element of obligation and allegiance to an institution. It created a non -threatening ambience for the young students who did not want to make any serious commitment to becoming members of any church until they were sure of their decisions and were ready to face the consequences of social abandonment.<sup>232</sup>

Another significant contribution of the Youth Center was the ecumenical spirit it fostered between students who belonged to various faith denominations. Evangelical Christians, mainly the Pentecostals, representing the emerging new religious voice, suffered public ridicule and stereotyping by the larger Orthodox Christian population. The Missionaries working with the Center embraced the Pentecostals in spite of their differences. Albert Manzke, treated them in love and appreciated their zeal for evangelism. The Pentecostals also capitalized on this strategic opportunity to throw their nets as wide as they could to draw the young men into their new movement. The dynamism that the Pentecostals exhibited in their preaching, their lively worship style, the self- managed programs, which appealed more to the young Ethiopians, the various mutual support initiatives they had innovated to help each other, and above all, their aggressive testimonies drew many students into their circle of influence.

The presence of a Pentecostal chapel, close to *Sedest Kilo* Campus, not far from the Nazareth School (Catholic school for girls of middle class status), and the Youth Center that relocated itself to the same neighborhood, had strong influences upon the community of students in the university and adjoining high schools along the *Arat Kilo-Sedest Kilo* axis.<sup>233</sup> This was an area where there were (and still are) several high schools, such as Menelik II, Tefari Mekonen, and *Itege Menen* schools, with a relatively high concentration students compared to other sites in the Capital City.

#### ***The Mekane Yesus Youth Hostel:***

Though not comparable to the SIM Youth Center, another development of major significance that occurred in the 60's was the establishment of a Youth Hostel in

the heart of the National University under the auspices of Ethiopian Evangelical Church of Mekane Yesus. The Mekane Yesus Church played a vital role in rallying young Ethiopians as a pioneer of the only evangelical national church registered under the government. It had attracted a small elite group from Eritrea, Wellega and Addis Ababa who inspired many young Ethiopians around the capital city because of their leadership style and teachings.<sup>234</sup>, The Youth Hostel that was founded in 1966 through the support of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and other Lutheran churches, merits further elaboration.<sup>235</sup>

Officially inaugurated in 1966, the Youth Hostel, began to provide rental rooms at subsidized rates for university students from rural backgrounds who had some affiliation with the evangelical faith. As a result, it brought together students of the evangelical faith from various parts of Ethiopia. The Hostel hosted programs that extended beyond providing rented rooms for students from the university. It opened its facilities to Christian students who were arranging various evangelistic and revival programs. In fact, after the establishment of the Haile Sellassie I University Christian Fellowships, the student leaders effectively used its facilities to conduct workshops and conferences.<sup>236</sup>

The Hostel provided various training programs in connection to evangelism and the systematic study of the Bible, programs that had not been offered either by the SIM missionaries at the Youth Center or the Pentecostals. The greatest contribution of the Hostel was what it accomplished during the period of the Ethiopian Revolution whose story will be reported at great length in the next chapter.

The two centers, located right in the heartland of the National University, gave new associational and networking spaces for students, especially of those coming from rural areas who had been separated from their familiar rural -based support systems. In the new student fellowship that the centers promoted through activities like panels, religious teaching, recreations, songs, the young students participating in the different activities of the Hostel helped establish enduring social ties. The common faith they embraced, the mutual support system they created through prayer and other spiritual engagements, the sense of anticipation engendered by being pioneers of a new youth-led faith movement, gave them a strong bond and a greater interest to impact their generation and the nation at large.<sup>237</sup>

In summary, it can be said that the attraction of the youth towards such specialized mission programs and innovative approaches, could not wholly be explained in religious terms alone. Perhaps, empowerment is an issue to consider. The various spiritual programs offered by the mission centers or those with educational orientations, such as learning the English language, were valuable venues for academic success, hence their instrumentality. The quality of the services, especially the high level teaching and panel presentations, and diversities of themes covered, not only strengthened the spiritual life of the young students, but also contributed to the growth of their general knowledge. According to Tekeste Teklu (later Doctor), a leading member of Christian youth activist in his time, these added significantly to the student's ability to meet the challenges of life as young citizens and university students.<sup>238</sup> The lessons they learned from qualified professional speakers on various subjects, like the relationship between science and faith, or creation and evolution and spirituality and

rationalism and logic, had an empowering influence because they provided the students with rich resources of information that had practical applications for their lives. Viewed from a sociological perspective the new conversion experience, or simply the embrace of the evangelical faith, can also be viewed as adaptive responses to a rapidly changing socio-cultural environment.

***The Role of Radio Voice of the Gospel (1963-1977):***

The establishment of a modern radio station constituted another major development of immense significance to the expansion of the evangelical movement in Ethiopia. The first of its kind in Africa, was the Lutheran World Federation's station, named Radio Voice of the Gospel (RVOG). RVOG, with a broadcast coverage of one billion people, was one of the most important ventures ever undertaken by the LWF. It was set up with the purpose of countering the influence of Islam and atheism, and particularly the varieties of communism which were engulfing the Third World countries at that time.<sup>239</sup> The station was established in the capital city in 1963 after years of negotiation with the government. Emperor Haile Sellassie, who strongly supported the project, gave permission to its establishment, despite opposition from the Patriarch and some members of his cabinet. The Emperor foresaw the enlightening influence of the station's services; he reprimanded the clergy and his hesitant ministers for their shortsighted attitude and gave his blessings to the project when the request was made by the LWF in 1961. According to Emanuel Abraha, an evangelical, who then held a ministerial position in the government, the station was set up with the purpose of

“transmitting the message of the Gospel to the whole of Africa, the Middle East and South Asia.”<sup>240</sup>

The establishment of the RVOG is important for the purpose of our discussion because it has been one of the most powerful and effective tools that mission agencies used to explain and promote the evangelical faith in Ethiopia. The radio station attracted millions of listeners through its high quality programs and diversified services from its beginning in February 26, 1963 until its confiscation by the military rulers in 1977. The station aired a variety of programs tailored for different audiences 24 hours per day, in English, Amharic as well as other languages. The principal thrust of the program was towards non-Christian audiences to whom high quality services were offered in order to appeal to listeners and encourage them to take interest in the evangelistic aspects of their radio programs. Accordingly, the 30/70 design was applied, whereby 30 % of the program was to be devoted for evangelism and the rest to informational resources. By and large, the general public in Ethiopia listened regularly to the daily spiritual messages, and were able to obtain information of benefit to their daily lives.

The RVOG continually channeled programs on education, health care development issues, daily news programs that were of interest to the public at large. The daily Gospel messages in Amharic were highly valued and well received even by adherents of the Orthodox Church, especially its educated sections. Emperor Haile Sellassie was one of the regular listeners of the programs of the RVOG.<sup>241</sup> The unique mix of the programs and the modern style of their presentation very much appealed to the nation's youth. Its gospel music hours, more than any thing else, popularized the

new gospel songs that were being composed and sung by the Pentecostal choirs and soloists. According to Emanuel Abraha the Scriptural messages transmitted by the RVOG influenced a large number of Ethiopians who had access to radios. To those, who were already committed Christians, the programs brought refreshing messages. The programs also impacted the lives of many Ethiopians who as a result became more receptive to the Gospel.<sup>242</sup>

Like the distribution of the Bible, RVOG was an important means for disseminating the Evangelical faith in the airwaves of Ethiopia. It thus rendered the distinction between “Closed” or “Open” regions virtually irrelevant. Radio Voice of the Gospel became one of the immediate and obvious targets of the *Derg*. Therefore, it was no wonder that it was nationalized by a government decree in 1977. The pretext given for its confiscation by the military officials was that imperialist forces were using it as an instrument of subversion against the popular revolution. The government accused the RVOG of polluting the national culture and propagating a viewpoint contrary to the improvement of the broad masses.<sup>243</sup>

### ***The Gathering Momentum***

#### ***Billy Graham's Crusade (1960) and its Aftermath:***

There were a series of happenings, which in one way or another, facilitated the expansion of the evangelical faith in the 60's. One which I consider is very germane to the issue under review was the crusade organized by the American evangelist Billy Graham. The American evangelist conducted his evangelistic crusade in the capital city in 1960. Emperor Haile Sellassie himself granted permission for the crusade to take



place in the capital city. The emperor even encouraged young Ethiopians, including his grandchildren, to attend the crusade by allowing the schools to have a day off for the occasion so that students could have a chance to hear message of the evangelist. It is hard to speculate as to why Haile Sellassie went out of the way to make the famed evangelist's religious gathering such a success, though it could emanate from his desire to inspire the youth with a renewed faith commitment as well as his international image making agenda. Billy Graham reports that about 10, 000 men attended his meeting, half of them staying for counseling. He was not specific in his use of the phrase, "staying for counseling," though it may suggest that some made new commitments to be Christians or reaffirmed their position to observe their faith seriously. Billy Graham seemed to have been impressed by the outcome of his crusade as is evidenced by his statement: "It was the greatest response of our African trip."<sup>244</sup> Informants, who attended the meeting, confirmed the assessment that there were several people who decided to become committed Christians during the crusade.<sup>245</sup> Due to "The soul harvesting mission," to use Edwin Orr's description, Evangelical Christians were encouraged by their participation and the acclaim and support the Emperor gave to the crusade. Both the outcome and the publicity of the meeting strengthened the endurance of those who had suffered social marginalization as a result of their faith. Orr observes that, "the crusade, which was obviously more of a harvesting than a revival movement....proved to be a great encouragement to the faithful workers."<sup>246</sup>

This observation can only be appreciated in light of the experience and situation of Ethiopia's Evangelical Christians as it existed during the visit of the American guest. Most evangelical Christians were viewed as religious outsiders, pariah groups and as a

result were persecuted and alienated with tag names like *Tsere Mariam* (anti-Mary) by the largely Orthodox public. In those days, for that matter even today, given the high reverence that most Orthodox Christians display to Virgin Mary, to be labeled as *Tsere Mariam* was to be the enemy of one's religion and by extension, the enemy of the nation, and this would cause automatic isolation from the community.<sup>247</sup> The labeling not only generated stereotypes, but led to persecutions that became a source of agony even for those Ethiopians who gave distinguished service to their nation, such as Aleeqa Taye and Kentiba Gebru.<sup>248</sup> In the same manner, Evangelical Christians had been expelled from schools because of their faith. They were looked upon as people who were not bona fide Ethiopians, exhibiting little patriotism.<sup>249</sup> Witness the case of those students who were banned from both Teferi Mekonnen School and Harar Teacher Training Institute for no other reason than their faith.<sup>250</sup>

Evangelical Christians today recall that the Crusade was a big event which significantly boosted their morale and created for them the opportunity to identify each other and look for possibilities of forming solidarity groups. Since most of them came from different parts of Ethiopia and were spin-offs of various missionary activities in the rural areas, they had little chance of identifying each other and getting together. A center was set up in *Piazza*, a central location of the capital city, under the name of the American evangelist Billy Graham, which served as locus for the scattered evangelical groups residing in Addis.<sup>251</sup>

Evangelical Christians in Addis Ababa and the surrounding areas had been dispersed. Most of them were either high school students or students from Haile Sellassie I University or employees of various government institutions. Some of them

were affiliated with the various mission stations in Addis like *Bete Berhan* of the SIM near *Piatza*, *Merah Ewran*(School for Blind), Red Sea Mission and the Lutheran missions at Mekane Yesus Church. There were also some evangelical associations that were beginning to emerge along professional or organizational lines. A good example of this would be the Ethiopian Imperial Air Force Christian Society (EIAFCS). This society was active in its own sphere, but not connected with other evangelicals.<sup>252</sup>

Evangelical Christians from high schools, who were converted due to the presence of instructors, mainly from SIM and Mennonite backgrounds, also formed informal solidarity groups. Such groups could not emerge as strong associations as they were few in number apart from being scattered groups. In the 1950' and 1960''s, there were few evangelical Christians who came from different rural areas attending the HSI University. Their faith and their association with missions had given them a sense of identity. Yet, the group had not crystallized into a solid organization, despite their occasional interactions in places of worship conducted in various mission compounds.<sup>253</sup>

A contributing factor to this, most likely, was the presence of a plethora of mission organizations, which had gathered the evangelical Christians from various locations in their respective centers or stations. In this respect, the Billy Graham Crusade was a landmark for it provided a symbolic space for unity, as the American evangelist brought evangelical Christians of different colors to the spectacular gathering held at the national stadium. Informants allege that the event gave Christians new courage to proudly accept themselves, have an assertive attitude, resist societal pressures and promote their faith boldly.<sup>254</sup> Admitting that, however, it must be said

that the conditions had not arrived when educated evangelicals in the urban areas would organize and become a force to be reckoned with at a national level. Evangelical Christians had not succeeded in providing the leadership to create the synergetic articulation of their evangelical views. Their views had not yet solidified to ignite a unified movement and galvanize actions that would have impacts at a wider level in the society. In short, the movement had not as yet coalesced into a critical mass that was capable of kindling a new spark of a national import. The momentum had yet to come.

In the decades of the 50's Ethiopian evangelical Christians energetically engaged in serving their respective churches playing vital roles in the process of indigenization of the leadership and programs of their churches.<sup>255</sup> Some of them were making efforts to form independent churches after embracing the evangelical faith through their encounter with the mission agencies. A good example is the Geja Qale Heywet Church, which was founded by young Ethiopians in Addis Ababa who have prior contacts with the SIM missionaries in the late 50's. Tied to their localized engagements, it seems that they had little time and energy left to envision broader national goals and come up with a common platform for all evangelical Christians in Ethiopia.

The above discussion is relevant for the various events and stirrings that unfolded in the 50's and 60's as important evangelical heritages that have not been appreciated in light of development in the 70's. In my opinion, these chains of events are the missing links between the Pentecostal movement and its precursors. Most Pentecostals fail to see and appreciate this historical legacy. As I argue in the next

chapter, the Pentecostal movement in Ethiopia did not emerge from a vacuous historical tradition, it had its antecedents in these and other developments.<sup>256</sup>

The point I want to stress, however, is that there were indications of social and cultural changes that generated new religious consciousness, scattered strivings that did not consummate into a religious revival on a national scale. In short, there were undercurrents of religious changes setting up the stage for a new evangelical awakening of wider ramifications.<sup>257</sup> A vanguard elite, an autonomous force free from denominational restraints was needed to bring radical changes in the direction and orientation of the evangelical churches and to provide some kind of glue to connect the scattered elements and initiatives. The quickening of the forces of change and the confluence of several variables related to the country's transition brought to the surface a new blood, which I seek to characterize as a creative national strain. This new strain served as a collective pool for the young evangelical Christians who had been tied to the various mission centers and denominations. Contrary to one's expectations, the vanguard elite did not evolve out of the mission background, for neither the SIM nor the Swedish Lutheran missionaries as such produced the high profile elite that could transform themselves into a critical yeast of such a standing and level.<sup>258</sup>

Ironically, such a group came from Orthodox Christian background, called forth by the expansion of modern Western education, especially, at the higher levels in the 60's, a period that witnessed a remarkable upsurge of Ethiopian national consciousness on a broader spectrum.<sup>259</sup> The Evangelization of Ethiopia received an unexpected impetus from an unexpected source, the world of higher education. In the next chapter, I will consider the historical development that led to the rise of this group, a new force

that brought out evangelical Christianity from its peripheral cushion to the central core it now occupies.

It suffices to say that the decade of the 1960's as a period could serve as a culture fault line separating the tradition of the past and the modernization phase of society. The dominant church-state driven value matrix, which provided general framework and social consensus for most Ethiopians, was punctured by different vectors of change. This had its own disquieting impact upon the youth as they tried and infuse new value systems into the older veins. The mood of the youth in the 50' and 60's was one of quest, searching for a new key to life, new ideas and thought that would provide the emerging new social force with new ethos for life. For the most part, as the youth went into the university or other higher educational systems, the symbolic significance of their old values appeared no longer to hold water. The metaphorical importance of *Mateb* (the chord put around the neck symbolizing Christianity) and the observance of fasting, which demanded dietary restrictions for not less than 155 days per year, died away or were simply left in abeyance without due process of closure. The obliteration of traditional boundary-marking values, of course, had serious consequences. In this context the students coming from the Christian faith background, had the option of either seriously clinging to their traditional faith or charting out new avenues of faith in secular or religions dimensions. This is the subject that must receive critical consideration in light of the development of the Pentecostal movement and the spread of Marxism among the Ethiopian youth of the 60's and the 70's.

### ***Conclusion:***

It appears that evangelical Christianity held strong appeal in those areas recently integrated into the Ethiopian empire. Experiencing relative social and political marginalization, the people of the south and southwestern Ethiopia had apparently saw evangelical Christianity with its promise of salvation and a new start as a liberating faith. Christian conversion, which allows the assumption of new identity in situations in which macro-historical changes have a weakening impact on the old, spurs validation. New identities are enacted primarily through the adoption of new narratives that reposition men to see themselves differently. This, however, is a critical and sensitive issue that requires a much closer investigation.

The Evangelical Christian movement in Ethiopia, to a surprising extent, is the result of Ethiopian initiatives. When considering earlier development, the discontinuity of the Italian invasion created the conditions for the rise of an indigenous evangelical movement whose leaders and catechists came from the rural population with virtually no formal education. Two significant features of this development are: idigeneity and mass participation. In the urban areas, a new strain of the evangelical faith unfolded in the 50's and the 60's. Though their originary processes had links to one or another category of the various missionary groups, they were characterized by independence and self initiatives that led not only to the indigenization of mission churches but also to the creation of a myriad of para-churches, fellowships and new local churches. Unlike the previous phases of the development of the evangelical movement, the new varieties now appearing in the urban centers were pan-ethnic with nationalist evangelical agendas.

The Western missionaries, especially, the SIM did not concentrate on the formation of elite-based leadership. Therefore, no articulate leadership of national magnitude emerged until a later time, due to a change of policy. The situation of the Christians with Lutheran background was a bit different. There were a few elite groups that emerged and even took new initiatives to advance the evangelical faith at a national level. Nonetheless, they did not make significant impact because of their strong doctrinal loyalties to the Lutheran faith and their major preoccupation of strengthening their own local church through institution building and other pioneering activities. A new indigenous lay-led religious movement, covering a dozen ethnic groups and imagining new vision of unity in the midst of diversity emerged, without the taint of passing through a Western mission grid.

Overall, the influence of missionaries, either by way of westernization or the idea of a civilizing mission, has been very weak in the Ethiopian situation. This was mainly because of the presence of deep-rooted religious traditions, a strong culture of independence, and the countervailing power of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church that enjoyed state support. There is no denying the fact that the coming of Western Protestant missionaries in Ethiopia and the resultant expansion of the evangelical faith has changed the religious map of Ethiopia and its demographic constitution. Before the advent of the missionaries, the people of the southern and southwestern parts of Ethiopia, were predominantly followers of traditional African religions, interspersed with enclaves of Orthodox Christian communities. This picture changes dramatically with the coming of the evangelical faith through the Protestant mission agencies and its rapid expansion mainly through the evangelizing efforts of local missionaries.



According to a religious survey conducted in 1927, the total population of Ethiopia was 12, 081, 100, of which: adherents of the Orthodox faith were, 3, 000, 000; the Moslems constituted, 3, 000, 000; the Jews made 80, 000; evangelical Christians formed 1, 100 and adherents of the African Traditional Religion (followers of “animistic” faith as they are described in some literature), composed 6,000, 000. The concentration of Protestant missionaries had in the past been in those areas, where the African traditional religions had been prevalent. As a result, the shift of religious status has mainly taken place in those areas. Today, the two national evangelical churches, the Qale Heywet and Mekane Yesus churches, with their base in the south and southwestern part of Ethiopia, claim more than 6 million evangelical Christians. At the root of this major development lies the missionary factor, as discussed in this chapter. Yet, it also had to be noted that the dramatic shift also occurred in the decades of the 60’s and the 70’s, when the evangelical movement registered dynamic score associated with the rise of a new national strain that catapulted indigenous evangelistic initiatives to the forefront. This shift was not only a numerical one, it was also geographical as the new faith began to penetrate other areas, which had in the past been closed to “mission religion” principally by local agencies and insiders.



<sup>1</sup> When Heyling passed through Swakin, the Turkish Pasha lured conceived by his riches and clapped him into prison on charges of espionage. Faced with a demand to choose either Islam or the sword. Heyling accepted the latter. Gustv Aren, *Evangelical pioneers in Ethiopia* (Stockholm: EFS forlaget, 1978), pp.36-37. For more see, Johannes Launhardt, *Evangelicals in Addis Ababa (1919-1991)* (New Bruaswick, Transaction Publisher, 2004), pp.22-28.

<sup>2</sup> Aren, *Evangelical Pioneers*, pp. 34-36. Aasulv Lande, "Evangelical Mission in Ethiopia: Why an ecumenical failure" *The Missionary Factor in Ethiopia*. (Frankfurt: Peter Lang Publisher, 1998), pp. 186-187.

<sup>3</sup> It stems from the view that the Orthodox Church had along the way lost elements of the pure Gospel as it underwent an extensive indigenization due to isolation. The desire of Heyling and those who followed his legacy was to infuse the church with new "evangelical life," so that the church could reform itself from the inside. The assumption was that through the availability of Scriptural materials in the vernaculars, the priests would develop sound Biblical knowledge and understanding. They hoped that this would initiate an inner process of change that would recognize the centrality of Jesus Christ in the redemption of sin and salvation.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted from Olav Saeveras, *On Church-Mission Relations in Ethiopia 1944-69* (Lunde: Drammen 1974), p.16. Other evangelical missions which advanced the same approach such as the Pilgrim Mission and the BCMS desired that adherents of the Orthodox church experience renewal within, but did not envisage the setting up of new congregations. This was not an easy commitment, however. In principle, the missionaries of this category, might have been faithful to their policy. But ideas have consequences. Once missionaries started contacting individuals and influenced them along new lines of thoughts, things usually took their own direction.

<sup>5</sup> For further see, James M'ueen, *The Journals of C.W. Isenberg and J.L. Krapf* (London: Frank Cass &Co. Ltd. 1968).

<sup>6</sup> According to Sundkler, there was an alluring historical dimension to his vision. He compared the role of the Oromo to that of the Catholic Germany in medieval Europe. He figured that the Oromo could become for Africa what Germany was for Europe. Bengt. Sundkler, *A History of the Church in Africa*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) .p.156.

<sup>7</sup> The Oromo Bible was later translated in 1899 by Onesimus (1856-1931) and it was widely in use in southern Ethiopia by the local Oromo people. The CMS and the British Foreign Bible Society made great efforts to translate various portion of the Bible in Amharic, which had been distributed, at least, in northern Ethiopia since the 1850's albeit in a small scale. For further see below.

<sup>8</sup> The Bible in Amharic was first translated in 1840 by an Ethiopian monk, Abraham, also known as, Abu Rumi (perhaps a corrupted reference of the Amharic name, Abraham), Abu Rumi prepared his first New Testament version in 1829 and the entire Bible in 1840. The improved version that Krapf and Flad prepared became key to the enterprise of the Protestant mission in Ethiopia.

<sup>9</sup> Donald Crummey, *Priests and Politicians s: Protestant and Catholic Missionaries in Orthodox Ethiopia, 1830-1868* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), p.149. One is amazed at the indefatigable interest and commitment Krapf demonstrated in expanding mission activities in Ethiopia. He had been involved in several projects together with Gobat and others, in the works with the Pilgrim missionaries, the setting up of the training stations at Imukulu near Massawa, the revival movements of the Orthodox movements in Hamassien and was one of the key players in drawing the attention of the Hermannsburg mission to Ethiopia. Krapf also served as an interpreter of the General Napier's expedition of 1868 in the early stages of the campaign. The role Krapf played in the missionary enterprise in Ethiopia is something that requires a comprehensive study.

<sup>10</sup> Rubenson has also concluded that Teodros had a positive attitude towards Europeans unlike later characterizations. The Emperor's association with the missionaries was based on his pragmatic approach of making a systematic use of their knowledge and skills in order to fit them with his agenda of building a "modern" nation, however he envisioned it. For further see, Sven Rubenson, *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence* (Addis Ababa Kuraz Publishers, 1991), p. 175.

<sup>11</sup> Spencer Trimingham, *The Christian Church and Mission in Ethiopia* (London: World Dominion Press, 1950), p. 27. In a letter Teodros wrote to Samuel Gobat in April, 1855, he spelt out his position towards the missionaries by stressing the fact that he had no needs of priests or teachers of the Christian faith, but artificers and civilians for the progress of his people and his country so that it could advance like the West. The Emperor enjoined Gobat that the workman bring his engine to him. Crummey, *Priests and Politician Priests*, p. 119. In one of his recent articles, Donald Crummey observes that the Emperor's agenda was decidedly the transformation of Ethiopia for which importation of technology and modernization of army and bureaucracy was necessary. Donald Crummey, "Ethiopia, Europe and Modernity: A Preliminary Sketch." *Aethiopica*, vol. 3, 2000, p. 9.

<sup>12</sup> Crummy, *Priests and Politicians*, p. 117.

<sup>13</sup> C.F. W Flad, *Abyssinia, A Romance of Mission*. (London: 1926), pp. 14-33. Most of the missionaries ended up in the service of the royal court than engaging in evangelistic pursuits. For more on this, see Crummey, pp. 115-134.

<sup>14</sup> Flad, pp. 13-33.

<sup>15</sup> Flad, pp. 13-19; Rita Pankhurst. "Mikael Argawi Ethiopia's First Protestant Missionary," *Ethiopia Observer*, 1960, pp. 217.

<sup>16</sup> Peter Falk, *The Growth of the Church in Africa* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), pp. 291-292.

<sup>17</sup> Theophilus Waldmeier notes that some of the monks questioned the very validity of monastic life for they contended that according to the Bible "Jesus Christ ordered his followers to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." Challenged by this conviction some of them left the convent into the neighborhood "to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ according to his order." Theophilus Waldmeier, *Ten Years with King Theodore in Abyssinia and Sixteen in Syria* (London: The Orphans Printing Press, 1886), p. 70.

<sup>18</sup> Aren, *Evangelical Pioneers*, p. 91.

<sup>19</sup> Bengt Sundkler, *A History of the Church in Africa*. p. 154.

<sup>20</sup> The movement was later spearheaded by Dr. Fatovich, a Jewish linguist and philosopher. Apparently, mission work among the *Felashas* did not pick pace. By 1956, the number of evangelical Christians among the *Felasha* had significantly declined. Dorothy Smoker and Chester I. Wenger. *God Led us to Ethiopia*. (Salunga: Eastern Mennonite Board of Mission, 1956), p. 21.

<sup>21</sup> This is not the place to discuss the complicated relations between Emperor Tewodros and the missionaries. This is a subject that has already been extensively covered by Crummy. See his work, Crummey, *Priests and Politicians*.

<sup>22</sup> Aren, *Evangelical Pioneers in Ethiopia*. p. 129.

<sup>23</sup> Aregawi and his colleagues were branded as *Tsere Mariam*, haters of –Mary, and experienced harassment including imprisonment. Rita Pankhurst, p. 216.

<sup>24</sup> Yohannes IV was reported to have asked the question to a party of a Swedish missionary, "Are there Jews in your country?" "Yes, Your Majesty," the visitors replied. "And through what country did you pass to reach mine?" he asked. "Through Egyptian territory," they responded. "Then why," he exclaimed, "did you not stay in your own country or in Egypt to baptize the people there? We have no need of this here," *Addis Reporter*, July 18, 1969, p. 18.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in Richard Caulk, "Religion and State in Nineteenth Century Ethiopia," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, x, 1(1972), p. 30.

<sup>26</sup> Bahru Zewde, *The History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855-1974* (London: James Currey, 1991), p. 48. Overall, Ethiopian emperors considered that all their subjects shared their religion, notwithstanding the fact that people of the peripheries have long been Moslems and the inhabitants of the south and central regions, by and large, followed traditional religions.

<sup>27</sup> Jonathan Miran, "Missionaries, Education & the State in the Italian Colony of Eritrea," *Christian Missionaries and the State in the Third World* (Oxford: James Currey, 2002), p. 123.

<sup>28</sup> Aren, *Evangelical Pioneers*, pp. 201-202.

<sup>29</sup> Waldmeier, pp. 140-141. Menelik received the order in 1886 and obeyed the Emperor's instruction by expelling the missionaries from his domain. Menelik seems to have relaxed his position after the death of Emperor Yohannes when he inherited the mantle of imperial power.

<sup>30</sup> On the persecution of these priests, the theological debate raised between them and the clerics and the Bible Readers Movement, see, Aren, *Evangelical Pioneers*, pp. 172-208.

<sup>31</sup> Onesimus Nasib (1856-1931) was born in Illubabor to Oromo parents. His original name was Hika. He was enslaved as a young boy but was liberated in Massawa by the Swiss adventurer Munzinger and entrusted to the SEM missionaries in 1870. He was given the Christian name Onasimus after his baptism in 1872. Apart from the Bible, he translated Songs and Psalms and Bunyan's book, *Man's Heart*. Onesimus, though a man of erudition lived his life as a simple native Oromo. He abandoned all manners of European styles and he chose to identify himself with the people to win their confidence in his teachings, Aren, *Evangelical Pioneers*, p. 164. For more on this, see, Terfassa Diga. *A Short Biography of Onesimos Nesib*. Addis Ababa: The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, 1999.

<sup>32</sup> Onesimus had already served as a missionary in Ethiopia. For instance, he had been involved in mission works in Agaw Meder and Jimma in the 1880's. In 1904 Menelik gave him an official permission, which said, "The bearer of this letter, Onesimos, as well as the ten, with three rifles, travel to the country of Dejzmach Gabra Igziabher. They have our full consent. Let no one stand in their way." The *Abuna's* letter, though one of approval, stressed his teaching should not deviate in any way "from the faith of the church." Terfassa Diga "Onesimos Nesib, pp. 59-60. This clearly shows that Menelik had made a significant change of policy by this time. It is very clear that the Emperor favored the idea of local catechists teaching the local people, the outcome of which he may not have realized.

<sup>33</sup> According to Mulu Work, Carl Cederqvist obtained the full permission of mission work including evangelism from *Lij Iyasu*, the young ruler who replaced Menelik. Mulu Work Wolde Giorgis, "A Short History of Mekane Yesus Church, 1904-1974." Senior Essay, Addis Ababa University, 1994, p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> Carl Cederqvist was buried in Addis Ababa. In a way, his death puts a closure to SEM's venture of working with the Orthodox church with the purpose of forming evangelical Christian communities from within. Cederqvist did not endorse the idea of forming an independent congregation mainly for theological reasons, apart from his concern about a backlash from the Orthodox priests. His Swedish successor Iwarson and Erikson, encouraged by the new developments in Boji, Nedjo and other parts of Wellega, pursued the line of forming an independent Christian fellowship outside the Orthodox church. For further see, Aren, p.172, pp. 177-196. Influencing this development was also the advent of new missionary groups who stressed the alternative of building separate congregations. Examples include, the American Presbyterian missions, the German Hermannsburg Mission (1921) and the SIM.

<sup>35</sup> For more on the Emperor's relations with the Swedes see, V. H. Norberg, *Swedes in Haile Sellassie's Ethiopia, 1924-1952*. Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1977.

<sup>36</sup> For more on the history of this issue see Aren, pp. 391-410; Feqade Gurmessa, *Ya-Wengel Emnet Enqesegase..*, pp.207-250 The account that we have concerning those Ethiopians with evangelical convictions is that they called themselves "believers." We have no record which suggests that they called themselves "Protestants" or "Evangelicals." The issue that we cannot settle with full certainty is: were they Orthodox or Evangelical Christians? They had issues with some doctrines of the Orthodox Church and questioned its longstanding practices, but did not deny their Orthodox identity. Aleme Eshete partially discusses this issue without offering a resolution. See Aleme Eshete, *The Swedish Evangelical Mission in Ethiopia 1866-1889* (Addis Ababa: Almeida Da Amanuel, 1972), pp.36-37. Some scholars like Meserete Sebhat, who left the Orthodox Church under considerable pressure because of their evangelical convictions, insisted that they were not against the faith/religion of their forefathers but simply objected to some of the practices that the Church had incorporated and uncritically maintained as part of its rituals. They stood for the Church's renewal, especially the eradication of what they considered to be unbiblical traditions. See his book, *Semea Tsedek* (Addis Ababa: 1992), p.9.

<sup>37</sup> For more information on the tensions that existed between the priests of evangelical convictions and the priests of the Orthodox Church see, Samuel Danke, "Contribution of the St. Mary Church in the Introduction and growth of Evangelical Christianity in Bodgi," MYS, 2002.

<sup>38</sup> This is a major issue even to this day. The refusal of burial by the priests has been one of the thorniest issues in the relationship between Orthodox and Evangelical Christians. It has also been one of the most deterrent factors for people with evangelical convictions to leave the Orthodox Church. *Aleqa* Taye, one of the earliest elite and converts from Orthodox background was buried in a Catholic cemetery at Gulele. Despite Empress Taitu's authorization, the clergy refused to officiate at his funeral and prevented his body from being at the Trinity Church.

<sup>39</sup> The priests from the Ethiopian Orthodox background did this with much reluctance, for they knew that it will put a seal to their original dream of reform from within. But, at least, as most scholars agree, they kept their Orthodox identity alive. Bademe Yalew not only maintained his original title *Qes* but was

instrumental in incorporating some of the liturgical and baptismal practices of the national church into the MYC, of which he was a chief figure behind its foundation. Bademe is reported to have said, we are renewal groups, our role is to renew the national church in all possible manners and we are not to be subservient to any mission or foreign program. Servos Olav, *On Church mission Relations in Ethiopia 1944-1969 with Particular reference to the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus and the Lutheran Mission* (Oslo, 1974), p. 38.

<sup>40</sup> Sheik Zakaria became a Christian having some kind of epiphany through readings of the Bible. He later led tens and thousands of Muslims to embrace the Christian faith. He got his converts baptized in the Orthodox Church since it was the only Church around. After he died, most of the followers either reverted to their former faith or blended with Orthodox Christians. There were some who had fallen between the cracks which the Seventh Day Adventist missionaries found and formed a local congregation from their constituency.

<sup>41</sup> Informants: Million Belete and Bruce Adams.

<sup>42</sup> James McCann, *From Poverty to Famine in Northeast Ethiopia : A Rural History 1900-1935*. (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1987), pp.31-32.

<sup>43</sup> The Presbyterian church of Bethel joined the Evangelical Church of Mekane Yesus in 1947 as a member of the Synods of the south. For the history of the Bethel Church, see Debela Birri, "History of Evangelical Church of Bethel 1919-1947," Ph. D Dissertation. Lutheran School of Theology, Chicago, 1995.

<sup>44</sup> For further see, Tibebe Eshete, "The Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) in Ethiopia 1928-1970," *Journal of Northeast African Studies*, 6,3 (New Series), 1999.

<sup>45</sup> According to Charles Rey, Teferi was accused of selling his country to foreigners. Rey Charles, *Unconquered Abyssinia* (London: Duckworth, 1924), p. 270.

<sup>46</sup> Donald Donham, *Marxist Modern: An Ethnographic History of the Ethiopian Revolution* (Berkley: University of California, 1999), p. 91.

<sup>47</sup> T. A. Lambie, *Abyssinia: "Quickly" to the Abyssinian Frontiers* (New York: un. 1920's?)

<sup>48</sup> A. Lambie, *A Doctor's Great Commission*. Wheaton: Van Kampen, 1954, p. 181.

<sup>49</sup> See Tibebe "The Sudan Interior Mission..." pp. 35-36. See the appendix section for the full content of the letter.

<sup>50</sup> Stuart Begsma, *Rainbow Empire: Ethiopian Stretches out her Hands* (Grand Rapids: W.M.B Eerman's, 1932), p.272. Lambie also was emphatic about the primary purposes of medical services. He explained his convictions by stating the fact that in the context of Ethiopia, a medical diploma acts as the best entrance passé porte given the poor health situation and the dire absence of health institutions. He concluded, "Medicine was once again the spear point or the camel's nose---were there enough doctors, Ethiopia might be opened from end to end." Thomas Lambie, "Conquest by Healing in Ethiopia," cited in Donald Donham. *Marxist Modern...*, p.89.

<sup>51</sup> Brian L. Fargher, *The Origin of the New Church Movement in Southern Ethiopia, 1927-1944* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1996), pp. 133-149. This view has also been confirmed by local informants. Informants: Teshome ( I: 18-05-03), Mehari Choramo (I: 30-12-02), Tesfaye ( I : 23-05-03), Shagna Anjaro (I: 19-05-03), and Milkias Borena (I: 19-05-03).

<sup>52</sup> Tibebe, pp. 40-41.

<sup>53</sup> Informants: Mehari and Tilahun Haile (I:22-11-02)

<sup>54</sup> Fargher, *The Origins of ...*, p. 58.

<sup>55</sup> Albert Brant, *In the Wake of Martyrs*. (Langley, B.C: Omega, 1992), p. 112.

<sup>56</sup> See Tibebe, "Some notes"; Eshetu Abate, "A Short History of the Origin of Evangelical Christianity in Wollaytta, Southern Ethiopia,' BA thesis, Addis Ababa, MYS, 1989, pp. 3-4.

<sup>57</sup> Kao Goda told to the local people that they should observe Sundays. In his eschatological message he would preach, " Those who stop offering to the ancestral spirits and believe only in God will be saved from judgment. People will fly in boxes in the sky. God will descend from heaven holding a golden umbrella. He will judge the world. The dead will rise again." E. .P. Balisky, *Wolaitta Evangelist: A Study of Religious Innovation in Southern Ethiopia, 1937-1975* (Aberdeen: University of Aberdeen, 1997), pp. 12-121. Obviously this was a message that attacked primal religion. I have used the notion of fault line in connection with such movements. They are voices from the margin, like the *Bahetawian*, but when they appear in amidst people of peripheral regions, their religious messages could assume political tones and coded meanings.

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<sup>58</sup> Mehari, *Ethiopian Revivalist*, p.10.

<sup>59</sup> Terfasa, "Onasimos...", p. 90. The whole issue of the prophetic movements in Ethiopia is one of the least investigated field of studies in Ethiopia.

<sup>60</sup> Ingeborg Lass-Westphall, "Protestant Mission During and after the Italo –Ethiopian War, 1935-1937," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*. 10,1(1972), p.100.

<sup>61</sup> Informants: Mehari, Milkias, and Shanga.

<sup>62</sup> Informants: Mehari, Milkias and Shagna..

<sup>63</sup> Among those men who rose to the challenges of leading the new movement were Shegute Ddada and Sebro Weseno from Kambatta and Hadiyya, and Biru Dubale from the area of Wellyata. A system of elders, introduced by the missionaries, which also was found to be compatible with the traditions of the local population was soon adapted and replicated. Added to that was social networks such as friendship and extended family ties that were effectively used to promote the spread of the Gospel. Together, they played crucial roles in the process of reconfiguring the evolving church and in providing key guidance to a growing movement. Staffan Grenstedt, *Ambaricho and Shenkola: From an Independent Church to the Evangelical Mainstream in Ethiopia* (Upsalla: Upsalla University Faculty of Theology, 2000), p. 64-66; Wondiye Ali, *Ye Ekule Lelit Wegegta* (Addis Ababa: The Ethiopian Kale Heywet Church Literature Department , 2000), pp. 24-27; Mehari Choramo, *Ethiopian Revivalist: Autobiography of Evangelist Mehari Choramo* (Edmonton: Enterprise Publications, 1997), pp. 6-47. Informant: Mehari Choramo

<sup>64</sup> As early as May 1936, the strategy had been well developed and articulated. The Italians wanted to present themselves as liberators of the people of the newly conquered regions. A document that was published in Rome on May 5, 1936 reads, " What has the Ethiopian Empire done in the last forty years , from Menelik to Haile Sillassie, to raise the natives from that state of barbarous ignorance which made it easy for the chiefs to hold them in subjection? With the exception of the admirable work of the Italian Catholic missionaries who ...had brought the Gospel to the natives... absolutely nothing has been done." Societ ' a nazionale Dante Alighieri, *Roman Peace and Civil Progress in Redeemed Ethiopia, October 2, 1935-May 5, 1936* (Rome: Dante Alighiere Society, 1936), p. 26.

<sup>65</sup> Spencer J. Trimmingham, *The Christian Church and Missions in Ethiopia*. (London: World Dominion, 1950), p.34.

<sup>66</sup> Cornwallis Harris, *The Highlands of Aetiopia* (London: Longman, 1844), Vol. III, pp. 75-83.

<sup>67</sup> Some local people claim that the coming of the missionaries had been foretold. For instance, in the area of Sidama, a man by the name Warassa, reported that he was seeing *Megeno*, the Creator, and he was earnestly looking for the way to find him. In a dream, he claimed to have seen, a tent beside a sycamore tree, and three white men in those tents. In his dream he also saw a voice coming which said to him, "these are the people who will show you the way to me." This was reported to a missionary who went to the local site in the 1940's. See, Helen M. Willmott, *The Doors Were Opened* (London: SIM, 1949), p.88. Anecdotal information of this nature has been documented in an Amharic book of the Qale Heywet Church. See, Wondiye Ali, *Ye Ekule Lelit Wegegta* pp.150-175.

<sup>68</sup> A similar development took place in the southwestern parts of Ethiopia, in Wellega and Ilubabor. For further, see, Gustav Aren, *Ervoys of the Gospel in Ethiopia* (Stockholm: EFS forlaget, 1999), pp. 509-536; Feqadu Gurmeissa, *Ye-Wengel Emnet Enqesqase Ba-Itypia* (Addis Ababa: MKY Church, 1999), pp. 272-292.

<sup>69</sup> Informant: Mehari. Staffan Genstedt, *Ambaricho and Shonkola*, pp. 64-69.

<sup>70</sup> For further see, E.P Ba.lisky, *Wolaitta Evangelists*. In spite of his great contribution to our understanding of the role of the Wellayta evangelists in spreading the evangelical faith, Balisky does not identify that local strain, an inherent outgoing impulse, within this ethnic group, be it socio-cultural, historical, or demographic, that lent the Welayta such a propensity to go out and evangelize. This is also a strain visibly exhibited among the Amhara and Guraghe ethnic group, albeit the differences in imperatives and motivations.

<sup>71</sup> In one locality it is reported that all dogs had been killed. When the people were asked for the reason, their reply was "Does not the Scripture tell us to beware of dogs." Dorothy Smoker, pp. 23-24.

<sup>72</sup> Informants: Mehari, Shagna, and Milkias.

<sup>73</sup> The issue of demonic activities is pervasive across all societies in Ethiopia since ancient times. This was also something that many travelers have paid attention to in their books. Harold Fuller observes that " every where I went in Ethiopia, I came across reports of demonic activity-far more than I heard of other counties. It may be more apparent because many of the people worship the devil himself, whereas

most animistic religion try to appease spirits, which, they hope, will protect them from Satan.” W. Harold Fuller, *Run While the Sun is Hot* (Aylesbury: Hazel Watson and Viney Ltd. 1967), p. 203. This could be an exaggerated statement, but there is a lot of truth in it. Stories of successful power encounter and deliverance from spirit possession are bound in the testimonies of preachers and converts as was the case in the south in the period under review as well as today. Pentecostalism in Ethiopia has been successful partly for it incorporated this element of the spiritual life of many Ethiopians as one of the main features of its ministry.

<sup>74</sup> Informants: Tukji. Shanga and Milkias. Fargher, *Bivocational Missionary-Evangelist: The Story of an Itinerant Preacher in Northern Sidamo by Sorsa Sumamo*(Edmonton: 2002), pp. 64-68;150-151.

<sup>75</sup> Arne Tolo, *Sidama and Ethiopian*. (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 1998, p. 115.

<sup>76</sup> Informants: Mehari, Shagna and Milkias. A good example of preaching that combined music would have run as follows:

The catechist statement(in a musical form)	People’s response
Jesus is with us	yes he is with us
He is the son of God	Yes he is with us
Born in a manger	Yes he is with us
Suffered for us	Yes he is with us
Did died for us and rose	Yes he is with us

<sup>77</sup> Based on information from Mehari and Balisky. See also Raymond Davis, *Fire on the Mountains: The Story of a Miracle-the Church in Ethiopia*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1966) , pp. 124-136.

<sup>78</sup> Informant: Mehari.

<sup>79</sup> Brian Fargher, *Bivocational*, p. 2. On the role and activities of local evangelists of the time see Wondiye Ali, *Bemekra Yabebech*, pp. 233-243.

<sup>80</sup> Informants: Mehari, Shanga and Milkias.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Fargher, *Bivocational*, p. 101. Partly the new identity came from the new name they assigned to themselves. The converts called themselves, “believers” while at the same time other referred to them, “*misyon*”(mission). They referred to their meeting place as *Ye-Tselot Bet* (prayer house) instead of *Bete Krestiyen* (house of Christians, church) of the Orthodox Christians.

<sup>83</sup> The Sudan Interior Mission. *Roots from Dry Ground: The Story of the Sudan Interior Mission* (Aylesbury: Hazell Watson & Viney Ltd., n. d), pp.46-47; Quinton also recites similar accounts of torture and death. A. G. H. Quinton, *Ethiopian and the Evangel* (Edinburg : Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1949), pp.28-29.

<sup>84</sup> For further see, Grenstedt, *Ambaricho*...., pp.65-73; Davis, pp. 119-136.

<sup>85</sup> Wondiye Ali, *Ye-Ekule Lelit Wegegta* ( Addis Ababa: Kale Heywet Church, 2000), p. 31.

<sup>86</sup> There were only 48 converts in the area of Welayta and about 10 in Kambata area, and perhaps a few more here and there in Hadiya. Eshetu Abate, “The Origin of the Growth.... ,p.21; Tilahun Haile, *Ye Wengel Serechet Tarik Be Itiopia*. Unpublished manuscript, 1999, p. 11.

<sup>87</sup> According to Peter Falk, the church grew to 10, 000; and according to Playfair to 25, 000. Peter Falk, *the Growth of the Church in Africa*.,p.293; G.W. Playfair, *Ethiopia is stretching out Her Hands Unto God*. (London: Sudan Interior Mission, n. d. ca. 1944), p.23.

<sup>88</sup> For instance, Willmott observed, “ How did it happen-this reaping of fruits of souls? A mere handful of believers had grown in five years to a membership of about 20, 000! A modern Pentecost in the mountains of Ethiopia.” Helen M. Willmott, *The doors were opened: The Remarkable Advance of the Gospel in Ethiopia* (London: Sudan Interior Mission, u.d.1950?), p. 55; In a similar fashion, Davis comments, “ the growth of the church and the effectiveness of the Gospel in Wallamo can only be attributed to the work of the Holy Spirit....it could never have been produced by mere human efforts, however devoted or consecrated.” Davis, *Fire on the Mountain*, p. 241.

<sup>89</sup> Alfred G. Roke, *An Indigenous Church in Action*(Auckland NZ : SIM Mission Office 1938), p. 55.



<sup>90</sup> People's movement requires some kind of definition. Cotterell is cautious in the use of the term. The argument he presents is that the converts made decision on individual basis sometimes in isolation from relatives and clans. He was not against the contagious nature of the movement but his concern was it might suggest some mobish move and feared that the notion might gloss over the issue of freewill and the moral responsibility of each person in making decisions. E.P. Cotterell, *Born at Mid Night* (Chicago: Moody, 1973), p. 168.

<sup>91</sup> Through out the Italian period, the *Gabar* system was abolished and the high taxes and forced labor taken away. After the restoration some of the old taxation systems and patterns of social relation lingered on, though the *Gabar* system had not been re-instituted. This come back of the old system created deep resentment and even caused major civil strife between the former land lords/the settler and the local inhabitants. Such transitional problems that unfolded in the immediate post-war years have in some places been referred to by the local people as *Shiber*. For further see, Arne Tolo, *Sidama and Ethiopian* (Uppsala: Fjellhaug Mission Seminary, 1998), pp.120-125.

<sup>92</sup> Wondiye, *Ye-Ekule Lelit*, pp. 41-44; Informants: Mehari, Shagna and Milkias.

<sup>93</sup> Qes Gebre Sellassie Tesfa Gabre was installed as the first indigenous pastor of the newly formed evangelical congregation, on March 23, 1922. This, according to Aren, "constituted a milestone in the history of Evangelical Christianity in Ethiopia." Aren, *Envoys of the Gospel in Ethiopia*. p.197.

<sup>94</sup> Grenstedt, pp. 71-74.

<sup>95</sup> Aren, *Envoys*, p. 535.

<sup>96</sup> See below

<sup>97</sup> Johnny Bakke, *Christian Ministry: Patterns and Functions within the Ethiopian Evangelical Church of Mekane Yesus*(New York: Humanities Press, 1986), pp. 141-142.

<sup>98</sup> Mulu Work Wolde Girorgis, "A Short History of the Addis Ababa Evangelical Church of Mekane Yesus, 1904-1974," Addis Ababa University, History Department, 1994, pp.15-16; p.64. Leaders like Bademe, Yohnnes Reda, Amanuel, Berhanu Akalu, let the Swedish missionaries know that they were ready to be autonomous assuring them that they were confident enough to carry on the task of evangelism in their absence. In good faith the local leaders imitated the Swedish missionaries free from burdens they were free to invest their resources elsewhere.

<sup>99</sup> For further see, Aren, *In the Footsteps of...*

<sup>100</sup> Unlike the SIM, who come from a fundamentalist background, the Lutherans both from Europe and USA, did not maintain a theological position that sought to separate converts from their culture. In fact, practices such as marriage with non-Christians, polygamy, and drinking locally brewed alcohols were accommodated.

<sup>101</sup> The SEM group formed their own association and the efforts of the leaders veered towards creating a single denominational entity. Likewise, the leaders in the south also formed the association of evangelical believers under whose umbrella they brought the scattered believers congregation to one major denomination. The energy for pan-denominational unity was thus divested.

<sup>102</sup> In the first meeting of representatives of the evangelical Christians, held on December13, 1944, missionaries were not invited. This was done with a clear message that the participants had a national agenda that had to be addressed by the Ethiopian nationals. It is interesting to note that this meeting took place only three months after the Mission Decree of August 1944. It is tempting to suggest that perhaps the move might have received impetus from the Decree that recognized missionary activities and local evangelicals ipso facto. (See minutes of the various leaders in the appendix section)

<sup>103</sup> The Qale Heywet church was organized in 1971 consisting of all evangelical Christians of SIM affiliations. The Church has the highest membership of evangelical Christians in Ethiopia composed of more than 4, 000,000 . Tilahun Beyene, " *Bete Krestiyen Eseralehu*": *Yemesete Kirstos Bete Krestiyen Tarik* (Addis Ababa: Mega Matemia Enterprise, 2002), p. 88.

<sup>104</sup> Overall, the idea did not gain currency by the missionaries, especially the SIM. In fact the SIM and the Lutheran missionaries, who had long history of misunderstanding, did not want the process to consummate. As a result, the ecumenical movement took its own local emphasis as believers sharing same or related doctrines became the focus of unity. Eventually, two big evangelical groups emerged, the Qale Heywet from the SIM background (1971)and the Ethiopian Evangelical Church of Mekane Yesus from the Lutheran background(1959). Because it has spearheaded the movement for a united Evangelical church, the latter retained the fundamental principles and the broader name, "Evangelical", and to this day, it de facto, represents evangelical churches in general at the level of popular perceptions and the

state. The Ethiopian Revolution, which forced the mission to leave the country, once again, brought the tempo of pan-denominational cooperation in the form of annual pastor's conferences eventually leading to the formation of Fellowship of Ethiopian Evangelical Christians.

<sup>105</sup> The persecution experience of the evangelical Christians of the south has been ably documented in Wondiye Ali's, *Bemekera Wust Yabebech Bete Krestiyen* (Addis Ababa: Kale Heywet Church, 1998); for the situation in the southwestern parts of Ethiopia see, Faqadu Gurmesssa, pp. 267-293; Debela Birri, "History of the Evangelical Church of Bethel 1919 to 1947...", p. 18; p. 293.

<sup>106</sup> The persecution experience of evangelical Christians in southwestern parts of Ethiopia partly derives from the fact that pioneers of the movement originally were members of the local Orthodox Church. Once they left the church under the pressure of the local clergy, they were denied burial and baptismal rites for their children. It was this social ostracization that reinforced their identities as evangelical Christians. Debela, p. 18.

<sup>107</sup> Sundkler, *A History of Africa*, p. 1028.

<sup>108</sup> The sense of independence the discontinuity allowed, continued to inspire ensuing leaders, which the missionaries had to consider seriously and make the necessary accommodations. They dealt with this issue early on by indigenizing the leadership right at an early stage, as was the case of the Mekane Yesus Church and that of the Qale Hewyet churches, though the latter took a longer time to accomplish.

<sup>109</sup> There were reported cases where local evangelists made literal translation of some verses in the Bible and introduced some strange practices such eliminating dogs because they were defiled animals. In some cases there were also attempts to re-incorporate pre-existing cultural or religious traditions such as observing a fast on Friday and celebrating baptism accompanied by horse rides. There were some missionaries who did not feel at ease with these developments, while there were others who were simply intrigued by the situation and tried to offer corrective emphasis to maintain the doctrinal standard of the evangelical faith. Informants: Mehari, Shagna, Pastor Bark Fahnestock (I: 01-09-02).

<sup>110</sup> By ethno-religious phenomenon, I mean to say evangelical Christianity in the south reached the Kembatta, Hadiya, Welayta belt and then reached the Sidama people. In the case of the southwestern part of Ethiopia, it was mainly linked with the Oromo of Wellega region. This is unlike the Orthodox religion, though clearly associated with the "Amhara," has assumed a supra-ethnic dimension. It was the expansion of the Pentecostal faith that has reversed this process as we shall see in the next chapter.

<sup>111</sup> Lass Westphal, p. 92; Viveca Halldin Norberg, *Swedes in Haile Sellassie's Ethiopia, 1924-1952*, p. 70.

<sup>112</sup> C. Sandfird, *Ethiopian Under Haile Sellassie* (London: Dent, 1946,) p. 68. The Emperor was particularly impressed by the works of the Swedish Mission. The Emperor expressed his impressions early on during his visit in Sweden (1924) by indicating that the Swedes were the most appreciated missionaries for they learned the Ethiopian language and built schools. Norberg, p. 122. The support the Emperor gave to missionaries is universally acknowledged in most accounts of missionaries and travelers.

<sup>113</sup> Evangelical Christianity has emphasized the urgency of providing vernacular translation of the Bible in the languages of the "un-reached." This caused a major displeasure among the missionaries. From the government's point of view, unity was the paramount concern, for the missionaries, evangelization was the most important issue. No doubt, the missionaries working with various linguistic communities skirted gingerly around the issue like applying phonographed discs in vernaculars. However, when discovered, they were given stern warnings. See the letter of Akale Work Habtewold, 1947 in the appendix section.

<sup>114</sup> It has become public knowledge that some Catholic missionaries in Jimma had been found spying for the Italians. Moreover, Dr. Lambie of the SIM had also been suspected of having some associations with the Italians before he left Ethiopia, though there is no evidence to substantiate it. Different scholars have taken different positions on the 1944 Mission Decree. Saeveras considers it as positive achievement demonstrating a relative openness to missions, while Norberg views it as a policy that was essentially aimed at putting limit to the works of missions. Olas, Saeveras, *On Church Mission Relations in Ethiopia 1944-1969: with special Reference to the Evangelical Church of Mekane Yesus and the Lutheran Missions*. Uppsala: University of Uppsala, 1974., pp. 33-34; Norberg, p. 79.

<sup>115</sup> Informants: Shagna, Milkyas, Mehari and Tilahun.

<sup>116</sup> This a view strongly shared by Abebe Fisseha, For further see, Abebe Fisseha, "Education and the Formation of Modern Ethiopian State, 1896-1974," Ph. D. thesis, University of Illinois, 2000, pp. 167-

173. Abebe makes the point that the Emperor wanted to get the National Church reinvigorated to counter the rising tide of Islam in Ethiopia, especially its growing influence along the border regions, coinciding with the emergence of Gamal Abd al Nasser as the leader of Pan-Islamic world. The issue of using western missionaries to christianize areas inhabited by Moslems was a project Tewodros sought to implement. Crummey, pp. 131-132.

<sup>117</sup> Informants: Shagna, Milkyas, Mehari and Tilahun.

<sup>118</sup> John H. Spencer, the American fellow who was a close advisor of the Emperor and who was also involved in drafting the Decree, admitted that he wanted the document to be as liberal as possible and the Emperor also shared his views to a large extent, but faced serious challenges from hard liners. Meeting this challenge determined the content and stipulations of the decree. Spencer thus acknowledges that the document was a compromising solution. John Spencer, *Ethiopia at Bay, A personal Account of Haile Sellassie Years* (Algonac, Mich. : Reference Publications, 1984), pp. 169-170.

<sup>119</sup> Grenstedt, p. 78. The distinction between "Open" and "Closed" strictly speaking had no pronounced lines. Perhaps, the Emperor wanted it to be deliberately vague or else it was found difficult to make the delineation and, hence, was left to be conventionally understood.

<sup>120</sup> David E. Stokes, *Ethiopia – Land of the Outstretched Hand* (London: The Bible Churchmen's Missionary Society), 1948, p. 32.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, p. 18.

<sup>122</sup> Outstanding among those evangelists and preachers was Worku who was among those young Ethiopians massacred by the Italians in 1937. Norman Grubb, *Alfred Buxton*. (London: Lutterworth Press, 1942), p. 154. As will be seen in later in the next chapter, Worku was also one of the young men involved with the first Pentecostal missionaries who came to Ethiopia in 1934.

<sup>123</sup> Informants: Tefera Wolde Mickael and Belaynesh Feleke ( I: 15-08-04)

<sup>124</sup> Informant: Belaynesh Feleke.

<sup>125</sup> ibid

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, p. 38.

<sup>127</sup> Informants: Rev. Colin Mansell (I: 24-02-12), Mesfin Lisanu (I:22-05-02), Negussie Tefera (I: 28-01-08).

<sup>128</sup> There were also the anonymous ones, for instance, men like the famous journalist Paulos Ngnogno, who was also a member of the *Army of Jesus*, whose life and activities in relation to his faith we know very little of. Informants: Tuji Jimma ( I: 28-12-02) and Tefera Wolde Michael

<sup>129</sup> Among those who became local evangelists and who contributed a great deal to the expansion of the evangelical faith under the auspices of the MYC were: Wondimagegne Haile, *Memere* Shibeshi Wolde Michael, *Qes* Haile Dersu, *Qes* Engida Work Eguale Berhan, Estifanos Dere, and Rahel Wato. Fekadu Gurmessa, *Ye-Wongel Emnet Enqisqase Be Ityopia* , pp. 266-267;322-324.

<sup>130</sup> The magazine was later renamed as *Berhan* after the BCMS gave it to the national Evangelical Fellowship during the early years of the Ethiopian Revolution.

<sup>131</sup> If, however, missionaries like Peter Heyling had left influences having stayed for a limited number of years, in one localized areas with a very limited publication of Scriptural literature, how much so of BCMS, with an organized mission work of modern times, with so many programs embracing the youth in urban centers as well as rural areas and with so much literature they had produced and made available.

<sup>132</sup> Dorsa. J and Mary K. Mishler, *Invited By The King: Personal Vignettes of God's Leading in Relief and Mennonite Mission Beginnings in Ethiopia 1946-1948* (unpublished manuscript)1999, p.130. Informants: (I:22-07-03).

<sup>133</sup> Hege *Beyond Our Prayers*, p.47.

<sup>134</sup> Later on, born out of the concept of the comity, the various missionaries in Ethiopia also established an Inter- Mission Society. The forum was also designed not only to help the missionaries forge closer ties but also serve as an arena for consultations on larger issues of mutual concerns.

<sup>135</sup> Hege, pp. 48-49; J. Dorsa and Mary and K. Mishle. *Invited by the King*. pp. 130-136. Interview with the authors.

<sup>136</sup> P. Cebatchew. Church Report, Meserete Krestos Church, Ethiopia: Bedeno. 1975. Mennonite Central Committee Collection. File 138/83. Mennonite Archives, Goshen, Indiana.

<sup>137</sup> These men later became fine scholars and professionals and church leaders. In fact, one of them served as the country Director of World Vision Ethiopia and East Africa. All of them played pivotal role

in the formation of the Meserete Kirstos Church, an off-shot of the Mennonite missionary activities in Ethiopia. Tilahun Beyene. " *Bete Kirstianen Eseralehu*": *Yemeserete Krestos*, p. 38.

<sup>138</sup> According to Million Belete, the Ethiopian generation of the time was full of questions. The youth were clinging to unexplained truth that could not carry them long through the journey of modern education and the demands of modern life. The youth had fundamental questions about their faith, and the philosophy of life, in general for whose answers they voraciously read books, virtually books of any kind. Interview: Million Belete. (I: 22- 01-02).

<sup>139</sup> The bookshops were later confiscated by the military regime in 1974 and turned into a government controlled publishing enterprise, called *Kuraz*. Million Belete, one of the foremost leaders of the evangelical churches and a man who had been reared in the Mennonite tradition, has now opened bookstores under the name of *Raei*, in the footsteps of the Menno Bookstore founders.

<sup>140</sup> Informant: Million.

<sup>141</sup> Informant: Million.

<sup>142</sup> According to Paul Gingrich, some missionary parents experienced problems with the rules and regulations of the Bingham Academy of the SIM and wanted to raise their children in a different institution. One unhappy missionary was Mr. Chester Wagner, who thought of having a separate alternative school for mission kids. The idea, which originated from Chester Wagner, led to a serious discussion with Dr. Herbert Schaefer of the American Lutheran Church. Dr Schaefer took it further and got the approval of the government for the start of this special school. Informant: Paul Gingrich ( I: 22-08-03).

<sup>143</sup> Quoted in Hege, p.77.

<sup>144</sup> Rohrer Eshleman " Prayer Letter Support", *Missionary Messenger*, 10 ( 52), p. 5.

<sup>145</sup> Gemechu Gebre Telila "History of the Meserete Kristos Church at Wonii Geffersa, Ethiopia, During the Derg, 1974-1991: God Works for Good," MA: Eastern Mennonite Seminary, 2002, p. 15

<sup>146</sup> For further see, Gemechu Gebre Telila, "History of the Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji, Gefersa,..."

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Hege, pp. 81-82. It has to be noted that what contributed to the good reputation is the high standard of its faculty members. For instance, one of its former faculty members, Professor Calvin Shenk, has become a distinguished scholar worldly renown for his scholastic achievements.

<sup>149</sup> Informants: Dorsa Mishler, Mary Mishler and Paul Gingrich.

<sup>150</sup> Quoted from Hege, pp. 79-80. Hege cites, "EMBMC" Annual Report for 1959, p. 44 (EMBMC, stands for Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, which later changed to Eastern Mennonite Board of Mission before it assumed its current name Eastern Mennonite Missions)

<sup>151</sup> Hege, p.139.

<sup>152</sup> See the next chapter.

<sup>153</sup> Informants: Million, Professor Negussay Ayele ( I: 28-06-03) and Mekonnen.

<sup>154</sup> Among those who became fine scholars were Professor Tilahun Yilma, Professor Negussie Ayele, Dr. Daniel Lemma, Dr. Girma Asfaw and a host of others. Some have shifted gears and broken their allegiance to the evangelical faith after active service in their youth while others have continued to pursue it and still serve the church in different capacities.

<sup>155</sup> I have purposely avoided the issue of conversion in my discussion. For one thing, it is a complicated issue in the context of Ethiopia and secondly, it causes so much diversion from the flow of the grand story I seek to tell. It is interesting to note that the Mennonite missionaries, just like the SIM, were serious about evangelism and stressed the need for a separate Christian congregation outside the Orthodox Church. They were not supposed to proselytize, they knew this very well, but they called all people to salvation including adherents of the national church and insisted that a person who made serious faith commitment to following Christ would need baptism and is expected to show a life that is in conformity with the renewal promised in the Bible. For the youth who came to the new faith, the question is were they converted or did they make rational decisions based on their past spiritual experience and options offered to them, and if that is the case what should we call that process? One can find in this situation an elements of conversion as well as re-conversion.

<sup>156</sup> Informants: Solomon Kebede and Tilahun Yelma.

<sup>157</sup> Informants: Negussay, Solomon Kebede (I:02-05-03), and Afework Kebede( I:05-07-03)

<sup>158</sup> In fact, according to informants, one of the principal reasons why many parents tolerated their sons and daughters who were participating in the new faith was, the character shift they had introduced and

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the accompanying improvements in their school records. Informants: Solomon, Professor Tilahun Yilma ( I :26-06-03), Afework and others.

<sup>159</sup> Informants: Solomon, Negussay, Tilahun

<sup>160</sup> Informants: Negussay, Solomon, Tilahun, and Afework.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Informants: Negussay, Tilahun Yelma, Solomon Kebede, Mulugeta Zewde ( I: 25-10-02), Rev. Zeleke Alemu ( I :29-09-02, and others.

<sup>163</sup> The notion of “rational choice,” originally an concept, has been extended by Rodney Stark, a prominent American Sociologist, to apply to religious studies. For further see, Rodney Stark, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion* ( Berkeley: University of California Press), 2000

<sup>164</sup> Brigitte Berger and Peter Berger, *The Homeless Mind* ( New York: Random House, 1973), p.52. My reservation to this and the notion of “deprivation theory” theory is that crisis and traumatic experiences may pre-dispose people to become religious, or seek religious experiences, but not necessarily make them religious. Not only that, such notions leave important things from the equation such as issues of agency and the nature of the messages addressed and the way they were packaged and delivered to a recipient. In the context of my discussion, it mutes the Gospel’s offensiveness. I stress the power of the word, the power of self-disclosed message (as perceived by believers) and the element of choice, in the reconfiguration process.

<sup>165</sup> I developed the concept of “lack” based on a series of interviews with General Taye Tilahun, a long time member of the MYC and once the country’s Minister of Defense and Interior. Informant: General Taye Tilahun ( I: 30-01-01;29-08-02).

<sup>166</sup> Informant: Professor Tilahun Yelma. This was also a view shared by Professor Daniel Lemma. It must be stressed that the youth who went through the new religious experience were very serious of their faith. I have tried to trace the history and current status of the youth and found out that most of them are still committed to their faith and are still active in promoting it while admittedly there are also a few of them who still have some reversion to the Orthodox faith or charted out new paths.

<sup>167</sup> Informants: Solomon Kebede and Mekonnen. Alemayehu (I; 01-04-03).

<sup>168</sup> Informants: Negussay, Tilahun and Solomon.

<sup>169</sup> Informant: Solomon Kebede.

<sup>170</sup> Hege, pp. 128-146.

<sup>171</sup> Among those Ethiopians attending the Conference were Haile Wolde Micael and Negussie Ayele ( who later became distinguished professors in Addis Ababa University). There was a lingering debate whether the term Mennonite should be attached in the MKC both among Ethiopians and expatriate missionaries. Some Ethiopians contended that its use could be more harmful than beneficial since its foreignness could present a setback for the churches mission in Ethiopia.

<sup>172</sup> According to Dr. Abdella Osman, Mellion was simply made to serve as a temporary leader of the church and may be informally serving as a “pastor” hence, the term pastor does not fit his position.

<sup>173</sup> Informants: Wubshet Dessalegne (I:19-12-03), Kebede Kumsa (I:22-07-01), Assefa Alemu ( I: 12-04-01), and Pastor Hiruye Tsige (I :03-02-03). Informants could not explain the reason why the missionaries had not done much on training and ordaining local pastors. Opinions are divided on the issue. There were those who felt that it was not fit to ordain Ethiopian pastors. There were also those who contend that it was not necessary to ordain pastors because it was a foreign concept and hence they had to wait until Ethiopians developed their own title fit to their local contexts. During the Revolution many Ethiopian pastors emerged as the leadership entirely fell in the hands of the Ethiopians. It seems that the title became popular after the emergence of many local pastors during and after the revolution. Even Qes Bademe Yalew, considered to be one of earliest pastors of the MYC, was known by the title he had inherited from the Orthodox Church, rather than pastor.

<sup>174</sup> Hege, p. 144.

<sup>175</sup> The issue of indigenization, in the context of Ethiopia, basically refers to transfer of leadership from the hands of foreign missionaries to that of the locals and modifications of worship practices. Otherwise, in most cases except in the independent church of Mulu Wengel, the Ethiopian leaders adopted the creeds, beliefs and theological tenets of their particular denominations.

<sup>176</sup> Hege, p. 143; Tilahun, pp. 79-86; Interview: Paul Gingrich, Mellion Belete ( I : 07-01-03); Doctor Tesfa Tsion Delel ( I: 12-02-03). The issue of independence was raised by the Ethiopians but the Mennonite missionaries especially Chester Wenger had also been a strong proponent of the idea of local

leaders assuming the full leadership and mentoring young men for that purpose. A memorandum of understanding was established between the Ethiopians and the missionaries outlining the various stages by which the transition was to be accomplished. Informants: Paul Gingrich, Negussay Ayele and Tesfa Tsion.

<sup>177</sup> Hege, p.139.

<sup>178</sup> Messay Kebede, *Survival and Modernization Ethiopia's Enigmatic Present: A philosophical Discourse* (Lawrenceville :Red See Press, 1999), pp. 301-304. Messay even stretches the point by saying that the modernization process, instead of renewing Ethiopia, generated conflicts resulting in the surfacing of a dysfunctional generation. He argues that these were the conditions which set the stage for the revolution of 1974.

<sup>179</sup> Informants: Solomon, Mekonnen Afework, Balcha Deneged ( I: 12-03-03); and others.

<sup>180</sup> Hege, p.147.

<sup>181</sup> According to informants, this was facilitated mainly by Dr. Rohrer Eshleman, the Mennonite missionary who was also teaching the students English classes. Informants: Paul Gingrich, Afework, Mulugeta, Solomon, and others.

<sup>182</sup> According to Tilahum, Solomon learned about the Pentecostal movement in the Summer of 1963 from Zeleqe, a student from the Harar Teacher Training School, while both were attending the annual youth conference held in Nazareth. Zeleqe who had a prior knowledge of the Pentecostal movement in Addis Ababa through his friend, Getachew Mekere. The latter had learned about Pentecostalism because of his past connections with the Finnish Mission. The issue of who influenced whom, for that matter, pinpointing the exact locale of its origin is a complex issue which leaves much to be desired.

<sup>183</sup> Informants: Solomon, Pastor Seyum Gebre Tsadik ( I: 18-01-03), Afework and others.

<sup>184</sup> Informants: Solomon, Seyum and Mulugeta.

<sup>185</sup> Informants: Mulugeta, Afework. Balcha and Mekonnen.

<sup>186</sup> Informant: Paul Gingrich.

<sup>187</sup> Informants: Solomon, Mulugeta and Mekonnen. Hege, p. 153-154. According to Hege, the students prayed for Gebre Sellassie and he fell to the ground and started to speak in tongues. Hege, p. 154.

<sup>188</sup> This should not give the impression that the *Semay Berhan* became members of the MKC at this stage. They did not. They joined them as a separate entity to work together under one umbrella. The issue of membership became a thorny and a divisive one for the members. It was left for the decision of the individual. In 1972, Solomon Kebede, one of the leaders, decided to become a member based on the conviction that "gone were the days of the youth" and that the movement had to crystallize into something solid, others, like Mulugeta Zewdie, another leader of the group, followed suit. By 1973/4, virtually all members of the movement merged with the Mennonites. Informants: Mulugeta, Solomon, Afework; Hege, pp. 156-157; Tilahun Beyene, pp. 96-97.

<sup>189</sup> Informants: Solomon, Mulugeta and Mekonnen.

<sup>190</sup> Informants: Million Belete, Paul Gingrich and Mulugeta.

<sup>191</sup> Informants: Tesfa Tsion, Seyum G/ Tsadik and Solomon

<sup>192</sup> Informants: Solomon Daniel, Daniel Mekonnen and Fikre Abera . For the details see the next chapter.

<sup>193</sup> Michael A. Knibb, *Translating The Bible : The Ethiopic Version of the Old Testament*( Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 19.

<sup>194</sup> Abu Rumi translated the Bible in Amharic, an indigenous contribution just like what Onesimus did for the Oromo. He worked for ten years in translating the Bible in Amharic, generously assisted by the French Consul de Cherville of Cairo. The manuscript came into the possession of the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1820. The complete Bible was published in 1840. It was this Bible that had been revised and printed for use for several decades. Martin used his revised edition for his mission work in Ethiopia and later came with his own improved version, worked out with the assistance of Michael Aregawi. S. Bergsma, *Rainbow Empire*(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1932). pp.262-263. Aba Rumi's translation (which is kept at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa) has been the real ground-structure of the Amharic Bible later revised in many forms.

<sup>195</sup> Emanuel Abraham, *Reminiscence of My Life* (Oslo: Lunde forlag, 1995), p. 43.

<sup>196</sup> Aren mentions that *Aleqa* Taye ventured the opinion that "Ethiopia's lack of progress had its roots in 'improper pride and negligence to teach the Gospel in the vernacular' as the same time as manual crafts were sorely neglected and were held in great contempt." Aren, *Envoys of the Gospel*, p.39. See also, Eskil Forslund, *The Word of God in Ethiopian Tongues* ( Uppsala: International Tryck, 1993), pp. 63-64.

<sup>197</sup> The Emperor was taking a revolutionary step in this regard. He knew the effects of the power of print. He seems to have an appreciation of Biblical principle, which affirms the view that "faith comes by hearing and hearing from the Word of God." He encouraged the printing of the Bible and its distribution as an important component of his program of modernizing the church. According to Stokes, the Emperor was even desirous of introducing reforms in the conduct of mass within the Orthodox Church, albeit progressively. He established a model church as his minor experiment while he was in exile in which he allowed the liturgy to be conducted in Amharic. He continued his experiment at a local church housed at the compound of HSI Hospital, where Sunday services were run entirely in Amharic. Stokes, p.48.

<sup>198</sup> Informants: Mellion and Wubshet.

<sup>199</sup> Informant: Million Belete. Million has been the General Secretary of the Ethiopian Bible Society for many years before he moved to Nairobi and became a staff member of the African Bible Society.

<sup>200</sup> Stuart Bergsma, *Rainbow Empire: Ethiopia Stretches out Her Hands*(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1932), p.261.

<sup>201</sup> This is also a view shared by many learned men from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church who are now leaders of various reform movements within the Church. Informants: Tefera and Tsegaye Demise.

<sup>202</sup> Informants: Tefera and Getachew,

<sup>203</sup> Waldmeier, pp.67-68.

<sup>204</sup> Trimmingham, p. 42.

<sup>205</sup> World Dominion Press, *Light and Darkness in East Africa* (London: WDP, 1927), p. 176.

<sup>206</sup> In the observation of Johnny Bakke, the term *Pente* later referred not only to those who actually were Pentecostals such as members of the Mulu Wengel church, but it stood for anybody who exercised zealous evangelism or lived a strict moral life. Johnny Bakke, *Christian Ministry*, p. 253.

<sup>207</sup> J. Spencer Trimmingham *The Christian Church Mission in Ethiopia*(London: World Dominion Press, 1950), p. 43.

<sup>208</sup> For instance see, Nahashon W. Ndungu, "The Role of the Bible in the rise of the African Instituted Churches: the case of the Akurinu Church in Kenya", Grand O. West and Musa W. Dube, *The Bible in Africa* (Liedon: Brill, 2000), pp. 236-247.

<sup>209</sup> David. Berrett, *Schism and Renewals in Africa* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 129.

<sup>210</sup> J. Mbiti, *Bible and Theology in African Christianity* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press), 1986, p. 28.

<sup>211</sup> The Italians correctly identified the source of the growth and wanted to destroy the Scriptural materials the southern people copied and kept using. Later the *Derg* did the same against evangelical Christians, though but in vain.

<sup>212</sup> Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (New York: Orbis, 1989).

<sup>213</sup> Sundkler, p.931.

<sup>214</sup> Informant: Mellion Belete

<sup>215</sup> Following her husband's death, Evelyn married the Canadian missionary R.N Thompson, who was involved in a variety of public services in Ethiopia, including institution building and recruitment of teachers from Wheaton College. Thompson became an MP in his country and passed away a few years ago after a long years of distinguished service.

<sup>216</sup> Informant: Elvin Thompson ( I: 24-09-02)

<sup>217</sup> Doctor Tekeste Teklu (I: 22-03-02), Bedru Hussien (I: 14-02-03), Solomon and others.

<sup>218</sup> Berhanu Negash, " Kale Hiwot Fellowship Church From 1972-1992," a paper submitted to church growth class at Evangelical Theological College Addis Ababa, August 31, 1992, p. 2.

<sup>219</sup> Fuller, *Run while--*, p. 208.

<sup>220</sup> Informant: Evelyn Thompson. Attested by several Ethiopian informants: Tiruwork Mesfin (I: 21-02-01), Tenagne Lemma (I:07-04-06), Tekeste Teklu, and others.

<sup>221</sup> This is an expression commonly used among Evangelical Christians to refer to the moment of decision when one commits himself to become a Christian.

<sup>222</sup> Informant: Albert Manzke ( I: 09-10-02)

<sup>223</sup> According to some informants, Rubenson, the ex-Swedish Luther missionary, who later joined the HIS I University as a History professor, initiated the beginning of university Christian fellowship. Informants also mention students like Fasil Nahom (now a prominent law professor), Wolde Ab (who became President of Asmara University after its independence), Asrat Gebre, were active in the early days of the Christian youth movement in the university. Informants: Professor Seyum Gebre Sellassie

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( I : 05-05-03), Solomon, Tenagne, and others.

<sup>224</sup> Informants: Shiferaw Wolde Michael ( I: 26-04-03), Berhanu Negash (I: 22-12-03) , Kebebew Daka ( I:28-03-03), and Solomon Lulu ( I: 22-02-03).

<sup>225</sup> For further see, Berhanu Negash, pp.2-9. Apart from the Youth Center, YMCA, established in 1947, was another Christian organization operating in the vicinity of Arat Kilo (though on the other side, close to the Trinity Theological Seminary). Unlike the Youth Center, the YMCA did not seem to have clear evangelistic agenda though it conducted youth-oriented and adult related services such as literacy campaigns, sports, recreations and educational programs including panel discussions.

<sup>226</sup> The fellowship of new converts had an earlier beginning, but it was constituted as a church in October 1, 1972 with about 20 members, mostly bachelors and students. Informants: Berhanu Negash and Shiferaw Wolde Michael.

<sup>227</sup> Dr. Alemu Biftu, a graduate, and a former faculty member of the Faculty of Education at Michigan State University, is an itinerant evangelist with an international outreach program based in Denver. Mulatu became( and still is) the African Director of Compassion International based in Kenya. Yohannes Yigzaw became a university professors in England and others ended up in working for international NGOs.

<sup>228</sup> Informants: Mulatu Belachew, Berhanu Negash, Shiferaw Wolde Michael.

<sup>229</sup> The English service was discontinued at the commencement of the Ethiopian Revolution because it was feared that it might draw the attention of the government and invite unnecessary trouble. This precaution, however, did not have effect as far as saving the church from the indiscriminate actions of *Derg*. Informant: Gebre Meskel Gebre Egziabher ( I: 22-10-00). For further, see chapter IV.

<sup>230</sup> Berhanu, p.3. The case of the *Hebret Amba* Fellowship provides an interesting mix of Ethiopian and missionary initiatives where a cooperative work bore fruit to the emergence of an independent institution, unlike the Mulu Wengel Pentecostal church, that has its roots from diverse soils and which represented an indigenous Ethiopian enterprise leading to the birth of an independent Ethiopian institution.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid. p.6.

<sup>232</sup> In those days, (as is the case even today),to be a member of the evangelical church coming from an Orthodox Christian family background is a costly decision entailing hurtful social consequences. Not only the church, but family members and friends disallow such a person. The marginalization process that consequently follows has added new fuel for converts to have a more assertive role instead of discouraging the believers.

<sup>233</sup> The above have been compiled from interviews held with the various missionaries involved in the early stage of the Youth Center and Ethiopians who had active parts in the Center. Informants: Evelyn Thompson, Albert and Marian Manzke (I: 03-10-02), Pastor Bark Fahnestock (I: 01-09-01), Dr. Negussay Tefera, Dr. Melesachew Mesfin (I: 01-06-03), Berhanu Negash and Gebre Meskel.

<sup>234</sup> Among the small yet articulate group that the MYC attracted since its early beginnings are: *Qes* Badme Yalew, *Qes* Ezra Gebre Medhin (Dr.), Emmanuel Gebre Sillassie (Dr.), and Emmanuel Abraham who had distinguished public service rising to the ministerial position in the days of the Imperial Monarchy. Emmanuel Abraham, was not only a source of confidence for evangelical Christians, but also a great help to countervail conservative forces opposed to the evangelical faith.

<sup>235</sup> On a brief history of the Youth Hostel, see Emmanuel Abraham, *Reminiscence of My Life*.(Lund: Lunde Forlag, 1995), pp. 252-255.

<sup>236</sup> Informant: Kebebew Daka and Tekeste.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

<sup>238</sup> Informant: Tekeste.

<sup>239</sup> For more see, M. Lundgren, *Proclaiming Christ to His World. The Experience o Radio Voice of the Gospel* (Geneva: 1983). One of the main reasons for establishing RVOG was the belief that the Ethiopian society, illiterate by and large, could be effectively reached with the Gospel through the air.

<sup>240</sup> Emmanuel Abraham. *Reminiscences of My Life*, p. 286. According to Emanuel Abraham, Ethiopia was chosen by the WLF because of it's strategic position in Africa, the Middle East and the Oriental World, in addition to its being an ancient Christian nation.

<sup>241</sup> Emmanuel Abraham, p.248.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid. pp. 286-287.

<sup>243</sup> John Cumbers, *Living with Red Terror* (Charlotte: Morris Pub.1996), p.120.



<sup>244</sup> Billy Graham, *Just as I am: the Autobiography of Billy Graham* (San Francisco: Zondervan, 1997), pp. 348-349.

<sup>245</sup> Informants: Berhanu Adnew, Tilhahun Haile and Asseged.

<sup>246</sup> J. Edwin Orr, *Evangelical Awakening in Eastern Asia*. (1975), p. 191.

<sup>247</sup> Informants: Berhanu, Tilahun and Asseged.

<sup>248</sup> The label *Tsere Mariam* was also used against Estifanite and his followers known as *Deqiqe Estifanos*. For the history of the rise and fall of this intriguing group see, Getachew Haile, *Deqiqe Estifanos* (Collegeville: 2004), pp. 55-115.

<sup>249</sup> On the contrary, the record of Evangelical Christians have in the past shown a display of patriotism no less than any Ethiopian. There were many patriots who died defending their country's independence during the Italian period. There were also many Ethiopians who contributed to their nation's development through writing and related intellectual endeavors as well as committed public service in many capacities. This danger of public denigration of Ethiopian evangelicals has been bemoaned as early as the 1912 by the emerging intellectuals such as *Negadras* Gebre Heywet Baykedagn, Gebre Heywet, observed that foreign educated Ethiopians who came to Ethiopia to help their country were pushed aside branded as Catholics, Protestants, heretics or foreign spies. They lived in want, accused constantly of not being loyal to their country. He concluded that this morbid conservatism was dis-empowering. It had detrimental effects that needed correction. See his book, *Atse Menelikna Ityopya* (Asmara: Berhan Yehun, 1912), pp. 341-344; Trimmingham, pp.53-54.

<sup>250</sup> In the first instance, those who were banned from school in the 1950's, include men like Mulatu Bafa (Dr. ) and Captain Yohannes Ijigu ( a former pilot of the Ethiopian Air Lines, now a Pastor of an African American church in US ). In the latter case, those who were expelled from the Institute include: Negussay Ayele (later, Professor) and Haile Woldemickael (later, Professor), Asrat Feleqe (later Doctor) Asrat Wolde Mickael and Asfaw Biratu ( a former member of the Faculty of Education AAU). Informants: Yohannes, Negussay, Haile, and others. The latter group appealed to Akale Work, then Minister of Education and pleaded for justice but were turned back with disdainful remarks such as, "You mission boys, what use are you for the nation? go to your mission camps." Informants: Negussay and Haile Woldemickael. Evangelical Christians of the previous generation had passed through the same experience. Men like Aleqa Taye, Kentiba Gebru of Gonder, *Aleqa* Tewelde Medhin, and *Aleqa* Gorfu Abreha, suffered public ridicule, despite their erudition and distinguished services for their country, and were treated as underdogs. For more on *Aleqa* Taye, see the introductory chapter of, *Aleqa* Taye, *Ye-Ityopia Hezb Tarik. History of the People of Ethiopia*, trans., Grover Hudson and Tekeste Negash ( Uppsala: 1987); For more on *Kentiba* Gebru, see his son's biography: Dawit Gebru, *Kentiba Gebru Desta Ye-Ityopia Qeres* ( Addis Ababa, 1992).

<sup>251</sup> Informants: Tilahun Haile and Wubshet.

<sup>252</sup> Informants: Colonel Tessema Abaderash ( I: 23-05-03), Taye, and Yohannes. See the appendix section. It has to be noted that professional associations of evangelical Christians came to exist in large number after the rise of the Pentecostal movement of the 60's and the formation of the student and graduate fellowships in the same period.

<sup>253</sup> By this time other missionaries have also started mission works in the capital city. One good example is the Emanuel Baptist church which was established near the Arat Kilo campus in 1960. Para-church organization such as Youth for Christ began to appear during the same period. There were many secondary schools in Addis Ababa and other major towns , such as Teferi Mekonnen and *Qedamawi* Haile Sellassie School and the Harar Medhane Alem Comprehensive school, which were considered to be model schools where missionaries served as teachers. There were many young students who have become evangelicals through the influence of these teachers. Not only that, the SIM had also thrown its nets by creating new stations at several urban centers across the country even in places like Goba, Dangela and the Ogaden. As result, there were evangelical students concentrating in the capital city particularly in the University. In HSIU, there were an articulate evangelical group, examples of whom were men like Seyum G/ Sellassie (later Professor), Abayneh Worke (later Professor.), Shimelis Adugna, a prominent government official during the reign of HS I, Daniel Lemma (later Professor.), Fasil Nahom (later Professor) who came a bit later.

<sup>254</sup> Informants: Tilahun Haile, Yohannes Ijigu and Wubshet.

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<sup>255</sup> See above. In general, the issue of I “indigenization” needs further scrutiny in the contest of Ethiopia. We need to examine the concept taking into account not only leadership transfer, but also changes in structures, liturgy, doctrines, worship, music, theology, and a host of related issues.

<sup>256</sup> This does not mean that there was not a hiatus between the Pentecostals and their precursors. There was a gap that had been created as some of the Ethiopian evangelicals were swallowed in local church building, while some of the active leaders left the country to pursue higher education and remained active in the faith by further promoting it amongst the Ethiopian Diasporic communities. There were also some evangelicals who staggered with their faith and leaned more on pursuing lucrative careers and lost their zeal for evangelism.

<sup>257</sup> As early as 1956, the SIM missionaries had noticed that there was a new national force in the process of emerging. R. N. Thompson, a missionary who served even as advisor to the government on matters of education and institution reported, “whether we admit or not, there is in the picture an increasing competent group of national leaders in the church as well as in the government and in commercial circles, who are increasingly desirous of assuming leadership of the entire Christian movement whether it be educational or direct evangelistic work.” R. N. Thompson. Public, Government and Mission Relations (Manuscript), August 1956, p. 2. SIM Archives, Charlotte, S. Carolina

<sup>258</sup> The Swedish and other Lutheran groups in Southwestern Ethiopia had succeeded in expanding modern education especially in Wellega, but the elite group from this constituency is very small in the 1950's. Because of the nature of SIM's educational policy that inhibited vertical growth of education, there were not many of the people from the south to form a strong elite group for the same period. As result, it can be argued that people coming from the South and Southwestern Ethiopia form evangelical background, relatively speaking, played a marginal role in the evolution of a new independent religious force that manifested itself in Pentecostalism. On the contrary, the Mennonite group, has produced a relatively high number of scholars because they encouraged their able members to attend higher education abroad including the USA. Dr. Lapiso Geldebo and Dr. Tesfa Tsion can be cited as good examples.

<sup>259</sup> The 60's is a momentous period in Ethiopian history that has to be studied on many fronts. It was the time of flourishing of lively experiments in art, music, literature, religion and politics.

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GROWING THROUGH THE STORMS: THE HISTORY OF THE EVANGELICAL  
MOVEMENT IN ETHIOPIA, 1941-1991

Volume II

By

Tibebe Eshete

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to  
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## Chapter IV

### **The Pentecostal Movement: a New Strain in the Evangelical Enterprise in Ethiopia (1960's-70's)**

Pentecostalism, which according to some scholars, originated in US at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has become a widely shared global religious movement. Its rapid expansion, especially in the Third World countries, is increasingly attracting the attention of a wide-range of scholars.<sup>1</sup> The Pentecostal movement is one of the least understood and most understudied phenomena in modern Ethiopian history. This partly stems from the fact that both expatriate and Ethiopian scholars have paid little interest to study the new religious movements, which are appearing in bewildering varieties. Perhaps, the popular assumption that, the “religion” pursued by the “*Pentes*”, is an “eerie” one has apparently lent some kind of intellectual distaste. Or else, the Pentecostal movement was one among many events in Ethiopia that historians miss because it has not registered in their historical screen.

Given the rate of expansion of the movement, its growing demographic and social impact it is making upon the Ethiopian society, one should make a careful and nuanced historical investigation concerning its origin, development, the various trajectories it has taken since its beginnings, and the reasons for its baffling explosive growth. In particular, the enlargement of its base and influence, now making substantial inroads in mainline churches, like the Ethiopian Evangelical Church of Mekane Yesus, Qale Heywet, and extending even to the historic Orthodox Church, demands closer scrutiny and explanation. Pentecostalism has also been a major force in the religious

scene of Ethiopia since it has become an important influence on the new religious movements that are mushrooming in amazing diversity and scale.

The current popular appellation of the term "*Pente*," referring to all the denominations of various Protestant backgrounds in Ethiopia, is too confusing to be employed in any scholarly work without major qualifications. The designation *Pente*, has now become a generic label to all non-Orthodox and non-Catholic Christians in Ethiopia, as if they form a monolithic block, with the prevalent public conception associating it with something cultic. The term came into usage in the late 60's as an aftermath of an episode in Debre Zeit in August 1967.<sup>2</sup> According to informants, a group of young Ethiopians who could be characterized as pioneers of the budding, then unnamed, Pentecostal movement, were attacked by a large, apparently well-organized crowd of people from the town of Debre Zeit, while they were conducting a conference.<sup>3</sup> Participants of the spiritual conference estimated at 300, included young students and civilian employees and members of the Imperial Air Force. The residents of the town that came in thousands to stage the attack included, merchants, bar owners, bar ladies, leading members of the clergy and adherents of the Orthodox Church at large. The large crowd stormed the assembly, disrupted the procession and attacked the men indiscriminately. They destroyed their musical instruments and the burned the Bible. Though police reports in *Addis Zemen* suggest that the crowd inflicted damages upon the house in which the gathering took place and upon the participants, informants recall that the damage was very severe in scale. In its report, the official newspaper concluded that the people of Debre Zeit took action to "punish" (*Qeta*) the young men and women who were involved in practicing "unknown" religion (*Yaltaweke Addis*

*Haymanot*).<sup>4</sup> Soon the incident became an issue in the media and other public fora as a result of which the term entered into the public usage.

The term *Pente* initially referred to the new “religious outsiders” as a shortened allusion to their Pentecostal faith experience, the most salient aspect of its expression being speaking with tongues as an evidence of the “baptism of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>5</sup> Ethiopian Pentecostals maintain that speaking with tongues, glossolalia, is the utterance of a stream of sounds accompanied by a sense of emotional release, joy and closeness to God. The utterances are believed to be heavenly languages inspired by the Holy Spirit as marks of supernatural touches to transform the life of a believer and empower him to hold unto his faith. Ethiopian Pentecostals insist speaking in tongue is not a modern day invented religious practice, but something inscribed in the Bible both in Old and New Testaments. They mostly quoted verses from the books of Joel chapter One and Acts chapter One and Two to validate their claims.<sup>6</sup> The young Ethiopians, mostly from colleges, training institutes, and high schools, considered their new spiritual experience that stressed enthusiastic worship, healing and revelatory knowledge, to be gifts of the Spirit which they avidly employed in their meeting places. As they perceived it, speaking in tongues, was a manifestation of closeness to God, a validation of the authenticity of their faith, and a demonstrative evidence of encounter with God’s power. The faith factor driving from their full trust in God and the power dynamic associated with claimed encounter with the Holy Spirit lent the young Pentecostals a sense of confidence in their Christian life, an articulation of its practicality and an aura of certainty of its authenticity. In a way, their newfound faith, especially its emphasis on power, invested them with a measure of authority to





withstand fear and anxiety and enjoy relative autonomy from societal norms and restrictions. It also released them to assert an experiential and more personalized form of spirituality and emboldened them to proclaim their faith in the midst of opposition. Overall, what emerges from studying the Pentecostals is their two-fold understanding of salvation: to be saved means to accept Christ as one's personal Lord and savior and to be assured of being empowered by the Holy Spirit for a victorious Christian life and faithful witness. Nevertheless, their seemingly noisy style of prayer, enthusiastic articulation of spirituality, and the apparently mundane nature of their *Tselot Bet*, or chapel, bereft of *tabot*(a wooden replica of the Ark of the Covenant found in every Orthodox church in Ethiopia), offended the religious sensibilities of the adherents of the traditional Orthodox Church, who looked upon them as exotic fringe groups out of tune with the Ethiopian culture and society. Thus, the term became a pejorative designation that considered the new movement not only outlandish but heretical, a notion that remains stuck in the public imagination even to this day.

From such a small and scattered beginning in the early 60's, however, a vibrant independent Pentecostal movement eventually crystallized in the formation of the *Mulu Wengel* church, which was one of the most powerful agents in the diffusion of Pentecostal experiences across other non-Pentecostal denominations. The name *Mulu Wengel*, literally Full Gospel, is noteworthy because it glaringly reveals the theology of Pentecostals concerning the full application of biblical accounts and promises to provide full salvation to persons, physical as well as spiritual. Basic Pentecostal practices, such as speaking in tongues, healing the sick through prayer and the laying of hands, exorcism, prophetic utterances, and passionate forms of worship, are valued and

consciously encouraged to signify the presence of the power of God. In particular, healing and deliverance from evil forces, fitting religious themes with indigenous worldviews, are practiced by invoking scriptural references from the Book of Mark (chapter five and sixteen) and the Book of (Acts chapter eight). Such wide-spread religious practices, which have become prominent features of many evangelical churches in Ethiopia, mainly stemmed from the expansion of the influence of this distinctly Pentecostal Church.

The Pentecostal movement in Ethiopia has been an urban phenomenon. Unlike the experience of most Protestant missionaries, who essentially launched their missionary activities from a rural setting, the new movement had its base in major urban centers. It drew its main spring from the emerging elite, of mixed social and ethnic background, who readily invested their talents to spread the faith through preaching, the dissemination of literature gospel songs, and aggressive witnessing.

This chapter, will record the history of the movement from the time of its inception in the 60's up to the period of Ethiopian 1974 Revolution, by pulling together the religious and socio-political stirrings that led to its emergence and its expansion. I intend to show that Pentecostalism has given birth to a new experience and articulation of Christian faith that has become a major force for the expansion of Christianity in Ethiopia as the movement overflowed its boundaries and significantly influenced the practices of other churches. I also try to situate the rise of the Pentecostal movement within the larger socio economic, religious, and political conditions of Ethiopia, the encounter of diverse forces in the 60's, and the responses of the youth to these encounters.

### ***Origins (1964/5):***

There are various historical locales from which the Pentecostal movement in Ethiopia drew its origins. Like all movements of political, social or, cultural origins, religious movements have soils and roots from which they germinate and find nourishment. Pentecostalism in Ethiopia sprang against the backdrop of evangelical Christianity that stressed personal salvation, the presence of a tiny segment of Pentecostal missionaries, who, albeit low key, highlighted the Holy Spirit dimension of Christian faith, and the strings of youth-oriented movements within the Orthodox experiencing revivals. At this early stage of the study of the Pentecostal movement in Ethiopia, it may be hard to locate all the elements that nourished it.

Historians, who have studied fundamentalism and the Pentecostal movement in America, have approached the subject in the same manner.<sup>7</sup> Fundamentalism was a multi-layered response to modernism and the rising liberal theology of the 1920's. But it was more than that. The Pentecostal movement that found expression in Azusa street,<sup>8</sup> California in 1906, in like manner, was a combined product of previous religious revival traditions, such as the Keswick Holiness movement, the Sanctification movement, and the Wesleyan revival, to mention but a few. It even received inspiration from the revivalist traditions of the Great Awakening movements of the earlier centuries.

The Pentecostal movement in Ethiopia may not have a historically identifiable root. One cannot, however, discount the presence of analogous religious situations expressed in the yearnings of pietistic expressions found in the long tradition of monastic life and the deep prophetic utterance of the "*Bahetawi*,"(a variant of the

monastic holy men), and localized prophetic movements, such as that of Sheik Zakaria, Esa Lalo and *Aba Gureza*, that reveal voices from the margin.<sup>9</sup> The healing practices performed through sprinkling of water and immersion, exorcism of evil spirits, like the ones conducted at Weliso by the late *Aba Wolde Tensay*, might constitute important spiritual backdrops, though one cannot establish a direct correlation to ascertain overflows and transfers. Most of the young Ethiopians who initiated the Pentecostal movement came from deeply Orthodox Christian background.<sup>10</sup> The movement could not have sprung from a blank spiritual and cultural slate. What needs to be clear here is that some elements of the Pentecostal experiences were found in the practices of adherents of primal religions in Ethiopia. The various Ethiopian religious traditions embodied elements akin to aspects of Pentecostalism. Healing through prayers, exorcism, stress on holiness, expressive spirituality, religious ecstasy or trance, had been in existence in restrained measures in a variety of religious settings. The Pentecostals put on a new cast and integrated them into their theology and practices, thus lending them new transcendental significance and prominence.<sup>11</sup>

The Pentecostal movement of the 1960's could hardly be said to have evolved out of the internal developments of these pre-existing religious basis. Yet, the presence of related traditions, however haphazardly, constitute important spiritual equivalents. The Pentecostal movement in Ethiopia emerged out of the convergence of multiple factors, some internally induced, while others are of external in nature.

The thesis I would like to propose is that the Pentecostal movement in Ethiopia was a manifestation of a deep religious yearning demonstrated among young Ethiopians whose faith and religious convictions were being challenged by the modern secular

thinking that engulfed their generation. Members of that generation were made to feel something was wanting in their inherited religious traditions as the result of modern education and the advent of Protestant missionaries, who had introduced an alternative variant of Christianity, and in essence, a paradigm shift. The failure of the historic church to be alive and relevant provided the soil in which the seeds of the movement nourished.

### ***External influences:***

The first Pentecostal missionaries to have come to Ethiopia were three ladies from Elim Bible Institute. Bertha Dommemuth, Ruth Shippey, and Ellen French were missionaries from the Assembly of God Church of New York who came to Ethiopia in March 1934.<sup>12</sup> The missionaries started a weekly English class accompanied by Bible studies and prayer programs at their residence. As the number of young Ethiopians participating in the class activities increased, the program gradually evolved into a formal language school, called the American Grade School and Mission.<sup>13</sup> The original members of the young Ethiopians included young men such as Worku and Haile who had already had some connections with the missionaries from the Bible Churchmen's Missionary Society. Encouraged by the interest young Ethiopians and some foreigners from the Armenian and Greek communities had shown, the Pentecostal missionaries started Sunday services in which they preached the Gospel and gave a series of lessons on the Holy Spirit and its gifts. The missionaries report that there was a growing congregation of young Ethiopian eagerly seeking to learn about the secret of miracles and healing. They also made inquiries as to how they could integrate and exercise the

power of the Holy Spirit in their faith experiences.<sup>14</sup> From these beginning, there appeared a small community of Christians who could perhaps be considered as the first proto-Pentecostal congregation in Ethiopia.

The three Pentecostal missionaries preached and practiced the Pentecostal faith including speaking in tongues, to their small Ethiopian and expatriate congregation despite opposition from some Ethiopians and other non-Pentecostal missionaries, mainly from the SIM group. In fact, the latter referred to the Pentecostals as “tongues people” and discouraged their members from attending their services.<sup>15</sup> Bertha Dommermuth notes that following the Italian invasion of 1936, the awkward circumstances compelled them to move to the Swedish mission station (Entoto Mekane Yesus) compound from where they continued teaching and conducting their regular Sunday services. She reports that the students taking their classes as well as coming to their religious services demonstrated a noticeably different life as they were filled with the power of God, which even touched others as they shared their powerful testimonies.<sup>16</sup>

By 1937, the missionaries were sending reports of revivals in Ethiopia where they mentioned not only several people being saved, but some young Ethiopians experiencing the baptism of the Holy Spirit.<sup>17</sup> Among the first young Ethiopians whom Dommermoth explicitly mentions as receiving the power of the Holy Spirit was Fikre, the daughter of *Qes* Bademe, the famous priest from Gojjam who played a prominent role in the establishment of the Mekane Yesus evangelical church.<sup>18</sup> If that is the case, one can consider the Entoto Christian youth groups as the first generation of the Ethiopian Pentecostal communities. The missionaries built good rapport with families

of *Qes* Badme and Amanuel G/ Egziahber (later Dr.) with whom they had established an enduring relationship, though the missionaries do not indicate that he had embraced Pentecostalism. Unfortunately, the missionaries operated during the turbulent years of the Italian occupation, which made their work extremely difficult. The Italians were hostile to the Pentecostals just like they were with the rest of Protestant missionaries in Ethiopia. The Italians took their houses and converted their School into barracks for the Italian soldiers.<sup>19</sup> The Italians viewed the young Ethiopians who had connections with these missionaries with extreme suspicions for they feared that the young Ethiopians converts were working for the patriotic forces under the guise of being members of a new faith outside the National Church. According to Dommermoth, most of the young men who were members of their congregation were arrested while distributing Christian tracts and killed by the Italians, while some joined the rank of the patriots and died resisting the occupying forces. In 1938, when the obstruction presented by the Italians became unbearable, the Pentecostal missionaries decided to terminate their mission work and leave Ethiopia for the US. The missionaries expressed their dismay and hope as follows:

Deep, deep sadness accompanied us as we left Ethiopia in May of 1938. What established work had we left behind? None that we could see. There had been so many tight restrictions placed upon us with very little freedom to do anything much; we had to leave everything in the hands of the Lord. The only thing we could do was accept our whole mission to Ethiopia as a precious treasure and, bury it, and expect God to bring it up resurrection life.<sup>20</sup>

It has not been possible to establish possible connections between the works of the Pentecostal missionaries from the Assembly of God and the rise of an indigenous Pentecostal movement in the 60's. According to informants, most of the young



Ethiopians who had been part of the congregation either lost their lives during the Italian interlude or lost their former zeal, which contributed to the lapse of Pentecostal experiences. This was a situation very likely to happen given the fact that the groups could not keep a steady fellowship to maintain their solidarity and give continuity to their religious practices and the absence of supportive milieu and human backing needed in the context of the times. Informants have vague memories of the connections of the Pentecostal missionaries with the family of *Qes* Bademe and that of Emanuel Gebre Sellassie, both distinguished leaders of the Mekane Yesus Lutheran Church, which as far as the current research indicates has not been a source of the Pentecostal movement.<sup>21</sup> Ethiopian Pentecostals of the latter generation do not know about the advent of the three missionaries from the Assembly of God and could not tell whether or not the missionaries left any trace of Pentecostalism in the capital city, since their experience in Ethiopia was cut short by the Italian invasion.<sup>22</sup>

The next likeminded missionary group that entered the country in 1952 was: Mrs. J.C. Jane Daoud and her husband. The couple came to Ethiopia with the express intention of preaching the gospel and conducting healing services. Sources indicate that they came to Ethiopia with the permission of the government and the approval of the national Orthodox Church. The story is included here not because the visit of the couples had any enduring bearing on the rise of the Pentecostal movement in Ethiopia, but because their advent in the religious scene of Ethiopia and their six-week stay stressed publicly a crucial element of the Pentecostal movement, the healing service, which later constituted a pivotal component of the activities of the Ethiopian Pentecostals. Arguably, this event may not have a direct link to the religious

movements of 60,'s but their popularization of healing services and the fact that they left a deep impression among a wide section of the populace in Addis should not be overlooked. The lady who led the healing service is remembered to this day as "*Cambologi Mariam*," the first, referring to the national stadium, where the healing services were mainly conducted, and the latter, to the Virgin Mary, who is revered by many Orthodox Christians and whose help is invoked in times of trouble. The event was well reported even in the media, where sensational accounts were presented about the large turnout of people attending the services of "the faith healing missionary" at the stadium and Jan Meda. The government newspaper, *Addis Zemen*, recorded accounts of daily testimonies to miraculous healings. The list included names of high officials, army officers and dignitaries including members of the royal family, who had reportedly participated in the healing services.<sup>23</sup>

In this connection, it is also worth mentioning the "crusade" organized by the famous American evangelist Billy Graham.<sup>24</sup> Thousands of people, mainly from the capital city, attended the crusade conducted at the national stadium in 1960. This event took place at a time when Protestant missionary activities were concentrated chiefly in the rural areas, as a result of which the number of urban converts was very low. Billy Graham's "crusade" lent public visibility to the image of evangelical Christianity in Ethiopia. For one thing, the Emperor approved the program. Not only that, he even encouraged public attendance, and secondly, it occurred at the national stadium with a huge turnout of Ethiopians, who were not necessarily affiliated with the Evangelical Christian faith. Though there were no organized local evangelical Christian communities at the time of Billy Graham's crusade, there were a few from the Lutheran

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and SIM backgrounds and a small number of men with evangelical convictions from the national church who were associated with the Bible Churchmen's Missionary Society (BCMS).<sup>25</sup> The event gave a strong stimulus for the young Ethiopians to feel a sense of elation and confidence which motivated them to network and form informal solidarity associations.<sup>26</sup>

Two Pentecostal missionary groups arrived almost simultaneously in Ethiopia in the 1950's. Unlike the ones that preceded them in the 1930's, the second batch of Pentecostal missionaries, Nordic in origin, left enduring impact on the rise of the Pentecostal movement among the Ethiopian youth of the 60's. The first were the Finland Pentecostal Missionaries (FPM), who arrived in Ethiopia in 1951 and set up a station, originally at Welmera, in 1954, and a second one in Mercato, the commercial hub of the capital city, a year later. Mr. Sanfrid Mattson the first missionary from the FPM used to visit and hold comforting prayer with Emperor Haile Sellassie I while he was in exile in England.<sup>27</sup> It was his previous acquaintance with the Emperor that gave the missionaries the entrée to open up a station. The Swedish Philadelphia Mission (SPM), which arrived in 1959, was the second company to make its way in Ethiopia.<sup>28</sup> The government allowed the SPM missionaries to establish mission stations in Awasa, a newly established modern town in southern Ethiopia. The Swedish Philadelphia mission was part of the Swedish Philadelphia Church (SPC) Overseas Mission. The SPC, one of the biggest Pentecostal Churches in the world up to the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, was founded by Lewis Peter. Peter was reported to have received his Pentecostal experience from Thomas Barratt, one of the participants of the 1906 Azusa Street Pentecostal revival in California.<sup>29</sup>

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The Nordic missionary groups had a palpable influence upon the development of the Pentecostal movement to Ethiopia.<sup>30</sup> They were the first to capture active recruits from the capital city who received their Pentecostal experience through new Pentecostal literature and direct exposure as interpreters and as aides to the missionaries. The young Ethiopian converts, who embraced the newer forms spirituality exerted tremendous influences in the budding movement as it reached the students of the Haile Sellassie I University in the late 60's.<sup>31</sup> The second group played a major role in providing the theological frames and in creating the psychosocial milieu for the youth coming from various sectors to coalesce as a solid group, thus providing the enabling condition for the formation of distinct Pentecostal fellowship.

Another missionary group, whose influence could not be clearly ascertained, is Kenneth Oglesby and his family. Oglesby was an American who was serving as an SIM missionary in the 1930's. Informants report that he became a Pentecostal while he was in the US during one of his furlong trips. Upon his return to Ethiopia his Pentecostal experience brought him into conflict with the SIM missionaries.<sup>32</sup> The SIM organization barred him from serving as a missionary in Ethiopia. In April 1956 Oglesby returned to Ethiopia after receiving permission from the Emperor when he met him in his first visit to the US in spring 1954. According to some reports, Oglesby hosted Haile Sellassie for one night at his mission station bordering the Sudan and Ethiopia during his return trip from exile during the final phase of the liberation struggle against Italian occupation in 1941.<sup>33</sup> The Emperor's grant of permission was an expression of his gratitude and indebtedness for the missionary's gracious act of good will. The American missionary established close relation with Haile Sellassie and

members of the royal family and carried out his missionary activities independently by working for the government as an advisor in the area of tourism and hotel management. His missionary activities included preaching, witnessing and inviting people for prayer at his home. There is some evidence, which suggests that he had some contacts with the youth in Addis Ababa. According to a mission report in 1957, Oglesby organized home church services with the participation of Ethiopians and was waiting for permission from the government for the home service to be public. The report concludes by saying that , “ There was a sincere group of Christians who are praying for a visitation of God’s spirit upon Addis and Ethiopia.” After the coming of the Swedish Pentecostal missionaries he developed close contacts and preached the Gospel under their auspices. In later years, Haile Sellassie sent Kenneth Oglesby to the historic site of Lalibela to develop a tourist site and hotel, a task he carried out for many years. Though we do not know much about his role and legacy, he was a Pentecostal missionary with some influence among the youth, at least, in Addis Ababa.

The Pentecostal movement also received some impetus, at least at its incipient phase, from an unlikely quarter. According to informants, in the early 1960’s, there were three Indian Pentecostals: Daniel Paul, Simen Stanley, and Paul Somngel, who were teaching in Harar, Direedawa and Asmara, respectively. The three Indians established close associations with the few Ethiopians who claimed to have Pentecostal experience in the mentioned areas, and gave valuable contribution to the movement through their involvement in teaching and preaching concerning the faith. Daniel Paul, in particular is well remembered for his participation in the leadership of the Ethiopian

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Pentecostal groups especially after the departure of those who pioneered the movement.<sup>34</sup>

### ***Internal Dynamics:***

A closer examination of the rise of the Pentecostal movement in Ethiopia reveals that it arose out of the interplay of several factors. Both pioneers and participants of the Pentecostal movement in Ethiopia emphatically state that the movement was spontaneous and would not favor an interpretation which links the movement's rise to impersonal forces such as existing socio-economic conditions of their society. For them, it was a revelation of the special power, the "fire," of God that was not apparently clear even to the participants at the time it did. They contend that the movement arose out of the depth of their past spiritual consciousness which had been profoundly stirred due to the fresh inspiration they received through reading the Bible and related Scriptural literature.<sup>35</sup> However, difficult as it is, one must attempt to explain why the Pentecostal movement unfolded in Ethiopia at the time it did. It is necessary to take issues further to look into the intersections of various factors that converged to cause the rise of the Pentecostal movements in Ethiopia and consider circumstances of its rapid expansion in the midst of extremely hostile socio-cultural and political environment.

Pentecostalism in Ethiopia raises a fundamental problem of situating its origin as a religious movement. Informants agree that the movement is like "a stream with many tributaries," where the "manifestation" of the power of the Holy Spirit occurred in multiple places at almost the same time.<sup>36</sup> The rise of Pentecostalism in Ethiopia, at

least in its earliest phase, was a relatively homogenous socio-cultural phenomenon with a base among the emerging urban elite. According to their testimonies, the sites where the young people claimed to have experienced this encounter leading to a radical transformation of their lives were mainly: Harar, Nazareth, Awasa and the capital city, Addis Ababa. The settings that provided the encounter with the Pentecostal experience were, in most cases high schools, teacher training institutes, and colleges/universities. Another important component of the setting was the beginning of the rise of new informal associations such as Bible study groups, prayer and witnessing gatherings in the 60's and the availability, on an unprecedented scale, of a wide variety of Christian literature, including the Bible.

The history of the Pentecostal movement in Ethiopia can be told through stories of persons who "sensed" the guidance of the Holy Spirit towards a fresh understanding of their faith and the power to communicate it to others boldly and eagerly. The best way to approach the issue of Pentecostalism's genesis is to recount the story as it has been told by the participants, and then try to establish the links and suggest explanations. Its autonomous rise, the lack of a well considered intention to generate a new religious movement on the part of the pioneers, and the relative absence of institutional backing to facilitate networks among the scattered streams of stirring that appeared virtually independent of each other, present some sort of an enigma. Reconstructing the genesis of the Pentecostal movement in Ethiopia poses a considerable challenge to the historian as it is difficult to provide adequate explanation as to the cause and manner of its emergence and as to how it succeeded in sustaining itself as a movement.

### ***The Harar Stream:***

The city of Harar, located in the eastern part of Ethiopia, is amongst the first centers of origin of the Pentecostal movement in Ethiopia. In its neighborhood, Harar hosts major training institutions, such as the Harar Teacher Training Institution, the Harar Military Academy and the Alemaya College of Agriculture. It was in the Harar Teacher Training Institute that students had their first Pentecostal experience in the form of glossolalia (speaking in tongues) in 1964. The Pentecostal students, who claimed to have experienced the “baptism of the Holy Spirit” manifested in speaking in tongues, were mostly Orthodox Christians, though a few came from an evangelical Christian background.<sup>37</sup> There were informal associations in the form of Bible studies and prayer gatherings amongst the students. In the process of their meeting, they began to read some literature (books, newspapers, and journals) about the Pentecostal movement that stressed healing and the experience of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and the endowment of the gift of speaking in a different language. Some of these writings were of a more radical nature, often reflecting the view of the “Latter Rain” movement, as it was known then in the US, and the new Revival Movement, especially the one represented by Oral Roberts, a leading proponent of faith healing. According to informants, there was a variety of literature that they were reading produced by the T.L Osborn’s organization based in US.<sup>38</sup>

The incident that led to the encounter of the new religious experience seems to be a bit obscure at this point. Some relate the episode to the sudden sickness of two students in the Institute, one originally from Harar, and the other from Gojjam, both

coming from a strictly Orthodox families with a priestly lineage. Those who wanted to exercise what they had known about healing through readings of Pentecostal books or reports prayed for the patients. It happened that both experienced quick recoveries and left the hospital.<sup>39</sup> This event led the two patients to eagerly seek the secret of the cause of their miraculous healing. This search, in turn, led to a communion of fellowship with those who were venturing into the new Pentecostal faith. As more and more students joined their circles, they looked for a place where they could meet regularly to pray and worship together. Reading the Bible rigorously became a routine exercise. As the fellowship and reading continued, they pondered over the issues of salvation and conversion and the need to make personal decisions to be committed followers of Christ. This led them to an open pronouncement of their decision to make what they called, a personal commitment to trust Jesus, in their own small assembly, followed by baptism. Informants, who participated in this early revival experience, often reminisce with grimace at the way they conducted these baptismal rites without an experienced and knowledgeable person to guide them.<sup>40</sup>

The conversion of Asefa Alemu (later Doctor) and Bete Mengistu (later Doctor), the two patients who had received miraculous healing and the growing participation of other students in the Institute offered a legitimizing ground for the young enthusiasts to witness their faith to others and recruit new believers outside the student compound. As their number quickly rose, the students decided to open a “chapel” at a rented house in the neighborhood of the Institute. This chapel also became a gathering center for those students from evangelical Christian backgrounds who used to meet covertly in their

dormitories and who were also experiencing ostracism from the dominant Orthodox group in the campus, especially from members of *Haymanote Abew* Association.<sup>41</sup>

Leaving a small chapel behind to the next batch of graduates, many of the students went to different provinces of Ethiopia upon finishing their training, making vows to each other to spread their newfound faith wherever they were assigned. The graduates became instrumental in spreading the Presented faith in the various corners of Ethiopia. Presented in a condensed manner, this is the story of the beginning of the Pentecostal stirrings in Harar.

#### ***The Nazareth Stream:***

The story of the Nazareth chapter of the rise of the Pentecostal movement is connected to the high school students of the *Atse Gelawdewos* Secondary School. In the early 1960's students from this high school formed a kind of Bible study club, which later acquired the name, *Ye-Semay Birhan*, literally "The Heavenly Light/Sunshine." Among those who were actively involved in the club, were members as well as leaders of the *Haymanote Abew* Christian youth association.<sup>42</sup> In their Bible study sessions, they often engaged in intense reading and discussions. Their extensive studies on the Scripture, particularly the Book of Mark, and more specifically, the Book of Acts, led them to an intense search to the working of the power of the Holy Spirit and its applications on their personal lives, as was evidenced in the lives of the Apostles. Those who participated in the event stress the fact that the experience of the "baptism" of the Holy Spirit was not only an outcome of desperate yearnings, but was a result of



fervent prayers and fasting, which in practice meant, abstaining from any meal for several days.<sup>43</sup>

Nazareth being a major city situated at a crossroad, it is quite possible that news of the Pentecostal faith might have come to the attention of some of the members of the Bible study group and spurred the search process.<sup>44</sup> According to some informants, some members of the *Ye -Semay Berhan* came to learn about the Pentecostal movement through one of the revival meetings of youth conferences held at the Nazareth Bible Academy. The youth revival meetings brought young people from various parts of Ethiopia including Addis Ababa.<sup>45</sup>

Their Pentecostal experience soon set them apart from the rest of the high school friends and they began to face opposition, which slowly evolved into persecution.<sup>46</sup> One contributing reason for that was the new style of mass prayer they had introduced, which was often accompanied by screaming, indicating in their view, evil spirits were being exorcised from those possessed by them. Their vocal style, which brought unfamiliar ways of expressing their faith practices, was not welcomed by their Orthodox peers, for they saw it to be antithetical to their solemn traditional exercise of faith. The increasing number of students participating with the group alarmed not only fellow students but also teachers and a wide section of the community in the town. In 1964, the tension that began to unfold in the high school evolved into riots that led toward the temporary suspension of some of the leaders, who, in fact, happened to be excellent students in their respective classes. Later, the students were readmitted and allowed to continue their classes taking their good school grades into consideration. Many of the leading members of the *Ye-Semay Berhane* group graduated

from the high school with outstanding grades and joined the Hails Sellassie I University and became influential agents in the dissemination of Pentecostalism.<sup>47</sup>

The incident forced the group to find a meeting place outside the school compound. The search for a meeting place ultimately led them to seek contacts with the Mennonite missionaries who sympathized with the earnest spiritual yearning of the students and provided assistance by way of covering rental expenses.<sup>48</sup> When members of the Heavenly Sunshine decided to accept the offer, they did so with a firm position of maintaining their identity as Orthodox Christians who had experienced salvation and the actions of the Holy Spirit. However, intervening events led to the forging of closer relations between the students and the Mennonites whose outcome was the establishment of a semi-independent institution called, the *Meserete Krestos* Church.<sup>49</sup>

#### ***The Addis Ababa Stream:***

In considering the third constituent of the origin of the Pentecostal movement, we need to pay attention to developments in Addis Ababa. The story of this chapter, however, has two interrelated dimensions. It would be more appropriate to start with the group that has its roots in connection with the Finland Pentecostal Missions.

The Finnish Pentecostal missions established their station at a residential site in Mercato, a strategic commercial location in Addis Ababa. Some of their activities include: building schools and clinics, and distributing tracts and the Bible, mainly for schools, hospitals and private homes. Their work in the Mercato neighborhood attracted young students who through the literature and teachings of the missionaries embraced the Pentecostal faith. Among the most prominent of the students were Melese Wegu



(later Doctor), Kebede Wolde Mariam (later Doctor), Ato Fantahun Gebre and Argaw Neda.<sup>50</sup>

What made this Addis Ababa based group different from the ones in Harar and Nazareth, was the fact that their encounter with Pentecostalism came as a result of direct contact with the Pentecostal missionaries. Addis Ababa being the capital city, the group also had the benefit of being highly exposed, not only to Pentecostal literature, but talks offered by guest speakers from other countries. One such a speaker who left an indelible impact upon the group was the Kenyan Pentecostal preacher, Omaha Chacha who came to Ethiopia in 1965 sent by evangelist missionary Paul Johansson in association with the Swedish Philadelphia mission.<sup>51</sup> The itinerant evangelist preached to the young Ethiopians congregating around the Mercato mission compound on the nature and the power of the Holy Spirit even defying the occasional interventions of the Finnish missionaries who put restraints on his actions in the midst of his service. According to an informant, he responded to such an attempt by one of the female missionaries by saying “ woman keep quiet, for there was no keeping quiet while walking on the devils territories.”<sup>52</sup> A large number of Ethiopians claimed to have experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and the attendant gift of speaking in tongues in one or the other of his preaching sessions.<sup>53</sup>

Most of my informants are unanimous concerning the contribution of the Kenyan preacher, who gave the Pentecostal movement solid ground among its young Ethiopian adherents. The simplicity of his presentation, as was evidenced by the lack of theological sophistication, his contextualized message, the liberty with which he exercised the gifts of the Sprit (prophesy, speaking in tongues, etc), the miraculous

healing services he conducted, the prophetic messages he delivered, and above all, his urge that believers should seek to experience the power of the Holy Spirit and speak in tongues, inspired many Ethiopians. Many of the participants felt that they had now found more spiritual insights from this itinerant African evangelist than from the many years of contact with the Finnish Pentecostal missionaries, who, apart from their Nordic placidity, were very cautious in exercising their spiritual gifts.<sup>54</sup> In the opinion of Kebede Wolde Mariam, a man who witnessed this development, Omaha Cha-cha's role could be compared to that of a matchstick that sparked light to the wood sticks waiting to burn.<sup>55</sup>

Some time after the visit of Omaha Chacha, a schism developed between the FPM missionaries and the Ethiopians. There are various explanations offered for the split. The main source of conflict revolves around the issue of leadership, strategy of evangelization, and the exercise of the "gifts of the Spirit." With respect to the first point, the issue that the Ethiopians had with the missionaries was their insistence of having a say in the leadership. The young Ethiopians wanted to be part of the leadership team so that they could have a handle over the various programs of the church. The young Ethiopians were not also fully reconciled to the influence Miss Helvi Halme exercised in the church. Miss Helvi Halme, who was a prominent member of the church's leadership, acted virtually as the pastor of the church. Her apparently paternalistic attitude coupled with her being a women caused some discomfort among the young Ethiopians. This displeasure should be considered in light of the culture where the young Ethiopians had come from a culture that does not encourage women's leadership.<sup>56</sup> The question of evangelization became an issue mainly because of pace.

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The Ethiopians wanted to share their newly embraced religious convictions to the rest of Ethiopia in some organized fashion, whereas, the missionaries wanted to go about it slowly, their strategy and priority being first to consolidate the local church they were building in Addis Ababa and other localities. Overall, the young Ethiopians, who learned more about the Christian faith and its importance for the nation, saw in the missionaries a limited vision of evangelization that did not encompass social and economic development agenda.<sup>57</sup>

The last touchy point had to deal with the issue of application of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, such as speaking in tongues, prophesying and exorcising evil spirits. The young Ethiopians went vigorously ahead with their newfound religious practices, unbounded both by theology and experience. They were extremely eager in exercising what they considered were gifts of grace available to anyone who desperately sought after them. The young Ethiopians realized that the gifts of the Spirit had to be exercised to meet the existential needs of Ethiopians who were going through several spiritual problems, and physical and psychological sicknesses associated with evil spirits so rampant in their societies.<sup>58</sup> The missionaries wanted to handle matters in a more a cautious and low-key manner, whereas the young Ethiopians wanted to apply them without reserve. It appears that the main reason for adopting a reserved approach was the fact that the missionaries did not want to stir any trouble either from the established/national Church or from the main line Protestant missionary groups, who evinced suspicion, at times bordering on hostility, towards the Pentecostals.

Cultural misunderstandings also played a role in the friction, and finally led to the breakaway of the Ethiopian Pentecostal group and the formation of their own

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fellowship.<sup>59</sup> Perhaps, in a miniscule way, one sees here a grain of what is so commonly known in African historiography as the independent churches.

In 1966, the young Ethiopians who separated from the FPM mission started to meet at a rented house in the Mesalemia area of the city. Shortly afterwards, they were joined by Harari Pentecostals like Assefa and Zeleke, a dynamic blending of two streams forming the nucleus of a budding religious force that soon crystallized into an indigenous Pentecostal movement.<sup>60</sup> This brings us to the last and most momentous aspect of Pentecostalism in Ethiopian history. The events that gave the Pentecostal movement significant impetus has mainly to do with the religious stirrings that transpired among the students of the former national university of Haile Sellassie I.

#### ***The Haile Sellassie I University Stream:***

The Pentecostal movement began to reach university students in the early 1960s, mainly through those students with a Pentecostal background who had entered the university. Some of them came from Addis Ababa, while others came from the Nazareth and Awasa areas. Informants hold a somewhat divided opinion as to how Pentecostalism found its way in Haile Sellassie I University. There are those who suggest that a group of students, fresh returnees of the Ethiopian University Service (EUS), started reading Pentecostal literature at a commonly shared rental house near the University. According to these informants, extensive reading of the Bible and an intense longing to know and personally encounter the Holy Spirit led the students to experience the baptism of the Spirit. The students claimed that they felt the action of the Holy Spirit spontaneously in their deep prayer times.<sup>61</sup> There are, however, others

who suggest that the first influence came from the Nazareth Pentecostal group who joined the National University in the early 1960's.<sup>62</sup> Bekele Wolde Kidan provides a perspective that combines both elements. In his book *Rivayval*, Bekele points out that some of the university students who lived together in a rented room near the HS IU campus had already experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit. For instance, Oqba Egzi received the baptism of the Holy Spirit while he was in Eritrea through Bete Mengistu and Alem Bistrat, the former students from the Harar training institute who were assigned to teach in the former Eritrean province. Berhane Abreha had similar experience in the Awasa conference of 1965 by meeting Pentecostals from the Nazareth *Ye-Semay Berhan* group. Teka Gebru, a student from the College of Engineering, had his first Pentecostal experience "after a desperate yearning and long quest" in the rented room with the help of friends staying with him. Philipos Kemere, the son of a Pentecostal preacher from the South, had a Pentecostal experience prior to meeting the group. Under the heading "All roads lead to Addis Ababa," Bekele concludes that small tributaries from Asmara, Awasa, and Nazareth converged at the University to form the bigger river that flowed in other directions.<sup>63</sup>

The formation of a prayer and fellowship group in the rented house in Arat Kilo near Menelik II School was a decisive event in the history of the Pentecostal movement, though Bekele's comparison to the Azusa Street appears to be a bit far-fetched. The four university students namely Philipos, Teka Gebru, Iqube Igzi and Berhane Abreha began meeting in 1966 for fellowship at the rented house, which they shared. They soon began to have steady prayer and Bible study programs, which gradually attracted the Pentecostals joining the national university as well as other

friends. The increase in the number of visitors created the need to look for a larger accommodation, which they acquired by renting a bigger house closer to the Sedest Kilo campus, the hub of activities of university students.<sup>64</sup>

What facilitated the expansion of Pentecostalism among students was the setting up of a “chapel” at a rented house in the neighborhood of the main campus.<sup>65</sup> Setting up a chapel was a very important step since the building served as the nucleus of the embryonic movement and a forum for students from a non-Orthodox background. The students were very aggressive in communicating their faith to others, and inviting people to the chapel became a strategy, so to say, for recruiting converts. Within a few months of the setting up of the chapel, the number of people joining them rose considerably.<sup>66</sup> Actively involved in organizing programs, such as teaching, preaching and leading prayer sessions, according to participants, were young Ethiopians who could not count on prior experiences yet had a strong desire to impact their generation and make a difference in their society.<sup>67</sup> They delivered amenable services that partially addressed the needs of students, mainly those coming from different provinces for higher studies who lacked family and social support. Apart from regular Sunday programs, they held attractive activities such as Bible studies, prayers for the sick, and counseling services to the students who had academic and adjustment problems. They also set up mutual aid programs to support one another reciprocally in terms of material exchange, sharing ideas and helping one another academically to cement their solidarity.

There were other factors that facilitated the work of the Pentecostal Christians in the University. First, assisting their work were graduates from various training



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institutes, especially the ones from Harar, who had the desire, the time and resources to provide some kind of backstops for the student fellowship that was brewing around the National University. Second, the Swedish Pentecostal missionaries, who saw the rising number and influence of the Pentecostals among the youth, noticed the need to provide some kind of informal training for the followers of the movement, particularly its active leaders. Third, there were para-church institutions established in the neighborhood of the university campus that had considerable impact upon the Christian students. The Youth Center that was set up by the SIM in the strategic area, between Arat Kilo and Sedest Kilo campuses, played a crucial role in providing a neutral space for all sorts of Christians. The center run multi-track activities such as recreational, library and counseling services to students who were facing some psychological problems or needed some kind of guidance. They also held lecture series in which they invited distinguished guest speakers on topics most pertinent to university students including faith and science.<sup>68</sup> There were many students who embraced the evangelical faith through the services of the Youth Center. The Center also attracted students from other persuasions, albeit for some other reasons. These were student radicals, mainly from the Crocodile group, who were openly hostile to the activities of the center and who often came there with the intention of disrupting the programs.<sup>69</sup> According to informants some of the members of the Crocodile group would choose every time they came to the Center a song from the hymn book entitled “ America is beautiful” not because they liked the song but with the sinister intention of blackmailing the Center which they regarded as a CIA project. Manzke, who later understood the intention of the Crocodiles, tore that piece out of the hymnal.<sup>70</sup> Aside from that, the Center created a

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common associational forum for the Pentecostals and Christians coming from non-Pentecostal backgrounds to interact with each other ecumenically, though the influence of the latter group eventually held sway.

The Mekane Yesus Youth Hostel, located adjacent to the church at Amist Kilo, also played a similar role. It served as a center for Bible studies and as a contact point between the Pentecostals and other students of evangelical background. Not only its proximity but the openness of the leadership of the Youth Hostel and the church in allowing their facilities to be used for different Christian activities was a great asset to the Pentecostals and other evangelical groups in the National University.

### ***The Rise of an Independent Pentecostal Church (1963-1966)***

#### ***Routinization and its Contexts:***

Bolstered by their rising numbers and the sense it created that the Pentecostals had reached a critical mass, interested leaders who were coordinating the activities in various chapels in Addis Ababa, felt the need to form some kind of structure to conduct organized programs and consolidate the movement. There were some sporadic informal meetings held by these interested groups, mainly students from HSIU University, College of Commerce and other secondary schools aimed at stirring discussions on how to streamline the new religious wave.<sup>71</sup> Such meetings assumed a more organized nature as “representatives” of various Pentecostal chapels began to meet more regularly to share experiences and discuss the issue of what was to be done with the new religious development that was in the offing amongst the youth. In other words, as Pentecostalism spread in different parts of Ethiopia and the number of the youth

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embracing it grew in size, the pressing question was should it continue as a “movement” or should it crystallize into some form of an institution.<sup>72</sup>

The Addis Ababa Conference of August 1966, which was essentially a culmination of these series of meetings, marked a watershed in the history of the Pentecostal movement. Among other things the meeting had the distinction of being attended by a crowd of Pentecostal youth from many parts of Ethiopia. According to the organizers, the main purpose of its calling was to address the crucial issue of how to consolidate and direct the fledgling movement in order to forge a common platform for the scattered spiritual stirrings.<sup>73</sup> The four-day Conference, attended by more than 200 participants, was significant for it brought together Pentecostals from all over the country to discuss for the first time the destiny of the new spiritual wave and the role of their generation in catalyzing its advance at the national level. The various teaching and prayer programs, solely organized and run by the Ethiopians, emphasized the need for bringing the movement into a higher level by providing it leadership and guidance. Their guiding motto, “the Gospel for Ethiopia by Ethiopians,” not only inspired many, but it also spelled out its national agenda.<sup>74</sup> Although the number of Pentecostals had grown by leaps and bounds, up to that time the movement had not yet coalesced into a single structure and leadership.<sup>75</sup> Nor had there been a distinct intent on the part of the young Pentecostals to form a church as such, except to bring together the inchoate groups of the new faith, which operated under various names in different quarters of Addis Ababa and elsewhere in the provinces.<sup>76</sup> At this stage of the Pentecostal movement, the most important concern of the leading groups was to streamline its various expressions by creating a common associational space and articulation.<sup>77</sup> An

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important outcome of the national conference was that it hastened the channeling of the various Pentecostals into a common stream. It created the context for the shading of Pentecostal identities that were developing along residential, regional and personality lines and helped to pull able leaders under one umbrella.

It must, however, be noted that the gathering in Addis received its impetus from the Awasa Conference that had preceded it. The Awassa Conference, organized by the Swedish Pentecostal Mission during the summer of 1965, formed an important background for the one convening in Addis, although the latter was entirely managed by the Ethiopians financially, logistically and in the running of the various teaching programs.

Awasa had hosted annually held local conferences but not on the scale of the one conducted there in the summer of 1965.<sup>78</sup> The Awasa Conference inspired united action and provided the structural basis to pursue it further. For one reason, it rallied Ethiopian Pentecostals from across the empire and it created the synergy that was indispensable to launch a collective new beginning. Second, in the two-week long educational and prayer sessions, students had the opportunity to learn relevant teachings by Pentecostal scholars on the varied aspects of the doctrine of Pentecostalism, evangelistic strategies, and church governance.<sup>79</sup> According to those who participated in the Conferences, this was ground breaking event given the fact that the Ethiopian Pentecostals who were scattered all over Ethiopia in a short period of time did not have a systematic theology to inform their faith and guide their actions. The lessons they drew out of the conference served as guideposts for their lives and future activities.<sup>80</sup> Informants also pointed out that the very fact of assembling in one



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place in such a large number virtually from all over Ethiopia infused a sense of confidence and enhanced their sense of solidarity and their convictions as Pentecostals. Solomon Kebede, a participant of the Conference and prominent leader of the Evangelical Fellowship, noted, “the thrill of being together and the powerful insight gained from the teaching instilled in us a messianic spirit that our generation was destined to impact the nation.”<sup>81</sup> In short, the Conference expanded the vision of the young Ethiopians and laid the groundwork for a consolidated effort, which the participants sincerely believed God alone had started.<sup>82</sup>

Informants unanimously agree that those who participated at the Awasa Conference came away with an invigorated spirit and a sense of anticipation that inspired the young Pentecostals to engage in aggressive work of evangelism. Informants also observe that it was after this Conference that participants from the University engaged in aggressive “witnessing”, *memesker*, a catchword commonly used in the religious narrative of Ethiopian Pentecostals.<sup>83</sup> Witnessing refers to sharing or giving testimony of one's faith in Christ based on the I Epistle of John chapter one.<sup>84</sup> In the vernacular of the Ethiopian Pentecostals, becoming and being a Christian meant acknowledging personal sinfulness and making personal decision/commitment to receive one's salvation based on the finished redemptive work of Christ. The young Pentecostals often cited verses from the Book of Romans chapter one and four and the Book of Galatians chapter two to validate their claim.<sup>85</sup> From their perspective, to be a Christian is not something predetermined or a claim made through family inheritance, rather it is a definite experience, a conscious and responsible act of the will. Even though, salvation is a gift of God made operative by grace through the faith,

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Pentecostals reasoned that unless the individual freely accepts Christ and His atonement, he cannot be born again and be saved.<sup>86</sup> The stress is very much on the individual's awareness of his sin and his personal conviction that redemption from the bondage of sin is possible only through faith in Jesus. Pentecostals often invoked the Book of John chapter three verse sixteen to stress the fact that "God loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believed in him shall not perish but have eternal life."<sup>87</sup> For the Pentecostals, salvation is synonymous with a new birth and a new beginning that follows conversion experience. It can also be a metaphor for radical renewal and reorientation of life style. On the psychological dimension, affirming new identity was an expressive and pragmatic act of individuals providing empowerment. On the wider group level, the conversion experience created the platform for collective restructuring of the social space. In this respect, one should view conversion with its extended sociological ramifications since it is a phenomenon that has more than a religious significance. It involves not only a religious reorganization, but the emergence of a new role, outlook belief, group identification in short, personal mutation with wider repercussions. Hence, the Pentecostals' frequent reference to *dagem lidet*, "born again," a concept that has not been spelled out clearly in the tradition of the National Church. It is this issue of *dagem lidet*, which has often times been the source of considerable tension between the Pentecostals and Orthodox Christians in Ethiopia.<sup>88</sup>

This moment of commitment described by believers as conversion is a pivotal experience, the before and after event, marking the beginning of a radical shift of life, for all Pentecostals. Ethiopian Pentecostals refer to their new spiritual encounter as

*getan magnet*, (meeting/finding the Lord) or *getan megebel* (receiving the Lord). They took the model from the Book of Romans chapter ten verse 9: "If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." In their understanding, who ever did not fit into that model, needed to hear the message of salvation. Witnessing, therefore, was communicating this experiential truth to others, which Pentecostals effectively used as a very important evangelistic tool to evangelize the young Ethiopians of their generation.<sup>89</sup> To the young students, to evangelize meant to put across the message of the "the good news," and the drive to spread knowledge of the Bible, for them, was the fruit of a deep personal experience of "new birth." According to informants who were actively engaged in the early phase of the Pentecostal movement, their chief motivation for witnessing was the life transformation they had personally experienced by becoming Christians and the urgency they felt to share it with others. Many other young students were also attracted by the striking changes they had observed in the behavior of converts whom they had known before as "bad guys" or sick men and the testimonies of miracles reported by converts.<sup>90</sup>

The impulse for witnessing came from the converts' active desire to bring new converts to encountering God's love, what in their perception was a pen-ultimate experience of life. This is a process that kept repeating itself, and which as a result, was the single most important avenue for diffusing the evangelical faith in Ethiopia.<sup>91</sup> Witnessing signifies the sharing of individual testimonies about how one encountered God and the dramatic change ensued and expressing ones love "for the lost" as the Pentecostals would often say. It involves the telling of one's spiritual journey after

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conversion experience to some one, usually an acquaintance, with the intent of wooing him to the new faith. It also entailed planned group activities to go out in the street and witness to persons they would meet and capitalize that opportunity to send short and simple evangelical messages, which were selective quotes from the Bible dealing with salvation. As most informants point out, witnessing, or personal evangelism, as it is also known, has been one of the most powerful tools the Pentecostals employed for evangelistic purposes with considerable success.<sup>92</sup>

Pioneers of the Pentecostal movement felt a sense of urgency to communicate the faith to the Ethiopians, which they seemed to carry out with a commitment level bordering the messianic. Pentecostals, especially converts from the historic Orthodox Church, claim that they redoubled their efforts to “reach” others who in their views were still “bound” by traditions, habits and rituals, which, from their perspective, simply made people become prisoners of fixed religious practices, instead of having “personal relations with Jesus.” The redoubling of commitment drew from the bridge burning act of the Pentecostals and “the ideal-reality gap” they noticed between creedal values and actual practices that stirred up in them a new vigor to promote their new faith. In their view, the Pentecostals saw the only way to “redeem” their fellow Ethiopians was to give them a chance to receive their salvation and the experience of the power of God by helping them to make personal decision to “trust” Christ and accept the gifts of the Holy Spirit.<sup>93</sup> This sense of calling to “reach out” to one’s “lost” fellows, turned converts into bona fide missionaries and preachers. Partly explaining this zeal for reaching out, what the Pentecostals describe as their “lost” generation, is the rising influence of secularism and agnosticism in their times and the inadequacy of

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the traditional equipment of the national Church to innovate new approaches to save them from falling victims of these forces.

Perhaps, it was out of this new fervor that there grew an interest among students to set up an inter-denominational organization, which later evolved into the Ethiopian University Students Christian Fellowship (EUSF).<sup>94</sup> The Fellowship played a decisive role in bringing ecumenical awakening among believers and recruiting new converts through its various outreach programs like retreats, drama shows, revival meetings and seminars.<sup>95</sup> The members of the university fellowship also formed choirs and went to various provinces to share testimonies, stage dramas and “minister” through songs.<sup>96</sup> In this way, the university choir became another important instrument by which the Pentecostal faith spread into the provinces.

The Student’s Fellowship, undoubtedly, became one of the few and most powerful associations, which openly challenged the new Marxist ideology that was making inroads increasingly into the university system. The Pentecostal group daringly confronted those individuals who were promoting Marxism by taking time to study it so that they could task the student radical both at the intellectual and spiritual front.<sup>97</sup> The student activists who embraced the Marxist ideology saw the Pentecostals as a danger to the student movement and feared that the vigor they displayed for their faith left no room for participation in student politics. The student radicals also suspected that the Pentecostal movement was of a foreign origin promoted by westerners who wanted to use the new religion as a tool for a neo-colonialist agenda.<sup>98</sup> According to Solomon Lulu, a serious point of departure between the two groups, who held opposing visions of the future of their country was -the Pentecostal’s philosophical and theological

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contention that only a spiritually self-transformed individual had the moral justification to call out for actions that would bring an all out community transformation. The Pentecostal's idea of the revolution, which in their perception, begins with the self, to be more precise, with the individual heart, as micro-model of revolution, definitely clashed with the student radical's macro-historical model that took Marxism as its centerpiece.<sup>99</sup> It was largely members of this fellowship who provided pivotal leadership for the various evangelical churches, which were forced to operate underground during the revolution.

The 60's, in a way, was a period where the Ethiopian society was experiencing in some ways cultural, social, religious and intellectual "enlightenment"/awakening, albeit in its nascent form. The transformations which carried with them significant demographic, social and cultural shifts allowed the emergence of a new social force that favored exploring new ideas and experimenting new faith. The new social force that came to exist as a result of the combined effects of urbanization, a measure of industrialization, the expansion of modern education and state bureaucracy, sought to develop a new way of self expression, new ethos and sensibilities that resonated the changed temper of the time. The period saw the rise of a new style of literature expressed through the works of Abe Gubegna (the rebel) and Mengistu Lemma (the comical), complex art and paintings, Afework Tekle, being its towering example, expressive music and new ways of association, be it politically or socially driven, and a new way of expressing leisure. This was the time that saw the culture of movies, the party and the rise of new musical bands some with exotic as well as local names, such as the *Solo* band, the *Walyas*, *Zola*, *Orkestra Ityopia*, the *Ashantis*. This was also the

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period which witnessed the presence of foreign communities (teachers, Peace Corps, advisors or staff members of international organizations, etc.) in an increasing number and variety.

The 60's also was a time that witnessed the swing of a new mood characterized by independent thinking and actions, especially among the youth, which indulged in counter culture or anti-cultural activities, intentionally or unintentionally, for ill or for good. Some of these counter- culture practices, whatever their causative motivation, modern or anti- modern, were expressed in new fashions, such as the *mini*, and *parry* and the *Afro* hair style, the *bell bot*, and the beginning of deviant style of life similar to a hippie culture, in some quarters of the youth influenced by global developments drawn from movies and literature. Counter culture also found expression in some extreme negative forms like the rise of the gangsterism, a typical example of which was the notorious *Chyna Buden*(Chinese gang/group of the *Qera Sefer*, which soon spread into some other affluent residential quarters in Addis Ababa. The youth of the 60's had a perplexing image of their country; while they were proud of their glorious past and took delight in seeing the establishment of the OAU's headquarters, the ECA and other international organizations in their midst, the backwardness of their country and the shocking level of poverty of the masses became a vexing concern. The radicalism the Ethiopian students expressed in the mid -sixties with their slogan of "land to the tiller," and the religious radicalism that their Pentecostals counterparts demonstrated with their slogans "the gospel for Ethiopia by Ethiopians" could perhaps be viewed as different refrains of the same song as both claimed to b champions of national salvation, a

mission to which both committed their lives wholeheartedly no matter what their differences and the outcome could be.

***Forming of the Mulu Wengel Church:***

The Awasa conference of 1965 and the one that followed it in Addis Ababa in August 1966, set the tone for the vision of having a united Pentecostal church in Ethiopia. The necessity of carving a common religious identity and a common structure, coupled with the need to combat persecution that was beginning to make itself felt, set the imperatives for speeding up the process. Soon after the national Pentecostal conference in Addis Ababa, leaders of the various chapels operating in the Capital City took steps towards implementing the consensus reached. Pentecostal pioneers perceived that the time had come for a decisive step to elect those who were to be the future leaders of national Pentecostal church. A selection committee facilitated the election of the leaders, albeit on a tentative basis. The organizers of the conference attempted to ensure that the elected leaders represented the various strands of the movement as fairly as possible. Among the newly elected leader serving as board members, three had their background from the Finnish Pentecostals, three from the Harari group and one from HSIU from a Swedish Pentecostal background.<sup>100</sup> The two deacons were students from HSIU. The reason for not involving the university students in the main leadership team was to allow them to have their primary focus on their studies. The higher leadership fell to those who were government employees and who had the extra time to commit to leading the church to be constituted.<sup>101</sup>

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Once the selection process was over, the issue of ordination became a primary concern. The group had neither a priest nor a pastor to conduct the ritual. The leadership settled the matter when it agreed to invite Karl Ramstrand, of the Swedish Pentecostal mission, to lay hands on the elected team, and pray for them, while at the same time, the congregation made a corporate prayer to officiate as well as consummate the act of ordination.<sup>102</sup> That was how the young Pentecostals resolved the dilemma of a delicate subject that involved issues of legitimacy, doctrinal identification, and autonomy.

The issue of designating a name for the church was another serious matter that posed some problems. Different groups made various suggestions as to the future name of the church, the two main ones brought forth for the decision were: *Ye-Semay Berhan*, literally, Heavenly Sunshine, and *Tintawi Ye Egziabher Bete Krestian*, literally, Old Time Church of God. The suggestion for the first name came from those who had their origin in Nazareth, as this was the name with which they had been identified while they were in Nazareth. The majority of the participants voted for the second name, which actually came from the chairperson of the Convention, Kebede Wolde Mariam (from a Finish mission background). The outcome did not please the self-conscious and articulate Nazareth group, who mostly came from HSIU. A mistake committed by the new leadership in failing to mention the town of Nazareth as one of their outreach posts in the registration process, led to a fissure. Eventually, most, if not all, of the Nazareth group decided to stay away before they joined the Mennonite missionaries.<sup>103</sup>

There were a few individuals who questioned the wisdom of forming a new church. For instance, Teka and Berhane, coming from the Orthodox background were



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originally in favor of spreading the movement with the national Church to bring revival from within. Others like, Oqube Egzi Seyum a member of the Mekane Yesus Church, argued that it was far better for the Pentecostals to remain in their respective churches, including the historic National Church, to enhance the spread of the Pentecostal faith incognito, rather than to attempt such a change from without. His point was that the Pentecostals would make more impact in their respective organized churches rather than isolated groups. Since most of the Pentecostals, especially those who came from evangelical background, had their legs in their home churches, the issue of denominational affiliation had not been discussed and resolved. Arguably, it was hard for some to leave their denominations and join a new one, which was only in the making. Oqube Egzi's idea did not gain currency, and as a result, he, being a long time member of the Mekane Yesus Church, happily remained there without taking further part in the formation of the new church.<sup>104</sup>

A major hurdle that the Pentecostal movement faced was obtaining a legal permit from the government. The leaders submitted an application letter to the government on April 24, 1967, for registering the church under the name. "*Tinatawi Ye- Egziabeher Maheber*." The reason for the choice of *Maheber*, association, was that they could not use the term church, for that was the exclusive designation for the historic Orthodox Church, and registration for religious associations, excepting the national church, had to be done under the designation of "*Maheber*."<sup>105</sup> Government officials, who reviewed the application, requested change of name, because the phrase *Tintawi Ye Egziabher Maheber*, might undermine the Orthodox church, that had a long-running history in Ethiopia. The leaders brought the issue before the congregation and

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the name *Ye Mulu Wengel Amagnoch Andenet Mahber*, (the Full Gospel Believers' Association), shortened to *Mulu Wengel*, stood out as replacement among alternative names suggested. It was this new name that the leaders entered upon resubmitting a letter of application to the government.<sup>106</sup>

According to the existing practices, once an application had been submitted for registration and negative response was not forthcoming within a matter of ninety days, then it automatically signified that the government had endorsed the request. In keeping with this understanding, the leaders received the silence with celebration and declared their church officially established in 1968.<sup>107</sup> The *Mulu Wengel* Church operated under this understanding for a while and in a short period of time expanded its area of influence. Boosted by having their own church, the young believer began to engage in the full-blown process of expanding the Gospel "to all corners of Ethiopia."<sup>108</sup> Among the young believers some volunteered to become evangelists with a monthly pay of 50 Ethiopian dollars. Thus the newly established church set a new precedent of being a national mission sending agent independent of any foreign financial assistance. Among those who first volunteered to be evangelists were Zeleke Alemu and the late Haile Wolde Michael.<sup>109</sup> Many others like Asefa Alemu, Ashenafi Zemat, Merid Lema, Tsadiku Abo, Taye Takele, Seifu Kebede and a host of others followed in their footsteps. There are a good number of young men and women who claimed to have received a "call" through dreams, visions, and prophesies, and who also submitted their lives to serving what the Bible describes as the, "Great Commission," by going into the various parts of Ethiopia.<sup>110</sup>

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The motto, “The Gospel for Ethiopia by Ethiopians,” the unwritten manifesto of the Pentecostals, proved to be the driving force behind this new spate of interest to go out and reach others, just like, “Land to the Tiller” (1965), was the driving slogan of the radical students of their generation in the National University. The Pentecostal movement developed a compulsion to create a contagious community of faith, which they sought to bring about with great zeal and consuming passion. According to its original founders, the movement was not devoid of social purposes. There was an embedded conviction among the pioneers that Ethiopia needed a religious revolution that invoked the power of God, through the Holy Spirit as a *sinqua non* for its socio-economic and political transformations.<sup>111</sup> Their zeal approximated that of the ebullient generation of American evangelicals in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century who were inspired by John Mott’s slogan, “the evangelization of the world in this generation.” As a result, the Pentecostals expanded their sphere of missionary activities from areas like Debre Zeit, Nazreth, Ambo, Debre Berhan to parts of Welega, Bale, Gojjam, Arsi, Eritrea, Tigrai, Jimma and Illubabor.<sup>112</sup> They accomplished this by mobilizing local missionaries, mostly men and women serving as government employees in different parts of Ethiopia and by organizing self-supported revivalist meetings, which they called “ spiritual conferences.”<sup>113</sup> This “geographical peel off”, to use Gerlach’s expression, is one of the most important key elements in the dynamics of the expansion of the Pentecostal movement in Ethiopia.<sup>114</sup> The church comprised disparate groups, mostly students, who did not have solid leadership with strong theological foundations. Most of them, being well-informed people, made up for that weakness by assiduously reading the Bible and applying what they considered basic Scriptural principles to

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guide their church in the context of their times and by further deepening their commitment to their call to serve.<sup>115</sup> For the most part, even to this day, lay ministry has been one of the chief characteristics of the *Mulu Wengel* Church.

The *Mulu Wengel* church right from its inception determined to be independent, though there were some attempts by the Pentecostal missionaries to keep their hands in the mix. According to informants, adopting such a stance emanated from the need to keep their distance from foreign missionaries in order to lend national credibility to their mission. This was because, evangelical faith has been associated with foreigners, and hence was perceived by the public at large, not only with great suspicions, but it was also viewed as a threat to the nation. For instance, the report that appeared in *Ethiopian Herald* in 1973 refers to the Pentecostal movement as “foreign association” in spite of the fact that its members including the leaders were Ethiopians.<sup>116</sup> The Pentecostal felt that keeping the missionaries’ influences at bay would partly help to dispel that assumption which has been deeply engrained in the psychic of most Ethiopians.<sup>117</sup>

Although there were some missionaries who were doubtful of the claims of the Pentecostals, there were a few who believed that whatever the weakness of the youth, who were engaged in this grassroots pioneering experiment, they deserved commendation. These missionaries thought that Ethiopian Pentecostals stood a better chance of success in spreading the gospel to Ethiopian nationals if they functioned independently without being identified with the western missionaries.<sup>118</sup> This position tallies well with the main intention of the Pentecostals to spread the Gospel to “Ethiopia by Ethiopians,” a form of “Ethiopianism” couched in religious terms. This is



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a position that the church has kept to this day.<sup>119</sup> Given the fact that the church drew its followers from the young students, financial resources were a major constraint. Yet, the church chose to be self-reliant and to avoid any kind of dependency especially, on foreign sources. Members of the Pentecostal church, who either were government employees or who ran their own businesses, supported their church by increasing their financial commitment through tithes and gifts.<sup>120</sup> The church has established its Pentecostal doctrinal basis by stressing the fact that the Holy Spirit was central to its activity. Apart from incorporating the doctrine of salvation, a crucial aspect of the church's canon is its emphasis on believers' Spirit baptism and its evidential consequence of speaking in tongues.<sup>121</sup> In the understanding of the Pentecostals, the concept of salvation received an enlarged meaning that went beyond the redemption of the soul. In its package, it incorporated healing from diseases and deliverance from spiritual bondage and a spiritual blessing to be experienced in the here and the now. The Pentecostals brought this experiential aspect of religion into their ordinary lay theology, which significantly became a strong pull factor for the beleaguered youth, at its embryonic stage, and the general populace, in its later phase. In so doing, they introduced a new framework of viewing one self as a Christian, centered on the concept of salvation, which embodies a here and now dimension.

From the very outset, the Pentecostal movement attracted members of the emerging elite, enthusiastic about their faith and confident in their own inherent talents, which undoubtedly proved tremendous spiritual as well as human capital that they marshaled for evangelistic purposes. Very soon, there emerged not only talented preachers but also gifted musicians such as Addisu Worku, Legese Watero (later

Index

Index

Index

Index

Index

Index

Index

Index

Index

Index

Index

Index

Index

Index

Index

Index

Index

Index

Index

Index

Index

Index

Index

Index

Professor), and others who emerged afterwards, like the nationally acclaimed singers, Tesfaye Gabiso, Tamirat Welba, Atalay Alem (later Dr.), and Tamirat Haile.<sup>122</sup> These young musicians composed their own songs and introduced modern musical instruments such as accordions and guitars into many of the church services. They radically changed the traditional antiphonal singing and the chanting of priests and deacons, which according to the Pentecostals, lacked a strong expression of spirituality and did not allow space for congregational participation. Pentecostal music diffused through the conduits of soloist and choir singers, as they gradually became an integral part of the new worship practices of most evangelical churches. The new gospel songs pioneered by the young Ethiopians strongly increased the visibility of the church and became one of the most significant evangelistic tools in the hands of the Pentecostals. Apart from the deep spiritual message, which the Pentecostals communicated innovatively combining traditional means and modern musical instruments, the availability of tape recordings and their increasing use both for production and listening purposes, significantly promoted the popularity of the songs. One thing that gave Pentecostal music considerable exposure and acceptance among the populace was their regular transmission in the Radio Voice of the Gospel, established in 1963 by the World Lutheran Federation in collaboration with the Mekane Yesus Church.<sup>123</sup> In fact, it can be said that it is the popularity of gospel songs, totally composed and sung by Ethiopians, along familiar lyrics and melodies, that made the Pentecostal movement more known among the general public as its most populist expression.<sup>124</sup> The emergence of new Pentecostal songs significantly shaped the worship style and practices of most evangelical churches. The participatory expression of faith that

corporate worship allows is reinforced by congregational singings. This is a new dimension of worship that the Pentecostals have popularized and which is gradually becoming a regular feature of the religious services of churches of non-Pentecostal denominations.<sup>125</sup>

### ***The Pentecostals and their Persecution Experience***

Since August 1967 the Pentecostals had been experiencing sporadic harassment largely from the Orthodox Christian members of the clergy and local officials who professed the Orthodox faith.<sup>126</sup> In the main, expressing hostility toward the Pentecostals were those who saw the movement as a cult and a deviant form of Christianity that has corrupting influence in the Ethiopian society. Official publications like *Addis Zemen* and *Ethiopian Herald* use flippant words such as “sect” an “unknown religion,” and “foreign virus” and *Pentecosti*, to characterize the movement.<sup>127</sup> In 1969, an angry mob, who, according to informants, were composed of mostly adherents of the Orthodox faith, stormed the congregation of the Pentecostals during a revival “spiritual conference” at Kasanchis, and attacked participants. According to informants who actually were at the site, when the incident occurred, the event stirred unrest and captured the attention of the media, which spoke of the Pentecostals as eccentric groups who were out of tune of societal norms.<sup>128</sup> The Kasanchis incident of 1969 and the Debre Zeit episode of 1967 that preceded it, involved elements of violence and mob justice which gave government officials as well as the clergy the occasion to view the movement as a source of de-stabilization that had to be nipped in the bud.

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In 1967, the Pentecostals rented a big house at a strategic location along the *Piatza-Arat Kilo* road, not far from the site of St. Mary Orthodox Church. According to informants, over 3, 000 people attended a 1970 conference that took place at the Pentecostal chapel located near *Ras Mekonen Deldei*. Over 700 men participated in the prayer session that the Pentecostals conducted on every Fridays. The large youth gathering observed on every Sunday drew the attention of the public and the clergy of the Orthodox Church in particular, whose head office was also located in the neighborhood. One thing that had induced fear and hostility from the Orthodox public and the government was the sharp increase in the number of people turning to Pentecostalism and the embracing of the faith by some public figures including some famous musicians.<sup>129</sup>

Not only its growing size and the spectacular gatherings, but the visibility of the location, made the fledgling church a target of those who did not welcome the practices of the new faith. In particular, men of the older generation were leery of some of the practices of the Pentecostals, such as their shouting and screaming, during prayer times and healing services. Informants maintain that judged from the perspective of the public, certain practices of the Pentecostal faith lacked, “*chewanet*,” that reserve and gentility supposed to reside at the root of the Ethiopian persona, thus, their viewing it as counter-culture and anti-social.<sup>130</sup> According to informants, what particularly offended the sensibility of the public was the absence of hierarchy, the conduct of prayer services on regular days, apart from Sundays, their night time prayer meetings, their loud singing, the spontaneity of their worship styles, and lack of sacramental rituals.<sup>131</sup> The Pentecostal religious practices presented a strikingly visible contrast with the traditional

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Orthodox faith practice even in what appears to be simple cases like the preaching of the Bible by ordinary un-ordained men and women who stood in the pulpit without wearing priestly vestments. Overall, the Pentecostal movement and its egalitarian tendency presented some kind of cultural shock to the established church's standard of religious ethos and regularized pattern of expression of faith and worship. It represented one of the fronts along which the traditional culture of Ethiopia conflicted with the emerging ways influenced by new ideas and new social formations. The precipitous growth of Pentecostalism and the spread of its influence among other sectors of the society, apart from the youth, posed a threat to the established church, a fact which according to many informants, was at the core of the opposition against the new faith.<sup>132</sup>

The Pentecostal movement broke existing Christian traditions, Orthodox and mission related, at key points revolving around the baptism of Holy Spirit, which the young students, free from the restraints of denominations, picked from the Bible and began to experience and apply. For the Pentecostals the baptism of the Holy Spirit was something that they considered a normal spiritual happening, and even a necessary part of the Christian experience vitally important both for its sustenance and expansion. As a result, they suffered further marginality since existing mainline mission related churches, both from the Lutheran and SIM background, also considered the new movement as out of the ordinary that must not be allowed to enter into their placid spheres.<sup>133</sup> Not only foreign missionaries, even local leaders of churches from mission backgrounds, with their relatively fixed creeds and structure, saw the movement as misguided urban youth filled with emotional stirrings that should be kept away outside

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their framework. They openly discouraged their church members, particularly the youth from taking any part in/with it.<sup>134</sup>

The Pentecostal movement challenged the established theology of the mainline churches by its pronounced espousal and bold exercise of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, particularly, glossolalic phenomenon, which they insisted were available to the Christians in their day, faith healings and guidance through revelation. Pentecostals did not as such introduce a new faith except that they spelt out specific dimensions of the Bible that others have not stressed in their doctrines as well as religious practices. They have drawn on the basic theological emphasis on individual salvation, holiness, and in the formation of separate community of believers. What made Pentecostals stand out was their reliance on the Holy Spirit as the central experience from which one could partake to equip oneself to lead a soundly sanctified Christian life with a radical commitment to evangelize the world. The Pentecostals also openly claim that the world is affected by a plurality of hidden forces, demons, spirits, principalities and powers as described in the Book of Ephesians chapter six, which cause afflictions and impede progress. They insisted that believers need protection and deliverance from such malevolent forces through the exercise of the gifts of the Spirit and the power of effective prayers. The trump card of the Ethiopian Pentecostals is that the personal redemption that the Gospel promises is holistic and hence they firmly believed that personal needs can be addressed not only through doctrinal formulations but by applying them in existential situations. Consequently, the Ethiopian Pentecostals saw themselves advancing a more authentic and dynamic faith movement in contrast to what they considered as mere repetitions of sets of rules.

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In essence, what the Pentecostals considered to be a reenactment of the Book of Acts in their times, mainline churches viewed, as unbiblical and hence cult-like. This was mainly because some of the gifts of the Spirit have not been espoused doctrinally and exercised openly in the services of mainline churches. While the Pentecostals believed that the signs and wonders that followed early believers were as valid in their times as was in the past, leaders of the mainline churches earnestly believed that practices like prophesying and speaking in tongues only operated in the times of the Apostles and had ceased to operate since then. Tilahun Haile, a prominent leader of the Qale Heywet church remarked:

It took us a long time to understand the movement since we did not have a good grasp of its theological underpinnings. We had basically no sound teachings coming either from the historic church or from the churches of mission background, concerning the power of the Holy Sprit and gifts of the Spirit and its workings, or at least, the subject was under-emphasized. We saw the fruits of Pentecostalism as young people faithfully witnessed and extended their faith and as a result brought many of their equals into transformed lives. Consequently, we had to introduce a change of perspectives.<sup>135</sup>

As most informants strongly point out, it was the persecution of 1971-72, and the resultant dispersal of the Pentecostals and the 1974 Revolution that opened the door for the spread of certain aspects of Pentecostalism in these churches almost by default, if not by choice.<sup>136</sup>

Following the Debrezeit episode of August 1967, there had been numerous minor incidents involving the Pentecostals and some members of the Orthodox Church who deeply resented the manifestations of the Pentecostal style of faith. According to informants, the serious nature of the clash at Debre Zeit, the insistent plea Pentecostals made for a reviewing of the incident, and the publicity it had attracted, compelled the

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government to undertake an investigation. The government investigation, held in October 1967 under the auspices of the Public Safety division of the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Education and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, reported that the new movement projected elements that were totally inimical to the Ethiopian society and the nation.<sup>137</sup> According to informants, their report concluded that the new faith was dangerous for the unity and stability of the nation. Interested members of the Pentecostal group brought up their case to Emperor Haile Sellassie for a just hearing by invoking his often quoted statement, "*ager yegara new hymanot yegel new*," (the nation is for all while religion is a private matter) and the religious freedom that the constitution guarantees.<sup>138</sup> The group who went to the palace representing the Pentecostals used the occasion to explain to the Emperor that they had been charged for no other reason except preaching the Gospel to the Ethiopians, upon which the Emperor retorted why don't you do it in the Orthodox Church? Their appeal for justice before the Emperor failed basically because of the investigating team's negative report.<sup>139</sup> Their persecution even got worse as their chapels became targets of harassment by mobs and police raids.<sup>140</sup> Though religious freedom was enshrined in the national constitution, it appeared that it was generally understood to mean freedom to choose whatever one chooses to believe but not freedom to propagate, nor to seek to change another's belief. Through their witnessing and proselytizing efforts of largely Ethiopian Orthodox Christians, the Pentecostals propagated their faith thus, subverting the latter dictum. This issue of propagation, or witnessing as described above, was one of the most fundamental reasons accounting for the persecution.<sup>141</sup>

In November 9, 1971 a letter released from the Chief of Public Security of the Ministry of Interior signed under Colonel Solomon Kedir, accused Pentecostals of engaging in anti-social and immoral activities, such as promiscuous sexual engagements and the duping of young men and women to make them believe in miracles through concocted stories of miraculous healing. The letter sent out to all government officials, military officers, parishes of the Orthodox churches and school directors throughout the empire alleged that the Pentecostal movement was not only illegal but dangerous to the unity of the nation and had to be suppressed by all means.<sup>142</sup> This memorandum set the tone for the ensuing persecution that swept through the country. As of April 1972, there were early signs of the government making up its mind to crack down on the Pentecostal movement with the beginning of sporadic arrests. On April 26, 1972 many church elders, pastors and evangelists gathered at the Emperor's court. The Emperor gave an audience to 15 of them and allowed them to present their pleas. After listening to their impassioned speech as well as the response of the Minister of Justice, the Emperor advised the Pentecostals to work out their problems with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.<sup>143</sup> It seems that the Emperor's heart was divided between sympathy to the young Pentecostals and loyalty to the established church. But in so doing, he forfeited the respect of the Pentecostals and lost his credibility as a champion of freedom of religion, which was often associated with the statement, the nation is for all religion is private.

Some of the leaders of the Pentecostal movement made attempts to dialogue with the leaders of the Church including the Patriarch but in vein. Philipos Kemere, one of the leaders of the Mulu Wengel church, recalls that he met the head of the national



church through the kind effort of Abiye Abebe (later general), but the contact ended with disappointment. The Patriarch wanted them to abandon their faith by making the disparaging remark, “why do you seek to open a kiosk (a small shop) when there is already a large mall?”<sup>144</sup>

In late August 1972, the police force began to arrest members of the Pentecostal movement in Addis Ababa and elsewhere imprisoning them under the allegation of conducting illegal meeting, (*beheg yaltefekede sebseba.*)<sup>145</sup> The government accused followers of the Pentecostal movement of all kinds of evil, but never tried them in court, or proved their charge of gross immorality. Estimates of arrests vary from source to source ranging anywhere between 165 to 480. The figure, 300, is the estimate that most informants cite.<sup>146</sup> Though the charges were not clear, some plead guilty to conducting illegal meetings, and were fined as much as 200 Ethiopian dollars. Most Pentecostals were not willing to admit doing anything wrong and hence accepted going to jail, insisting that they had not committed any crime, “unless of course you call it a sin to persuade Ethiopians that there is an alternative to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.”<sup>147</sup> One main reason why the Pentecostals became such an easy prey was their isolated position and the lack of backing from any domestic institution or foreign related missionary organizations.<sup>148</sup>

The government seems to have been concerned with the potential danger of the confrontation and the violence and instability that could possibly ensue from the clashes between followers of the new faith and adherents of the National Church. Informants vividly remember how in August 1972, the police raided their worship places on a single Sunday and took hundreds of their fellow believers to prison.<sup>149</sup>

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According to an incident reported in *Life of Faith*, "Police came to a Pentecostal house, stopped their singing and Bible studies, rounded them and took them to the police station."<sup>150</sup> The tortures, the shaving of hair, the bail imposed are some of the stories of suffering the Pentecostals recount today.<sup>151</sup>

The collaboration of the state and church to suppress and crackdown on the Pentecostal movement is an intriguing phenomenon that raises a fundamental question, namely, what kind of a threat did the Pentecostal movement represent, not only for the religious establishment but also for the political system that sustained it? Some government officials sensed that the rebuff the Pentecostal gave their religious tradition was also symptomatic of rejection of the political order, which drew a strong support from the established Church.<sup>152</sup> The speed with which the Pentecostal movement was spreading and the fact that it appealed mostly to the emerging elite, from which it drew the majority of its members, the climate of uncertainties, and its strange character contributed to a generalized fear and mistrust by the government and the national church alike.<sup>153</sup> The collaboration of the state and the clergy in suppressing the Pentecostal movement clearly shows the rhetorical nature *agar yagara new haymanot yegel new* and the blending of interest of the two institutions. Even if one put the best effort to ensure that the principle this statement invokes worked and the religious freedoms that the constitution guarantees were respected, there would still be a problem. This was mainly due to the fact that most of the governing elite, at the echelon level and at the local provincial plane, were members of the National Church who viewed any alternative form of Christianity as essentially foreign and by default heretical (*Menafiq*), or simply un-orthodox. As Bedru pointed out, such embedded

mentality caused constant problems in handling or mishandling of cases involving evangelical Christians who faced charges, fines and imprisonment just for their faith alone.<sup>154</sup> There were cases where people had in the past been brought to court allegedly following cults or harmful religions and received verdicts by local judges in the provinces. The verdicts, however, were reversed by court decisions at a higher level because of persistent appeals made by the victims or by those representing them, and fair hearings from enlightened judges who used their discreet scruples rather than their sentiments.<sup>155</sup>

Reduced to its essence, the conflict between the Pentecostals and the Orthodox Church mainly resulted more from a clash of tradition and certain religious practices than doctrines. In the past, there were minor tensions between the Orthodox Church and some evangelical groups, mainly in the southern parts of Ethiopia in areas like Sidamo and Gamu Gofa. The encounter between the Pentecostals and the national church took place on a considerably greater scale taking into account the speed with which Pentecostalism assumed such a national visibility and the intensity of the involvement of the state to crack down the movement. In the context of Ethiopia, the Pentecostal faith introduced in a short time an alternative version of Christian identity with new ways of exercising it, which stood at variance with the one that had existed for centuries. Thus, it presented a threat to the distinctive identity of the Orthodox Church, an institution that had in the past enjoyed privileged position in determining the process of defining national identity. The dominant postulation of the Orthodox Church was that being an Ethiopian assumes embracing the Orthodox Christian faith and its socio-cultural legacies. By shifting away from the main center and pursuing an independent line, the

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Pentecostals, in a way, deviated from the mainline definition of being an Ethiopian. This was the sub-text, in fact, the core point of the tension between the Orthodox Church and the Pentecostal movement. Informants point out that opposition to the Pentecostals from the Orthodox Church sometimes came in an organized fashion through the Patriarch and his immediate associates, who used their clouts to put pressure on government officials to suppress the movement. The clergy employed the media to condemn the movement by identifying it as a false religion. It also came from local priests and lay associations who liked to maintain the doctrinal purity of the church and defended it against any form of intrusions that would undermine the “true apostolic faith.” But it mostly came from the ordinary rank and file Orthodox Christians who viewed Pentecostalism as something eerie and anti-social and local functionaries of the state who largely followed the national religion.<sup>156</sup>

It has to be pointed out that the position of the Orthodox Church towards the Pentecostals was consistent with its past tradition of handling what it considered to be a sectarian movement. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church dealt with any form of Christianity outside its confessional creed severely. This is true whether they were internally induced like the Estifanites movement of the 15<sup>th</sup> century or injected by external agents like the Jesuits of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The issue is not religion, per se, it has a great deal to do with that of national identity, and for that matter, an identity that apparently seems to have been misconstrued as immutable and fixed. Any innovation or reform attempt that falls outside the doctrine of the Orthodox Church is considered a transgression or sin, and is, therefore, condemned (*Weguz*). In assessing this situation of the Church, Messay Kebede, writes “To tell the truth, the religion itself was not a mere

belief; it was also an identity-and as such subject to the law of permanence and inalterability.”<sup>157</sup> The young Ethiopian Pentecostals living in an age of relative freedom and with the power of their education and association, succeeded what previous dissenters had failed to create an independent indigenous movement with wide followings. According to Philipos, it was this indigeniety, its being such a contagious national strain, above and every thing else, that was found to be threatening to the national church and hence gave occasion for its thinking that the movement had to be nipped in the bud.<sup>158</sup> Another prominent leader of the national church bluntly told the Pentecostals that they were not afraid of western missionaries, be it the Baptists or the Lutherans or otherwise, but were terribly troubled by the Ethiopian Pentecostals.<sup>159</sup>

By and large, evangelical Christianity had in the past been a southern phenomenon and was viewed as the religion of the peripheral people. The Pentecostal movement introduced a new shift as their presence was felt in the central and northern regions of Ethiopia. In the early phase of the Pentecostal movement, the young Pentecostals targeted their Orthodox peers and broke in areas, which had been closed to western missionaries. In so doing they posed challenges to the national church in ways which missionaries had not done before. This was a challenge, which the national church faced from an unexpected and unlikely quarter. At its initial, stage members of the clergy as well as some local officials saw the Pentecostal movement as a mere sect that young kids “*lijoch*” followed out of sheer ignorance and passion or inducement. According to Philipos, members of the clergy with whom they attempted to dialogue used phrases such as *tekeshā yamymolu*, those whose shoulders had not been broad enough to describe their youthful status.<sup>160</sup> As it grew and became more robust, there

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did not seem to be a change of perception about the movement on the part of the state or the clergy. Bedru Hussien, a prominent leader of the Meserete Kirstos church, aptly remarked, “ Instead of examining the nature of the movement and make serious efforts to understand it by making inquiries about why the youth was turning its attention to Pentecostalism, the solution offered was one of confrontation, that is, declare an all out attack to curb the movement.”<sup>161</sup>

Messay in his recent book dealing with modernization makes a scathing remark that supports Bedru’s view. Messay summarizes the problem as follows:

Being so religious, the Ethiopian should have been keenly interested in new religious ideas if for no other reason than to fight them. Also periods of purification, reform and renewal or religious commitments, would have been quite normal. Astonishing as it may sound, however, despite the long duration of the faith and despite the constant challenge by Jesuits, Protestants, and Muslims, Ethiopia has never known a period of religious purification and reform. Characteristically, the western religious challenge was handled not by means of reform and theological development, but by prohibition and expulsion....The response was not but still further isolation.<sup>162</sup>

Messay, in fact even goes further and charges the Church and members of the clergy for failing to foster a “hermeneutic attitude” that would have helped to understand and interpret modern ideas in their own terms to receive fresh stimulus from them instead it lamentably opted for outright rejections. Messay makes the stern judgment “that more than the reluctance of the imperial throne, it was the paralysis of the church, caused by a clash of tradition with modernity that was responsible for Ethiopia’s failure to modernize.”<sup>163</sup> Messay charges the church, in block, as an institution without helping the reader have a sense of appreciation as to the inherent problem of the church. His analysis is very pertinent, given the profound influence the

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Orthodox Church exercised on the minds and soul of a large section of the Ethiopians, especially the ruling elite. In the final analysis, he makes the argument that the national church became a fetter for change and innovation, which, I believe, could have helped the youth to develop a gradual approach and pursue a more patient, more creative, more constructive and a healthier vision of change and reform, rather than choose the road of violence fed by a non-religious secular philosophy of Marxism.

In fact, according to Dr. Tilahun Mamo, more than the failure of the Orthodox Church to adopt itself to change, the rise of Marxism and its growing influence constituted a very important background for the ascent of Pentecostalism in Ethiopia. His argument is that, unable to challenge the new atheist philosophy that was slowly creeping into the youth without a strong spiritual foundation, they clung to a more assertive, more definitive and more radical faith that could be defended on a more rational basis through experiences and the Word of God as written in the Bible.<sup>164</sup>

It is difficult to establish the link between the rise of Marxism and the beginning of Pentecostalism in Ethiopia. Most participants of the Pentecostal movement were aware of Marxism and its growing danger to their faith and the future of their country, but did not necessarily see their movement as an intentional reactive step to challenge it. Afework Kebede, a former Marxist, now leader of a church in the US, puts an interesting spin on the connection. He argues that the rise of the Pentecostal movement, in fact, was a factor that gave further cause for the hardening of position of the small Marxist groups and their increasing influence among the youth, at least, in the university. According to Afework, the embracing of the Pentecostal faith by the Ethiopian youth, its aggressive expansion and the apolitical tendency that the followers

exhibited, gave the student radicals occasion to rally against followers of the new movement. They even enlisted the support of the *Haymanote Abew*, a reformist group from the Orthodox Church hostile to the Pentecostals, to rally behind them in order to outflank the Pentecostals and curb their expansion.<sup>165</sup> Tilahun's view and that of Afework's may look contradictory, but the significance of their insights lies in what they reveal concerning the linkage between the two radical youth movements, in spite of their significant differences in perspective and goals, how they influenced one another, and existed in tension at the same time, living more or less in the same space.

In a way, the Pentecostal radical departure from the past and their aloofness, which to a degree, removed them from the long-held cultural moorings, contributed to the tension and hostility between the two Christian groups. Endale Mekonen, notes that arising out of their eagerness to break new spiritual grounds and their strong stress in evangelizing "a lost world," which they carried out with a sense of urgency, they were not able to articulate a contextualized theology and forms of worship that took stock of the rich heritage of the historic church.<sup>166</sup>

The persecution experience added a new dimension to the process of identity formation at this initial stage of the rise of the Pentecostal movement in Ethiopia. It strengthened the perception of the Pentecostals that they were holy and separate community called out of the world by God to witness to others to proclaim the Gospel and demonstrate its power. The claim of transformation following conversion, their shared sentiment as recipients of God's salvation, their experience of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, and more significantly, speaking in tongues, gave Pentecostals core elements on which they crafted their religious identity.<sup>167</sup> On top of this, their grand

vision of evangelizing Ethiopia and the commitment they paid to its realization also added to their collective experience and self-perception as messianic communities in their generation.<sup>168</sup> In general, persecution experience appears to create the condition for the persecuted to feel a sense of separateness and isolation that adds potency to interiorize existing self-perception, viz.-a -viz. with others. The opposition they faced from the public and the Church strengthened their determination to study the Bible more diligently and to prove by an experiential faith that the Bible was not a “dead book of the ancient but a living word of God.”<sup>169</sup> Informants strongly stress that it was the persecution experience that significantly shaped their identities as Pentecostal Christians. They point out that it instilled in them a strong bond and a collective destiny expressed in common Biblical vocabularies, persistent prayers, strict moral codes, songs, and persecution narratives linking them up with persecuted Christians in history as well as in the Bible.<sup>170</sup> This dynamics is well in accord with studies of social movements, which interrogate established order and where conflict becomes one of the mainstays for the successful spread of the movement.<sup>171</sup>

The condition of persecution helped the Pentecostals establish parameters around which they built their own codes and norms in order to carve out a separate social and spiritual spheres to allow them to be seen as distinct religious communities.<sup>172</sup> The Ethiopian Pentecostals developed a new style of exchange of greetings that expressed itself by throwing the arms around each other’s back as a mark of affection and solidarity. They developed new behavioral norms which stressed markers of holiness such as austerity, strict morality, especially regarding sexuality, *refrain* from the use of alcohol and excessive reserve from what they perceived as

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“indecent” languages, to set them apart from what they perceived was a “lost world.” At the cultural front, they also introduced new wedding styles that avoided the use of alcohol, traditional wedding songs and traditional pomp that accompanied wedding ceremonies. They adopted funeral ceremonies accompanied with songs, antithetical to the dominant practice of wailing, interspersed with preaching, at funeral sites and residences that emphasized the message of salvation. The Pentecostal totally abandoned all commemorative feasts (*tezkar*) conducted in the name of the deceased for they found them to have no biblical basis. This was an issue that re-enforced the image among the Orthodox public that the Pentecostals were aliens and was a subject that led to considerable tension between the two faith communities.

The Pentecostals also looked for promises that their sufferings were temporary and that God would intervene directly to save their situation. Scriptural materials such as the book of Revelation, which gives a graphic description of the world ruled by monstrous evil forces and their imminent doom, also shaped their perspective of the world. This view considers persecution as a normal and expected element of a Christian life that should give more cause not for weakness but strength.<sup>173</sup> The persecution experience made Pentecostals more committed to putting their faith into practice and exert more energy towards its expansion by paying the necessary sacrifice it might demand. Such movements often perceive more opposition to their cause than seems to exist objectively. In the opinion of most Pentecostals, opposition gives value to struggle and inculcates self-confidence militated by a sense of chosen-ness, which increases the willingness to risk lives for the service of one’s faith, be it imprisonment or *martyrdom*.<sup>174</sup> In the view of many Pentecostals, commitment deepens fervency as well

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as ignites ones ability to stretch out in order to enlarge the surface area of the faith embraced. Suffering which became a recurrent phenomenon for the Ethiopian Pentecostals, also formed a staple diet of their identity which they expressed in their songs and in their lay oral theology.<sup>175</sup>

Survival and even growth in the midst of persecution, has been and still is, a proud tradition and a constant refrain in the narrative of the Ethiopian Pentecostals. In short, one can say that the persecution experience, apart from serving as a defining moment, lent the Ethiopian Pentecostal an idiom of struggle. The relative isolation they suffered from media hostility and ostracization from the largely Orthodox public, including friends and relatives, reinforced their sense of identity and mission in life. It should be noted that it was the public that gave them the name “*Pente*,” as a way of “othering,” which has stuck to this day, at a time when the movement was in the making and had not adopted a definite name of its own.

The persecution that started in August 1972 with the closure of the church captured the attention of the international news media and provoked an outcry among international religious groups and human right activists. It even attracted the attention of *Newsweek* magazine, which covered the incident in its religious column.<sup>176</sup> Official newspapers, such as *Addis Zemen* and *Ethiopian Herald*, also reported about the arrest and gave explanations to justify the government’s position. In fact, the *Ethiopian Herald* contained an article titled, “Newsweek’s Report on Pentecostalists Unfounded,” in response to the comments made by *Newsweek* and other foreign magazines, by dismissing any link between the suppression of the movement and religious freedom.<sup>177</sup> The view of the official newspaper was that, apart from being illegal, the Pentecostal

movement was a sect that promoted anti-social practices contrary to the Ethiopian culture such as engagements in sexual misconduct and hooligan behavior inimical to the long established Ethiopian custom.<sup>178</sup> The newspaper justified government position in arresting the Pentecostals by stating that it was in the interest of the public to reprove those whose “malpractices” brought demoralizing effect upon the youth. The paper, in what it refers as “rubrics of the Pentecostal faith,” identified: the mixing of young girls and boys in night prayer meetings and their indulgence “in certain detrimental acts,” and “blasphemous teaching that encouraged lustful desires” as dangerous traits of the new movement. The article was extremely critical of Pentecostalism for its “teachings create a disruptive gap in the social life of the people by denouncing mutual respect, teaching the young not to obey their superiors and elders and to disregard patriotism, emphasizing in particular to despise the teaching of the Orthodox Church.” The paper concluded that the state rightly intervened to arrest “this foreign virus coming from an illegal association that flouts the laws of the land and teaches dissention among its people.”<sup>179</sup>

Leaders of the Pentecostal movement recount that though the Pentecostals attempted to conduct their services in selected houses in order to continue to survive as distinct Christian groups, the intrusive nature of the police made it difficult for them to continue doing so.<sup>180</sup> As a result, while some chose to go underground to maintain their identity, most opted to join other denominations. Prior to the persecution experience, by and large, the evangelical churches, if not openly hostile, had evinced a suspicious attitude towards the Pentecostals. During and after the persecution, however, most gave them shelters to express solidarity with the fellow Christians who had been unjustly

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treated by the state in spite of their doctrinal differences. While some churches embraced them with minor reservations, most evangelical churches welcomed them as guests who had to harmonize themselves to the doctrines and practices of their host churches.<sup>181</sup>

The persecution experience, which led to the dispersal of the young Pentecostals into the various denominations of the evangelical churches, was one of the first major events that opened the way for the wave of the Pentecostal movement to spread in what could be considered mainline evangelical churches. This was particularly true of the Meserete Krestos church of the Mennonite background. It was to this church that a famous wing of the choir of the Pentecostal group, known as "*Zion*," had moved as a result of the 1972 persecution that caused their dispersal. The impact of this group upon the entire Meserete Krestos church was enormous. Directly or indirectly, it became a significant force for the creation of a musical choir group that produced a number of nationally acknowledged singers such as Derege Kebede. Its greatest impact, however, was in turning the church into a charismatic institution through the leadership of Pastor Daniel, who was a member of the *Zion* group.<sup>182</sup>

The next major event that accentuated the spread of Pentecostalism in other evangelical churches was the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution itself. During the Revolution, the Pentecostal groups played an influential role in the underground church, drawing on their past experience and their presence in almost all denominations due to the preceding persecutions. Brian Fargher rightly asks, "What would have happened to the church of Ethiopia during the seven tough years of the revolution (1974-1980) if the renewal movement had not already effected many beneficial changes by that time?"<sup>183</sup>

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Not only the persecution experience, the fact that participants of the Pentecostal movement were largely men with a higher level of education and the fact that they had already had active involvement in various inter-denominational Christian fellowships, helped them to network easily and play a key role in enabling the evangelical churches to adjust and withstand the challenges they faced during the revolution.<sup>184</sup>

During and after the revolution the Pentecostal movement entered into a new level. From being an elite oriented, virtually homogenous unit, it transformed itself into a mass movement, embracing new members from rural farming communities, the working class, a growing number of businessmen, professionals and scholars.<sup>185</sup> Conditions contributing to his metamorphosis according to informants relate to the socio-political developments that have transpired during the period of the Ethiopian revolution (1974-1991) and the decade that followed it. The political upheavals that Ethiopia faced over the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the dramatic transitions the society passed through and the accompanying traumas the Ethiopian society experienced, not only had a disorienting impact but increased people's level of insecurity. Though Ethiopians had recourse to diverse outlets to circumvent these unsettling experiences, some found in Pentecostalism a place to feel at home.<sup>186</sup>

A varied section of the Ethiopian society was attracted to the movement because of Pentecostalism's different appeals. To some section of the elite terribly disappointed by the failure of the Marxist experience, Pentecostalism offered a sense of purpose for their lives. For the Ethiopian women, who had virtually no space for participation in the traditional religions, it opened them new vistas for exercising their freedom as well as their talents. For the youth, the Pentecostal movement offered them a relatively free

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autonomous space to channel their creative energy by their active participation in a variety of youth-led activities especially in the production of gospel songs. The poor tended to embrace Pentecostalism in an increasing scale for the Pentecostal faith extended comfort, hope and festive conviviality in the midst of despair and gloom.<sup>187</sup> Powerful preaching that emphatically stress that faith removes mountains of obstacles and enables people to gain victory over the daily battles of life provided the poor some form of redemptive uplift. As some studies in Latin America indicate messages translated in existential contexts had the effects of producing psychological empowerment that at times kindle the motivation to engage poverty and perform better in the practical demands of daily life.<sup>188</sup>

An increasing number of the poor in Third World countries have become leery of ideologies and political movements for their redemption and as a result have tended to place their hope in power beyond themselves.<sup>189</sup> The participatory and enthusiastic nature of the worship style of the Pentecostals provided for the poor not only a place in the midst of marginality, but lent a sense of wild liberation from the miseries of daily life. Peter Berger says, “ It is in worship that the prototypical gesture of religion is fulfilled again. This is the gesture in which mankind, in hope, lifts up its arms to reach transcendence.”<sup>190</sup> Pentecostals teach that their faith is also the here and the now, that God intervenes in human situations in multiple forms and is able to change the circumstance surrounding people’ life. This view, according to Pentecostals, expands the doctrine of redemption to incorporate the social arena and the daily existential dimension of life. According to long time participants and long time observers of the Pentecostal movement, this newer dimensions of the Pentecostal movement in Ethiopia



is making a growing appeal to the poor and distressed Ethiopians and turning the movement from an elite based movement, characteristic of its beginnings, into a mass oriented one.<sup>191</sup>

### ***Situating the Pentecostal Movement***

A fundamental question that needs to be addressed concerning the Pentecostal movement in Ethiopia is: Where do we situate the Pentecostal movement in Ethiopian history and in the larger socio-political contexts of the country?

Locating the rise of the Pentecostal movement in Ethiopia, requires careful analysis of its contexts in the 60's, one of the most exceptionally open times in our history. The 60's was the time when the Ethiopian society experienced momentous transformation due to the increased pace of the process of modernizing, largely commencing in the immediate postwar period. Haile Sellassie's modernization envisaged raising Ethiopia's reputation as a present day nation among the West through the promotion of technological and economic progress. It seems that in the Emperor's imagining of modernization, what featured prominently high was Ethiopia's advancement along the western lines. In his book, *My Life and Ethiopia's Progress*, the Emperor indicates that his desire was to gradually improve the nation by initiating changes modeled along western ways of civilization so "that the people may attain a higher level."<sup>192</sup> According to Harold Marcus, as early as during his regency, the Emperor "believed that Ethiopia could learn much from western lore and life, which fascinated him."<sup>193</sup> Perhaps, his exile experience during the Italian interlude and the need to suppress the conservative forces by creating a countervailing force might have

been significant factors influencing the Emperor's decision to adopt the ideas of modernization. In the context of the Ethiopian situation, modernization went hand in hand with the process of westernization, which in actual fact meant embracing the western paradigm of growth and the style of life that its espousal imposed without critical consideration as to the modalities under which it would acquire indigenous articulations.

Thus, from the very start the vision and inspiration as well as the manner of its adoption demonstrated a high dose of externality as was evidenced in the leaving out of even a giant institution like that of the Orthodox Church from the process.<sup>194</sup> This is not withstanding the fact that for centuries the institution of the church had been the main repository and agent of transmission of education. As a result, the Church, which in the past had created a culture of consensus by its long history, national influence and its privileged position, lost control and influence over the "mind and soul" of the youth.<sup>195</sup> Randi Balsvik points out that as of the late 60's radical university students were lodging scathing criticism of the role of the national church by asserting that it contributed to the under-development of Ethiopia and hence was no longer a useful institution.<sup>196</sup> She further explains, "Student criticism of the church was profound, whether it came from the minority that supported it, students of the College of Theology and the Haimanote Abew Association ...or from the majority who were estranged from the church."<sup>197</sup> Sandra Rickard who made a survey of student attitudes in 1966, also observes that students are finding the Church not only irrelevant to their generation, but a political block to progress."<sup>198</sup> This was the time when radical university students began to officially pronounce the view that religion was the opiate of the people, a cliché that

became increasingly prevalent among many activists. This was a radical leap considering the fact that religious faith permeated vital aspects of social life and provided ultimate guidelines for behavioral norms for the most part of the elite of the 50's.

Emperor Haile Sellassie's modernizing program was an enterprise that issued from his personal aspiration and perceptions of the goal of his nation. The project, therefore, was more of a self-directed exercise that was run with minimal participation from the public. It was a top-down phenomenon emanating from what, Rickard described as, "Big man Complex."<sup>199</sup> Indrias provides a succinct summary of this when he stated, "The many introductions to Ethiopia, the various 'firsts', such as Ethiopian Airlines, a university, modern schools, theater, stadium, and television all occurred under the imperial brand. All was bestowed upon the people through his personal command and beneficence."<sup>200</sup>

Several scholars who have studied the history of modern Ethiopia share the perspective that the Emperor's modernizing efforts emanated from his pragmatic aim to build a new society and an enhanced image of himself as its chief architect and guardian. Robert Hess, for instance, clearly states that, "the major impetus for change has come from the Emperor."<sup>201</sup> V. H. Norberg and Bahru Zewde albeit differently, have also expressed that the Emperor was the mainstay of the ideas of modernization and its chief translator.<sup>202</sup> Haile Sellassie used all opportunities that presented to him in pursuit of what he viewed as his national goal. His interest and the liberal attitude towards western Protestant missionaries was also a function of his modernization scheme. His own modernist goal, according to Donald Donham was, "wring as many

hospitals and schools as possible from the missionaries” and employ their expatriates as vehicles for the expansion of modern services and conduits of modernity.<sup>203</sup> Norberg also points out that in the missionaries, Haile Sellassie found suitable instruments to overcome the shortage of education to create an educated elite and medical staff and facilities to improve the conditions of health in Ethiopia.<sup>204</sup>

John Markakis claims that the Emperor facilitated the course of modernization with the view of strengthening royal power and to claim credit for all the beneficial aspects of the process, and hence, it lacked clear Ethiopian, or to be more specific, larger developmental purposes.<sup>205</sup> Harold Marcus rightly points out that modernization was a contradiction to the experience of most Ethiopians because of the mismatch of what underpins modernization as advancement in the scale of modern institutions, communications, urbanization and a progressive mentality that normally attend the process, and the actual socio-economic and cultural realities of Ethiopia. Glaring disparities existed in the distribution of urban amenities, levels of urbanization and infrastructural developments in the rural and urban areas of Ethiopia in the 1960's, which saw a considerable increase in the growth rate of the urban sector.<sup>206</sup> McClellan also shares the opinion that modernization is more of a super-structural development, as he argues that it was largely a process that impacted the state and not the society at large.<sup>207</sup> Messay Kebede considers the whole modernization process as a phenomenon deriving from the Emperor's intention to consolidate his autocratic rule and scathingly adds that it “has no salvational purpose.” According to Messay, modernization for Haile Sellassie was, “nothing else but the use of modern means to assert his complete power over the nobility.” Therefore, in his judgment, the Emperor used modern means to

achieve a non- modern goal, the consolidation of imperial power, which his predecessors had followed with no less vigor.<sup>208</sup> Messay, being a philosopher, and not a historian, does not provide us enough evidence to validate his assertion, but his unraveling of the inherent contradictions of the modernization policy of Haile Sellassie is in general cogent and consistent with other scholars.

My intention in raising the issue of modernization is not to initiate a new debate but to show the various perspectives and place my study of the Pentecostal movement into its socio-political context. Whatever the contradictions inherent within the modernization process and modernizing efforts of the Emperor, there has been a gradual transformation of the Ethiopian society whose ramifications found expressions in multiple levels across several channels. The process which involved elements of industrialization, urbanization, expansion of state initiated institutions (administrative or educational), improvements in the area of transport and communications, entailed consequences, intended or unintended. They created the condition for socio-economic differentiation, the emergence of new social forces such as the modern intelligentsia and the working class, the unfolding of new ethos and sensibilities, a new way of association and a new way of viewing and patterning ones life. The unfolding of such major historical processes subsumed under the term, modernization, in a society typically characterized as conservative and traditional created historical disjunction and tremendous social stress. Moreover, the convergence of several developments and happenings in a relatively short period of time affected mainly the new social force that the process had engendered. It was this force that sensed the challenge and responded to it re-actively or proactively, depending on its own perception of the challenge, its

constituency and accounts of resources (cultural, spiritual, intellectual, etc), and its overall milieu. Social movements of the 60's and the early 70's, be they political or religious, derive their inspirations from this general historical frame.

One of the principal venues of promoting progress, according to Haile Sellassie's perception, was education. He had an almost religious belief in the modernizing effect of western education on the nation's youth.<sup>209</sup> Most scholars observe that his desire to expand education stemmed from the need to develop modern leadership, an elite force from which staff for modern administration is recruited. In so doing, the Emperor sought to significantly reduce his reliance on the older nobility.<sup>210</sup> The Emperor introduced a free, but not necessarily obligatory school system beginning from elementary school up to the university level. Among the some of the many proclamations that the Emperor made following his return from exile in 1941 was the call to the Ethiopian parents that stated, *weldo yalastemare indegedele yikoterai*, or, roughly translated, "parents who do not educate their children are effectively killing them."<sup>211</sup> While the Ethiopian nationals and Indians served as teachers at the local elementary levels, secondary and college levels had European and American staffs.

Higher education began with the founding of the University College of Addis Ababa (UCAA) in 1950 consisting of the Faculties of Arts and Science. By 1952 the Engineering College had been opened, and the Public Health College and the Training Center opened in Gonder in 1954. The College of Agricultural and Mechanical Arts was founded in 1952. In the late 50's the 60's, other important training centers and colleges were established in Jimma, Ambo, Harar. The Haile Sellassie I University, amalgamating the Gonder Public College and the Alemaya College of Agricultural was

formally instituted in 1961. Though the Emperor recruited its administrative and teaching staff for UCAA mainly from the Canadian Jesuits and the Sudan Interior Mission, the college was a secular institution, modeled on foreign ideas and staffed by expatriates who offered instructions primarily in English.<sup>212</sup> The university system was largely a foreign transplant in its general set up and its content and remained so for a long time. The institutions of higher education did not evolve from a domestic base and internal dynamics. They were something imposed too quickly without a substantial forethought and deliberation as the broader national goals and the framing of the curricula.<sup>213</sup> The Emperor's educational policy lacked in its package a balancing mechanism, and a guiding national philosophy to mitigate the negative tendencies of the new social forces it gave birth to.<sup>214</sup> The vision it featured is uni-dimensional, in that, it aimed at producing domestic elite modeled on the West through staged training bereft of an appropriate mechanism to sufficiently ground "the end product" in indigenous resources and values.<sup>215</sup> Hence, the critical comment of Daniel Lema that the Ethiopian educational system has not focused on the most serious business of educating the man as it did not embody the requisite frameworks that would have allayed its fragmenting and de-linking influences upon the Ethiopian youth that went through it.<sup>216</sup> This is also something that Rickard's study of the conditions of the college students, and the youth in general, in 1966, spells out. Rickard describes the youth as virtually lonely, uneasily straddling between his traditional identity and the new one in the making.<sup>217</sup>

Haile Sellassie saw education as the chief venue and indispensable component of his modernizing ideals. The Emperor's plan did not take into consideration the full

implications of the educational program, the felt needs of the people, the impact of education on the younger generation and the cultural gap and rupture it would create between the old and the new, and the readiness of the society to accommodate such a change.<sup>218</sup> In fact, according to Teshome Wagaw, a noted scholar on the field of higher education in Ethiopia, it is this fissure and discontinuity that lay at the intellectual root of the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution that brought the demise of the old regime.<sup>219</sup>

Most of the young students who got involved in the initial phase of the Pentecostal movement of the 1960's were from higher learning institutes. They included men and women who came from a restricted traditional background in the countryside, albeit with established and elaborate social support systems, seeking to promote their careers through higher education.<sup>220</sup> A sizable number of students who entered the national university in the 60's to pursue higher education were without significant material and immediate emotional backing from their close relatives since they came from remote rural areas.<sup>221</sup> In the process, they were exposed to new ideas, thoughts, ways of life, which in a sense made them feel aloof and unhinged living in that zone of socio-cultural liminality. The concentration of students in same campuses and dormitories with a whole new level of contact, different from their rural contexts and the heterogeneity of the social mix and the adjustment skill it required, the challenges of rigorous academic life, all introduced their own stresses. Besides, the college ambience exposed them to an unprecedented liberty to think, speak and act either individually or corporately. The sense of detachment that removal from their traditional value-matrix constraints allowed them, and the new mental habit of critical inquiry that grew from their new intellectual milieu, gave them a strong impetus to



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navigate new religious expressions. This social and academic environment served as new venues for the process of secondary socialization to take effect upon the young students with great consequences in shaping their new attitudes. It was these conditions that made the young students quest for new articulation of faith that would provide new organizing principles that were more palatable and gratifying to the new temper of the youth.<sup>222</sup> It was this frontier situation, an area of porous boundaries, where the old and the new values encountered each other that set the context and paved the way for the new movements, religious or political, to breed along the fault lines.

To those young people, especially the ones for whom their faith seriously mattered, sudden exposure to secular thinking was a challenge to which they had to give some kind of response. This is a point strongly emphasized by many informants, who now enjoy distinguished careers in various universities both at home and abroad, but were students in the period under review.<sup>223</sup> It should also be known that this was also the time when students from missionary backgrounds, were making their debut in higher education, albeit in a small and slowly growing number.<sup>224</sup> The claim they were making that their faith had an informed foundation based on the knowledge of the Bible, and its application to daily life, as distinct from a more formalized conventional approaches, and their personalization of religious faith, all seem to have stirred a sense of uncertainty, a questioning attitude, and some kind of tension that had to be engaged and overcome.<sup>225</sup> Broadly speaking, the expansion of western education, a key feature and principal avenue of Haile Sellassie's modernization policy, and the accompanying process of secularization, created among the emerging Ethiopian elite a sense of dissatisfaction and a climate of cognitive dissonance that impinged on their faith.

Modern education spawned a new set of experience input that lent the Ethiopian youth of the 60's a lens to keenly notice the discrepancy between the new style of life, which tended to be more secular and western and their traditional ways. One major unintended consequence of modern education was the gradual collapse of a dominant worldview and a meta-voice and the coming into existence of competing ideas and voices that questioned mainstream thinking and conventional norms. This created the condition for people not only to conceive, redefine and interpret situations from altered points of views but act according to ideas derived from the changed perceptions. Unable to negotiate the space between "modernity" *zemenainet*, and traditional way of life sometimes misconstrued as "*hualaqernet*," living in the midst of the two worlds presented a monumental paradox, which Daniel describes as a serious disorder in normative behavior.<sup>226</sup> In this process of prolonged "conversation" entailing a sense of confusion, conflicts, negotiations, and ambivalence, the Ethiopian youth responded, proactively or reactively, depending on their assessment of the opportunities and potentials of the danger they sensed and actually faced virtually alone.<sup>227</sup>

This dilemma of the emerging elite expressed itself in several dimensions. For instance, certain students in the National University made decisions to terminate their education and join the ranks of the monks in the monastery of Debre Libanos to place themselves away from the world, which they perceived was pervasively infested with secular thinking. While this group chose a more pacifist, a path of least resistance, there were others who opted for the path of active involvement through voluntary social and religious services. Examples of these groups include students like Negussie Ayele (later Professor) and Daniel Lema (later Professor) who discontinued their university

education and went into the countryside with the intention of serving as conscientizing agents to bring public enlightenment and spiritual revival through Biblical teachings and active service.<sup>228</sup> The college arena provided a perplexing space, for on one hand, it allowed relative autonomy for young students to venture into new ideas, far from the bonds and legitimating norms of rural community life, and on the other, it was a place where one experienced a sense of bewilderment and some kind of psychic despair, placed outside familiar settings.<sup>229</sup>

The expansion of education across the wider regions of the Ethiopian empire, led to the swift displacement of cherished values. If not all, some members of the rising generation, viewed the traditional church as anachronistic with mere ceremonial functions.<sup>230</sup> Unconsciously, many young Ethiopians quickly lost along the way, treasured religious convictions and practices like dropping the *mateb*, a symbolic chord put around the neck, and fasting, important indices of religious loyalty in the context of Christianity in Ethiopia. A study conducted in 1953 indicated that the tradition of going to church and the observance of food taboos was showing signs of decline in urban areas and evidently so amongst the emerging elite.<sup>231</sup> By the 1960's the generation of students of Haile Sellassie I University believed that the values and beliefs held by their older generation served a traditional conservative society and were jettisoning them out of their daily lives.<sup>232</sup> The decline of the towering influence of the Church among university students and most educated people in the 60's is exemplified by the fact that they had turned their backs on the church and discarded the article of faith, which still permeated their society. Some educated Ethiopians were expressing concern that

modern education had created a void, which impoverished the spiritual and moral life of the youth who were feeling a sense of loss of bearing.<sup>233</sup>

As they mounted the educational ladder, students coming from the rural areas with strong religious backgrounds, encountered secular philosophies, the most challenging one being Marxism, which became the new gospel for radical students of the mid-60's, with their open endorsement of atheism. The young students who experienced alienation from their familiar cultural and religious milieus, keenly felt the threat but lacked the proper equipment to provide a systematic response. As early as 1961, Donald Levine captured this ambivalence as follows, "Ethiopia, like all other countries today, is in the throes of a dilemma, or serious dilemmas, that stem from certain conflicts of values."<sup>234</sup>

The alienation of the youth, the tensions engendered by the process of modernization and the attending secularization phenomenon, and the overall rejectionist mood of the youth against their past traditions form the most crucial contextual elements within which to situate the rise of the Pentecostal movement in Ethiopia.<sup>235</sup> This does not presuppose that Pentecostalism is the only response to the stress of modernization. Neither does it assume that the convergence of the above events associated with modernization, perforce, eventuated such a religious movement or similar ones. But, in the context of Ethiopia, the social and intellectual context of modernization nonetheless, provided a sine qua non for the emergence of Pentecostalism.

The other thing that needs to be considered, along side, is the missionary factor whose presence in Ethiopia had been rising since the 1950's, as American missionaries

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from the Baptist, Lutheran, Mennonite and other traditions arrived. Although most of these missionaries had rural-based activities, there were some others who also developed urban ministries. As a result, they had influenced a number of young men and women who either lived in their respective towns, or moved to new locations in pursuit of higher education in major learning centers. Some of the missionary groupings, together with para-church and service rendering organizations, like Youth for Christ, youth hostels, youth centers, and Gideon Bible distributing groups, had been influencing the youth and other sectors of the society through the publication and distribution of Scriptural materials.<sup>236</sup>

The availability of the Bible and the new rising culture of reading was a critical factor in defining the new religious experience. This development impacted particularly the youth, which had been at the forefront of picking up new ideas at an impressionable age. All the students, who participated in the Pentecostal movement admit that the Bible being available to them had been a major source of inspiration. This is, again, a significant element that had to be noted by any serious minded researcher. For most Ethiopian Christians in the past the Bible, as such, had not been the most important material from which they drew inspiration for their faith as well as guide their actions in their daily lives as much as it had been for the Pentecostals. Though this largely arose from the fact that most Ethiopians did not have the benefit of literacy, even the educated ones had not been encouraged to read the Bible when it was readily available to them at least as of the 60's. Other books such "*Dawit*," (the Psalms), and the "*Dersans*," (spiritual teaching gleaned from hagiographies and the gospel), mostly written in *Geez*, were more important to conduct devotional prayers than the Bible.<sup>237</sup>

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Young Ethiopians with Christian background realized that biblical preaching and biblical study had not been promoted in the past and they wanted to stand in the gap.<sup>238</sup>

As attested by many informants, the Pentecostals made the Bible a cornerstone of their lives and self-understanding. The Bible for them represented neither an event nor a document with abstract statements with verses to be memorized verbatim, but a book containing deep spiritual insights replete with existential wisdom.<sup>239</sup> The Bible also gave them a model of the Christian fellowship and the Christian church where the stress is not the building, or the structure, or sacrament, but principles of relationship to God and to one another that emulated the New Testament Church. The Ethiopian Pentecostals avidly read the Bible, the four Gospels, the Epistles of Paul, the Book of Acts, in particular, to inform themselves and ground their Christian faith on solid convictions. Parts of the Bible that have significantly influenced the young Pentecostals were the ones that talked about sin and the sacrificial death of Christ, themes of conversion and rebirth, topics related to the works of the Holy Spirit. Subjects having to do with holiness, suffering, victorious life and the power of prayer were also strong attractions. The young Pentecostals were also practical and success oriented and effectively appropriated messages of the Bible like, “like I can do every thing through him who strengthens me” or “we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” to overcome spiritual problems and other challenges of life.<sup>240</sup> They literally took the instructions of Jesus to his disciples concerning the propagation of the Gospel, as described in the Book of Mathew Chapter twenty eight, verses eighteen to twenty, and centered heir evangelization on that model.

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The Pentecostals popularized the reading of the Bible among a wide section of the Ethiopian population through their constant use and reference of the Book in their preaching and by carrying it around as a badge of their new identity. For the Pentecostals, the Bible always constituted a pivotal element of their faith and a blueprint of their life. They lived it, and prayed with it, read it, memorized it, and sang it.<sup>241</sup> In this respect, the young Pentecostal introduced a theological breakthrough in affirming the centrality of the Bible as a guide book for life and as the sole authoritative reference material for preaching and conducting worship services. As observed by its pioneers, the Pentecostals ushered in a new understanding of what it means to be a Christian to their generations.<sup>242</sup> The influence and impact of reading the Bible and other related materials upon the generation which passionately engaged in rescuing vital truth, as they interpreted their collective quest, and their counterpart's romantic zeal to discover truth from Marxist literature, is an intriguing phenomenon of the times requiring further comparative research.<sup>243</sup>

In laying out the macro- context of the socio-political conditions within which to locate the rise of the Pentecostal movement, we need to also consider the political situation of the country in the 60's. The abortive coup d'état of 1960 carried with it a mixed feeling of anticipation and failure. Modern education had brought new consciousness among the students. It had brought to their attention the modern achievements of the West and challenged their pride as citizens belonging to a country, which had one of the most ancient civilizations. Support for the coup by the students, though largely uninformed, came from the expectation that a new system of government may usher Ethiopia into a new era. Failure brought despair and gloom

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among those who greeted the coup with a sense of anticipation.<sup>244</sup> In the 1960's one can describe the overall mood of the students in higher education swinging between gloom and anticipation, gradually the latter outweighing the former.<sup>245</sup> It is in this fault line that Marxism took grip of an idealist youth, who for sure pressed for changes but pressed the wrong button.

Most of the pioneers of the Pentecostal movement in Ethiopia admit that politics was not within their immediate circle of concern. It was not a favorite topic for most of them.<sup>246</sup> Yet, most of them admit that they were trying to turn the country towards a new era and move along a new direction, albeit on religious terms. As a professor from the Faculty of Science and a former active participant of the movement noted:

We were filled with a new wave of consciousness, purpose and destiny, we were messianic in our new ventures and endeavors, we did not want to let go things we wanted to involve in the country's fate in the way we saw fitting, for us religion was the most fundamental issue on which all others things hinged upon.<sup>247</sup>

The participants of the Pentecostal movement, aware or unaware, were anti-establishment. By moving away from their traditional religion and creating an alternative expression of Christianity outside established Orthodox Church, they challenged the system from another angle, choosing the path of religion unlike their counterparts who opted to revolt against the whole system with the ideology of Marxism.<sup>248</sup> Both groups viewed the National Church, pillar of the old system, as an institution that had not kept in tune with the times and hence left it aside and opted for new routes one in denial, the other in a new venture to re-engage the faith.<sup>249</sup> At the risk of stretching, the Pentecostal movement may be seen as one of the thrusts breaking

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through the traditional patterns of the Ethiopian society and discursive resistance to established order legitimated by religious codes.

### ***Conclusion***

Considering the fact that the overwhelming majority of Pentecostals came from a strong Orthodox background, a fundamental part of the context for the rise of the movement was the country's transition from what it was to what the leaders wanted it to go through on the road to modernization, whatever that entailed. With this also goes the fact that the new movement faced opposition from the historic Orthodox Church because most of the members originated from its womb and presented a serious challenge to it. No one had posed so serious a challenge to the established church, in fact, mainstream socio-cultural order, as the Pentecostals did in recent times. This was, essentially due to the large and increasing exodus of young people from its tradition and the emanation of a new format of religion: loose, vibrant, open, allowing space for creative initiatives, autonomy uncharacteristic of the patriarchal and mono-centric national church, at times having detrimental effect on unity, mainly due to the lack of central structure. The Orthodox Church in its long history had encountered internal and external challenges but not of this scale.

It is tempting to consider the Pentecostal movement in Ethiopia as a revitalization movement, or to be more specific reformation from without, though the reformers bypassed the historic Ethiopian tradition as they looked for a New Testament Apostolic model to reformulate the foundation of their faith. It can also be viewed as old continuities in a new frame, at least as understood by the pioneers. In this context,

the term reformation is not used in its classic, historical and theological contexts. The Pentecostal movement in Ethiopia was a spontaneous stirring of the youth who were yearning for spiritual transformations disappointed by the lack of changes in their former faith base. None of the pioneers emerge from of organized theological communities, such as seminaries. The pioneers of Pentecostalism in Ethiopia did not initiate the movement with view and intent of reforming the Orthodox Church. By choosing to form a non-hierarchical religious association, embracing a belief that affirms the centrality of the Bible, and practicing a form of spirituality that is more experiential than liturgical, they created a new model that stood in sharp contrast to the national church, their earth while spiritual home base. The notion of righteousness, which they popularized by insisting that it comes from God through faith in Jesus Christ, contrasted fundamentally the traditional ideal that was premised on good work.<sup>250</sup> In that sense both their orientations and practices bear strong element of reformation. Pentecostalism in the Ethiopian situation demonstrated a yearning for New Testament model and a call for a radical faith commitment at the personal level holding the individual believer to live a life accountable to his Christian faith both privately and publicly. This is the individualized dimension of the reformation that it introduced in the religious landscape of Ethiopia.

The Pentecostals did not revive the established church, instead by shifting away from the operational understanding of its basic faith practices including its core element, the *Tabot*, symbolizing the tangible presence of God, its stress on saints and the centrality of Mary, they gained an identity otherwise denied them. The Ethiopian Pentecostals insisted that the transforming experience of conversion signaling rebirth is



a fundamental facet of the Christian faith that has been played down or lost in the bureaucracy or ritual of the established church. They also revived and redefined practices such as healing and exorcism, which in the past were solely exercised by priests and diviners and made them available to the ordinary Ethiopian. In this respect, Paul Gifford's comment that Pentecostalism is answering needs not sufficiently addressed by mainline churches has some relevance to the Ethiopian situation.<sup>251</sup>

In the context of Ethiopia, Pentecostalism was not an exogenous religion dumped upon passive recipients, but an intelligible responses to complex socio-cultural and spiritual problems they youth faced. It was a self-initiated spontaneous socio-religious movement accomplished in a situation of considerable isolation. This does not extricate the movement from the influence of external agencies, which to a limited degree existed, at least prior to the emergence of a distinct Pentecostal leadership. There were some Pentecostal missionaries stationed in Addis Ababa and Nazareth and a limited amount of Pentecostal literature was also in circulation in very few towns. In most cases, the Pentecostal movement unfolded in places far from the influence of the Pentecostal missionaries as individuals were searching for a meaningful faith for which Pentecostalism offered a way of articulation. Hence, its embrace emanated from the depth of an internal spiritual consciousness.<sup>252</sup> The students had taken advantage of their connections with Pentecostal missionaries such as using their facilities during revival meetings as well as benefiting from their teachings to inform their theology and pull guiding principles to direct the movement. Yet, as was indicated earlier, the young Ethiopians made sure that the religious innovations they were initiating remained independent and free from any outside influence. They advanced their own visions and

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agenda based on the principle of the three “Selves” (self -propagating, self-governing and self-supporting).<sup>253</sup>

It is noteworthy to stress the fact that the development of Pentecostalism, as most informants insist, should not simply be seen as a product of some impersonal socio-economic and political forces, for that would significantly reduce the agentic factor, the role of the person and the subject, as a decision maker and navigator of alternative routes of actualizing his needs.<sup>254</sup> Pentecostalism in Ethiopia is not a western invasion. It did not develop with a pervasive outside missionary effort nor did it sustain itself by resources gained from external sources.

One needs to introduce a rethinking of assumptions and a change of perspective regarding the Pentecostal movement in Ethiopia. Most Ethiopians view the Pentecostals as followers of an erratic religion. The Pentecostals might have partially contributed to that image by their choice of a life style that removed them from mainline traditions. The movement originated amidst a generation that was seeking changes and at a time when the Ethiopian society was experiencing transitions particularly affecting the youth. Some of these changes also brought about developments that challenged conventional sensibilities that had been handed down from generations to generations (*siwerd siwared*) without being seriously questioned.<sup>255</sup> The faith of most young Ethiopians was tested by the convergence of many factors to which they had to react without the benefit of preparatory experience and properly relayed received wisdom.<sup>256</sup> There were a variety of kickbacks and cultural rebounds expressed along different lines and outlets. Some young Ethiopians tried to accommodate the change by trying to create a niche within the historic church through some reform initiatives, witness the

case of *Haymanote Abew*, while others who perceived that the opportunity was closed to them, reconfigured the space and reconstructed a new zone of reality without intentionally negating the old.<sup>257</sup> In either case, there was something in the air, something was waiting to be born.<sup>258</sup> In fact, even as the name they originally coined *Tintawi Ye Egziabher Bete Krestian* to obtain legal permit from the government, suggests that the Pentecostals were invoking the past along fresh lines.<sup>259</sup> In this connection, the new religious enterprise of the youth was not a calculated rebellion against a long tradition of Christianity. Instead, as most informants strongly contend, it was a re-centering process which proceeded from the depth of yearnings for revival and out of a vehement concern and urge to resituate oneself in the spectrum of history, based on their estimation of the historic church's inability to modify its practices to be relevant to the contemporary social realities of Ethiopia.<sup>260</sup> Hence, though it brought a reformation of the spirit and claimed a new space for the youth to exercise their faith, it should not be seen as a discontinuous movement divorced from its past. It was an appropriation and practical expression of new religious ideas in the veins of pre-existing spiritual values and consciousness, which gained newer emphasis in a reconfigured space. This is a crucial issue, which both the Orthodox Christians and the Pentecostals, fail to see and appreciate. For most Ethiopian Pentecostals, their Orthodox background still retains a strong grip on their cultural subconscious. The Pentecostals desired to engage in deeper spiritual experience beyond mere church attendance and observance of regulations. Hence, the problematic nature of characterizing it as a break-away movement, for primarily it was a self-initiated and self-constituted movement without an agenda of breaking off.

Pioneers of the Pentecostal movement who came from the Orthodox religious tradition did not initially feel that they were initiating a new religious institution or shifting away from their past faith. They rather considered that their religious experiment allowed them to experience a major net increase in their spiritual commitment and gave them expanded opportunities to discover their faith, take new initiatives, participate more actively and pursue it with greater satisfaction. In short, it gave them a more meaningful experiential relationship with God.<sup>261</sup> A closer inspection of the Pentecostal movement in Ethiopia reveals that it represented modern education, social progress and a religion that was de-linked from a state that became a target of attack by the youth, particularly by students of HS I University. This seems to be much more evident after the radical students put out their notorious slogan of “land to the tiller” in 1965. The Pentecostal movement offered a new interpretive paradigm of Christianity that stressed the working of the Holy Spirit (power) and the practice of spiritual gifts (initiatives and actions). The innovation of a newer form of expressions of Christian faith in Ethiopia resonated to some segments of the “enlightened” youth who lived in an age characterized by self –assertion, radicalism, independence and spiritual drainage/anemia.<sup>262</sup> Its leading proponents maintain that their engagement in the Pentecostal movement was a pragmatic religious innovation that inherently carried with it the blessing of new ethos of life imbued with added experience inputs which have both transformative and utilitarian values. The young Ethiopian made conscious choices to embrace Pentecostalism and became the faith’s most zealous evangelists. It is these individual believers, non commissioned agents, firmly set in sharing their faith to their kinsmen, rather than organized institutions that advanced the evangelical cause

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in Ethiopia. In the course of time, it also became a symbol of the new dimension of Christianity that was not linked with foreign missions allowing many Ethiopians who opted for a Christian faith outside the national church to feel at home with their faith because of the indigenous nature of its roots, leadership, hymnology, worship practices and related issues.<sup>263</sup>

Concerning agency, there is no doubt that the Ethiopian Pentecostals were grassroots pioneers of alternative expressions of Christianity, who saw themselves as path finders and the generation destined to be the chief vehicles for the spread of Pentecostalism in Ethiopia. The popular perception that, “*Pente*” is a “*Mete*,” a foreign religion, is a misnomer that needs corrective emphasis. The fact that Pentecostalism lacks a long history compared to the national church does not mean that it cannot be authentically Ethiopian. In fact, considered critically, the Pentecostal movement could also be seen as a more nuanced response both to transplanted mission Christianity and a home-spun Christian faith that has not successfully perfected its tradition across the years. The outward manifestations of the Pentecostal religion may not wholly tally and conform with accepted norms of established religions that tend to view Pentecostalism from the optics of major tradition. Pentecostalism was an authentic expression of deep religious yearnings of young Ethiopians that emerged from the religious values and rich heritage of preexisting Christian tradition, which, however, lacked adequate resource to meet their felt religious needs. Their embrace of the new faith came both out of the depth of an already existing spiritual consciousness and their unmet needs. Some foreign missionaries exercised some influence, especially at the nascent stage of the movement, but never had a major role in shaping the direction and expansion of the

movement. Young Ethiopians were the movers and shakers of the movement. The pioneer leaders, and those who succeeded them, in the leadership of the Pentecostal churches, such as *Mulu Wengel*, *Heywet Berhan*, and *Genet*, maintained a safe distance from foreign missionaries and pursued a self-reliant approach. They were even careful in the choice of names to designate their local churches by avoiding any suggestion that sounded foreign.

The Pentecostals introduced gospel songs, original and genuinely indigenous, that spoke to millions of Ethiopians in their every day situations. They used their capacity to interpret the Bible and translate its message in popular and every day language that was descriptive and personal rather than doctrinal or rationalistic. In the process they also strongly registered the note that one could be a Christian without belonging to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Although this was an idea that some members of the elite had shared long ago, at least in principle, the Pentecostals gave it forceful pronouncement through their religious innovations by charting out a style of life their faith convictions demanded, often at a considerable risk.<sup>264</sup> At the same time the Pentecostals increased the visibility of the evangelical faith by gradually diffusing it across the nation through committed indigenous missionaries, thus extricating the popular imagining of evangelical Christianity from a mere southern phenomenon.<sup>265</sup> Not only that, the renewal movements, which many of the mainline movements are currently experiencing in Ethiopia, a phenomenon that has been described as the charismatic movement, is closely linked to the spread of Pentecostalism.<sup>266</sup>

The Pentecostal movement has now become an umbrella force for a rather unwieldy congeries of denominations referred to as evangelical Christians and for



people of all walks of life regardless of class, age, gender and ethnicity fitting under that rubric name. With the growing influence of Pentecostalism in mainline churches, evangelical Christians have formed a sub-culture by demonstrating certain distinctive in their life style and in the reformulation of aspects of their inherited culture.<sup>267</sup>

The spontaneous nature of its rise, the absence of a strong revivalist tradition on which to tap, the element of unprepared-ness exhibited by the inexperienced youth who pioneered it, baffles the historian's strenuous quest for a satisfactory material explanation. The vast majority of the pioneers of the movement, perhaps, with a handful exceptions, still embrace Pentecostalism. They assert that the religious revivals of the Pentecostal movement expressed itself in many ways across diverse channels and point to the problematic nature of attributing it to a single agency and an elaborate and well-intentioned beginning. In the views of the Pentecostals, who took active part during the formative stages of the movement, it would be unjust and unconvincing to explain its rise and expansion solely on the basis of human initiatives. Without excluding the role of human agency, they insist that ultimately, it was the result of God's sovereign intervention in time and space. Pentecostals assert that the Pentecostal movement of the 60's was not a man made cult of tongues as others would perceive it to be. Rather they contend it was a fresh wind of the Spirit of God only the power of which Jesus spoke to awaken the church to fulfil its apostolic mandate.<sup>268</sup> None of those young men involved in the initial phase of the movement realized that they were pioneers in one of the greatest religious revivals in Ethiopian history. Pointing this out does not necessarily entail endorsing their non -material explanation of its rise and expansion, but is intended to honor their perspective of history.

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It is a daunting task for the student of history to give accounts and validate faith-related human experiences. Issues such as the role of transcendence, the impact of prayers, claims of divine encounter including miracles, which constitute significant aspects of the narrative of the Pentecostals, are difficult to substantiate. Nonetheless, the student of history also has to pay heed to claims of extra-ordinary faith experiences when his subjects report about how those experiences have contributed to a radical reorientation of their lives. This is all the more important in so far as these radical changes shaped their self understanding and the understanding of the world and how perceptions emanating from that impinged on their thoughts, motivations and actions. For them, that element of experience is the single most important constituent that sustained their faith journey and kept the movement robustly alive. That element of certitude arising mainly from what they consider a moment of encounter with God, that moment in time, vividly remembered, to which they make reference in telling their story claims the attention of the researcher who honestly seeks to appreciate, portray and narrate their historical accounts. That is the crucial point around which Pentecostals craft the narratives of their religious identities and package them into vibrant testimonies to win others. In this respect, one need not pay a flippant attention to Engelsviken's remarks, that the main explanation for the religious movement of this magnitude and dynamics, occurring in the most varied cultural, religious, and economic contexts, must be a religious one. "Religion cannot and should not be reduced to its sociological, psychological, or economic dimensions, although these factors certainly may have an impact over the form and growth of religion" <sup>269</sup> What this quote says is that religious experiences are vital expressions of human affairs, hence, they can be

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understood, studied and analyzed in their own terms as well as in relation with other dimensions of human experiences, social, political or economic. Limiting religious phenomena to certain conditions, economic, political, grossly undermine issues of choice, motive and purposive responses. In short, we need to factor in religion as one of the major variable in human affairs.<sup>270</sup> Not only that, it will also mean doing injustice to those who see their historical experience as primarily one of religious and secondarily others. Scholars of the independent churches in Africa who admit the contributions of socio-economic and political factors for their emergence and growth strongly stress that such movements have strong religious motivations and hence should be studied and evaluated in religious terms.<sup>271</sup>

Finally, it should be noted that the Pentecostal movement in Ethiopia did not evolve from a disinherited constituency. It sprang from the emerging elite with a promising future in the context of the time. That was a big plus for the movement, for it drew its strength from these elite avant-garde, gifted with relatively high intellectual tools, which they readily used for expanding the faith. Members of the Pentecostal faith also passionately invested their life, resources, skills and networking capacities to spread the Gospel across the country, a commitment which many believe had been carried out with great sacrifice and faithfulness for love of God. They carried on with this evangelistic zeal and commitment through the period of the revolution. The hardship they had endured and surmounted, the underground network which persecution had forced them to create, the new genre of hymns that reflected the theme of suffering and victory, constituted a rich repertoire of the common heritages of the evangelical Christians facing the tyranny of an oppressive regime. The 1974 Revolution

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and the subjection of evangelical Christians under the harsh treatment of the military rulers created the necessary conditions for all evangelical Christians to go through a collective experience of persecution that facilitated the building of a common identity, bond and, by default, a common front. The Revolution also provided the context for Pentecostalism to be embraced by other evangelical groups because of the Pentecostals' emphasis on the power of the Holy Spirit and their stress on prayer, two vital elements that met the felt needs of many Christians in years of bleak times. It was also in the same period that the Pentecostal movement made a significant shift from a minority elite -youth-centered phenomenon into a mass movement, which increasingly drew into itself a wide variety of social groups from all classes mainly the poor. It must also be stated that it was this indigenous strain that largely gave a sense of independence and a mark of national distinction and an ecumenical touch to the various evangelical Christian groupings which had evolved from different mission backgrounds. Strong denominational ties has been one of the unique characteristic features of the Evangelical churches in Ethiopia.

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<sup>1</sup> For further see, Karla Poewe (ed.), *Charismatic Christianity as a Global Culture* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994); David Martin, *Forbidden Revolution: in Latin American and Catholicism in Eastern Europe* ( London: SPCK, 1996); Corten Marshall-Ftatani (ed.), *Between Babel and Pentecost: Transnational Pentecostalism in Africa and Latin America* ( Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Many informants agree that they do not recall the term *Pente* being used at any time and at any where to any religious group prior to the Debre Zeit incident of 1967. Doctor Tilhaun Adera, one of the Pentecostal students active in Haile Sellassie University in 1966 recalls that university students, opposed to their movement, continued to refer to them as followers of anti-Mary or simply as simpleton idealist believers. Informant: Tilahun Adera

<sup>3</sup> Informants: Dr. Melese Wegu, Debebe Alemu , Dr. Assefa Alemu. According to Tewodros, among those participating in the mob were members of the Haymanote Abew association. For further see, Tewodros Gebreab, " The History of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus in Debre Zeit to 1991," Mekane Yesus Seminary, 2000, p. 33

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<sup>4</sup> “ *Be-Debre Zeit ketema lijochena welagoch tegachu*,” *Addis Zemen*, Vol27, No. 826, September 19, 1967, p. 1. According to the report, the “unknown religion started a year before the incident by three young men and enlisted more than 200 people in the town alone. Their sudden rise and increase in membership coupled with rumors of “vulgar” practices including promiscuous sex under the disguise of night prayers, set the context for the attack. According to *Addis Zemen*, more than 6,000 people were involved in the assault. Informants: Melese, Debebe and Assefa.

<sup>5</sup> It is very hard to come up with a uniform definition of the Pentecostals. W.J. Hollenweger, a noted scholar in the field defined Pentecostals: “all groups who profess at least two religious crisis experience (1. baptism or rebirth; 2 baptism of the Spirit), the second being subsequent and different from the first one, and the second, usually, but not always, being associated with speaking in tongue” W.J. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972), p. xix. Ethiopian Pentecostals are in agreement that the term refers to those Christians who express the power and presence of the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the spirit directed towards effectively witnessing that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior. Most Pentecostals embrace the view that the baptism of the Holy Spirit comes subsequent to conversion. Though there is no unanimity, speaking in tongues is considered to be the chief indication of the infilling of the Spirit and a mark of being a true Christian. In addition to the baptism of the Holy Spirit, Pentecostals believe that nine Biblical gifts of the Spirit, “the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, the gift of faith, the gifts of healing, the gift of miracles, the gift of prophesy, the gifts of discerning spirits, the gifts of tongues and the gifts of interpretation of tongues are available today” to those Christians who earnestly seek them. David E. Harrel, *All Things Are Possible* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975), pp. 11-12.

<sup>6</sup> Informants: Kebede Wolde Mariam, Bete Mengistu and Assefa Alemu.

<sup>7</sup> E. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism* (Chicago: 1970); G. M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: 1980); Robert M. Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited* (New York: 1979).

<sup>8</sup> It is interesting and intriguing to note that in his book, *The righteous Empire*, Martin E. Marty makes reference to the presence of Ethiopians in the initial prayer gathering that ushered in the outbreak of the Azusa revival of 1906 that ushered in the outbreak of the Pentecostal movement, without, however citing the source for further probing.

<sup>9</sup> For a brief discussion of both Sheikh Zakariah and Isau, see Tibebe E, “The SIM in Ethiopia: A Preliminary note,” *Journal of North African Studies*, 6, 3 (1999) , pp.27-57; Aba Gureza was an intriguing “*Bahetawi*” in Harar, who in the early 60’s was calling people for repentance by wandering throughout Hararghe province, openly condemning the priest and Christians in general for lack of spirituality and moral corruption.

<sup>10</sup> In fact, they came from parents with priestly pedigrees. Example: Bete Mengistu (later, Dr.), Assefa Alemu (later Dr.), and Solomon Kebede, Alem Bazezew (later Dr), Halile Michael (later Dr.), Tenagne Lemma, etc. These were men and women who took their religions seriously. Some, in fact, were leaders of the *Haymanote Abew* youth association. Their intention was not to negate the foundation of their faith but to consolidate it through new venues of expressions. The unintended consequences, of course, has several implications including the undermining of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, but the new pathfinders were not fully aware of the implications of the new faith movement they were calling into existence when they initiated it. They were merely engaged in a common quest for a new way of being Christians in an intelligible, meaningful and personally fulfilling manner in the context of their times.

<sup>11</sup> One of the reasons why the Pentecostal or the Charismatic movements are making such rapid headway in Africa is the compatibility of their theology with that of the practices of the African traditional religion which stress healing, exorcism and prophecies expressed through local prophets and diviners. See, Kingsley Larbi, *Pentecostalism: The Eddies of the Ghanaian Christianity* ( Accra: SAPC Series, 2001), pp.419-429; Cephas NARTH Omenyo, *Pentecost outside Pentecostalism* (Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, 2000), p p.294-297.

<sup>12</sup> Marie S. Rice, *Sister Bertha Sister Ruth* (Nashville: Jonathan Publishers of Nashville, 1984), pp. 112-113; 118-194.

<sup>13</sup> The American Grade School and Mission had three levels: lower(beginners), intermediary and higher. Just a month after it’s opening the missionary report that there were about 90 students enrolled, a high figure for its time. Rice, pp. 112-118.



<sup>14</sup> The missionaries report that the young Ethiopians told them that most of their people spent much of their time in prayer and piety without experiencing radical spiritual changes. Berth Dommermoth points out that she spoke to Worku and his friends about the power of God and the baptism of the Holy Spirit and notes that their hearts were stirred since she saw them wiping their tears. Rice, p. 133. It is not clear from the statement whether or not the young Ethiopians spoke in tongue. Dommermoth reports that it was following this conversation with Worku and his friends that many young Ethiopians began to come to their place increasingly. See also, the report of Ellen French *Elim Pentecostal Herald*, vii, 61 (1938), p. 10.

<sup>15</sup> Rice, p.136. According to Dommermoth, the missionaries from the Sudan Interior Mission were very hostile to Pentecostalism. She describes the SIM missionaries as “a thorn in our flesh.” Rice, p. 186.

<sup>16</sup> Rice, p. 186

<sup>17</sup> Elen French, “Revival in Ethiopia,” *Elim Pentecostal Herald* vii, 51 (June 1937), p.7.

<sup>18</sup> Originally a priest from Gojjam, Qes Bademe Yalew, played a key role in the creation of the Mekane Yesus church, a name that was proposed by him. He also made pioneering efforts to form a united Evangelical church in Ethiopia, though that has never materialized even to this day. Gustav Aren, *Envoys of the Gospel in Ethiopia*, (Stockholm: EFS forlaget, 1999, pp. 94-97 See also his obituary *Addis Zemen*, Miazia 7, 1965/ 1973.

<sup>19</sup> Rice, p. 239.

<sup>20</sup> Rice, p. 191. It is interesting to note that missionary used both the word “bury” and “resurrection” in the metaphoric and spiritual sense. They were expecting the fruits of their labor at a distant future. The Pentecostal movement unfolded in Ethiopia from an expected quarter without their involvement. Though the Pentecostal missionaries visited Ethiopia in June 1969, they do not mention anything about the sprouting movement, which suggests that they were unaware of its existence. Instead of referring to the Ethiopian Pentecostals, who at the time of their visit, if not visible, were active in Addis Ababa and in the provinces, they mention about the how communism had already attracted young men and point out to its danger. Rice p. 242

<sup>21</sup> In their 1969 visit, Dommermoth and Ruth had a chance to visit Addis Ababa for over two weeks. They expressed delight at meeting some old friends, but they also sadly lament that some of the young men they knew as spirit filled people while they were there in the 30's, no longer showed the sign. Some of the names they mention include: Tsega, Admassu, Fikre and Haile. Rice, p. 242

<sup>22</sup> Informants: Pastor Yohannes Ijigu, Carltan Spencer, former President of the Elim Bible Institute. In fact, the Ethiopian Pentecostals of the 60's whom I had interviewed expressed surprise at the revelation of the presence of Pentecostal missionaries in the 30's and the existence of a small Ethiopian congregation who could be characterized as prototype Pentecostal.

<sup>23</sup> *The Ethiopian Herald*, No. 25, vol. 10, December 13, 1952. For a fuller report and more detailed account, see, Jane Collins, *Miracles and Missions and World Wide Evangelism* (Dallas: Jane Collins Daoud, 1953), pp.78-106.

<sup>24</sup> A term used in the religious parlance of the evangelical/charismatic world to describe religious public gatherings essentially for outreach purposes. Another equivalent word that has entered into a popular usage is “conference.”

<sup>25</sup> The Ethiopian Mission of BCMS began in 1934 when Messrs. Colin Mackenzie and Stanley Metters established a station at Asebe Teferi with the encouragement of Dr. Martin, (*Hakim Workeneh*). Later parties of recruits led by Mr. Mrs. A. Buxton settled in Addis Ababa and set up a Bible school for young Orthodox Christians. Their activities resulted in the creation of an association whose members were known as *Serawit Kirstos*, Army of Jesus. Many young Ethiopians, including the famous now deceased journalist, Paulos Gnono had come under the influence of this group. Most of these young committed Christians could not survive the Italian onslaught. Those who had survived, scattered in various places, did not seem to leave visible religious legacies. Norman Grubb, *Alfred Buxton of Abyssinia and Congo* (London: Luther Worth Press, 1942), pp. 114-1123; Informant: Tuji Jimma, a former member of *Serawiet Kirstos*.

<sup>26</sup> Informants: Tilahun Haile and Wubshet Dessalegne. See Chapter II.

<sup>27</sup> It is also reported that the prayers sessions led to intimate relations which finally led the Emperor to promise the missionary that he would be welcome to start missionary work in his country. Seleshi Kebede, “The History of Genet Church”, Mekane Yesus Seminary, 1990, p.2; Bekele Wolde Kidan, *Revival: Itiopia ena Yemechereshaw Revival* (Addis Ababa: Mulu Wengel, 2001/2), p.131. The

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Emperor had several contacts with church leaders and leading evangelical figures who prayed for him and assured him of that the day would come when he would be restored to his country and to his throne. His exile period significantly shaped his attitude toward missions in general. For further, see, Doris M. Rouse, *The Intercession of Rees Howells* (Cambridge: Luterwoth Press, 1983), pp. 22-23.

<sup>28</sup> Karl Ramstrand, the first missionary from the SPM, reported that he came to Ethiopia after encountering a vision, while he was in Liberia as a missionary, in which he saw a powerful light originating from Liberia stretching across the map of Ethiopia. He interpreted the vision to be a new call from God to serve the nation of Ethiopia as a missionary. Bekele, 67; Heywet Berhan: "*Ye Awasa Heywet Berhan Bete Krestian 40 gna amet meserete beal*," Awasa, 2000, p. 3.

<sup>29</sup> Bekele Wolde Kidan, *Rivaival...*, p. 83.

<sup>30</sup> The activity of the Finnish Mission gave rise to the formation of *Sefere Genet* church in 1971 under its first Ethiopian pastor, Hiruy Tsige, and the Swedish Philadelphia mission gave birth to *Ye Heywet Berhan* church, established as an independent local church in 1975. *Yeheywet Berhan Metshet*, p.11.

<sup>31</sup> The issue of conversion has been purposely avoided in the discussion. The Ethiopian experience especially involving those who transfer allegiance from the Orthodox to Pentecostal faith needs a serious theological reflection. Perhaps, the term "adhesion" as developed by Nock might serve a better purpose.

<sup>32</sup> Informants: Paul Johansson; Captain (now Pastor) Yohannes Ijigu. See also, *Elim Pentecostal Herald*, May 6, 1956, p. 15

<sup>33</sup> Bekele, p. 132. Bekele's information is based on Karl Ramstrand's "*Det Heliga Avenyret*" den *Kristna Bokringen* (Stockholm, 1986), p. 107.

<sup>34</sup> Informants: Assefa and Zeleke.

<sup>35</sup> Awasa Bete Krestian, *Ye Awasa Bete Krestian Arbagna Amet Misereta, Liyu Etem*. Nehase 1992/2000, p. 9.

<sup>36</sup> Informants: Dr. Negussie Tefera, Girma Tessema, Assefa Alemu, Reverend Zeleke Alemu, and others. See also Mulu Wengel, "*Ye Mulu Wengel Amagnoch Bete Krestian, 25 gna Beal, 1959-1984*," 1991, p. 30.

<sup>37</sup> According to Desta Wedajo, there were a few Christians in the Institute, such as Nega Ayele ( who later became a professor of political science in the national university and lost his life during the revolution), Abdi Yusuf and Desta himself, who sometimes visited the Swedish Lutheran church in Harar, but whose presence, as a religious group was not visibly felt in the campus. Informant: Desta Wedajo.

<sup>38</sup> Among the literature that have influenced the young in the 60's were materials written by T. L. Osborn, a radical Pentecostal from US. His books and magazines include: *Healing the Sick*, *Healing in His Wing*, *The Purpose of Pentecost*, *The book of Acts*, and *Faith Digest*. T. L. Osborn formed the Association for Native Evangelism (1953) to train local evangelists to serve as missionaries and used his networks to distribute extensive Pentecostal literature in several countries in Africa. He had been organizing major revivalist crusades gathering huge crowds in Kenya since 1957. Oral Robert's book, *Abundant Life* was also circulating in small numbers. There were also some periodical items like, *The Herald of His Coming*, *Voice of Healing*, *World Harvest* and *Decision* in circulation, albeit in limited numbers and localities. Informants: Assefa, Zeleke, Solomon Kebede(I :02-07-03), Bedru Hussien( I; 14-02-02) , Girma Tessema and Ferne and Campbell Miller.

<sup>39</sup> Informant: Zeleke Alemu. According to Zeleke he was the one who prayed for the patients. Except the information he received concerning the Pentecostal faith from Getachew Mekere, also a student in the Institute, and his claims of an unusual dramatic encounter of seeing a vision of Jesus Christ, he then knew very little about the Pentecostal faith.

<sup>40</sup> Dr. Bete Seme intimated to me that he went to one of the nearby rivers in Harar to conduct his own baptism. Dr. Assefa took baptism later on in Addis Ababa. This may appear to be bizarre, but that was how the young and inexperienced men and women handled it, out of eagerness and earnest desire to introduce a radical change in their lives.

<sup>41</sup> Informant: Dr. Melaku Mekonen, Mulugeta Abebe, and Dr. Bete Mengistu.

<sup>42</sup> *Haymanote Abew* is an association of young Ethiopian Christians from the Orthodox Church, which was created in 1958, mainly by University students of Addis Ababa. It was both a religious and social organization whose principal objectives seem to introduce reform from within. The association also received strong support and inspirations from members of the royal family and high-ranking officials, such as Akale Work Habtewold, who saw the need for the Orthodox Church to undergo some changes if

it should desire to accommodate the challenge of modernity, particularly as it effected the youth. The *Haymanote Abew* group were very hostile towards foreign missionaries in general and were very critical of the Pentecostal movement. Informants: Tenagne Lemma, Dr. Alem Bazezew, Solomon Kebede, and others.

<sup>43</sup> Informant: Solomon Kebede; Mulugeta and Girma Tessema.

<sup>44</sup> Some of my informants recount that a student by the name of Zeleke had contact with his friend Getachew Mekere, who was a Pentecostal from the Finnish background. Zeleke, who was then a student from the Harar Teacher Training school, shared what he heard and knew regarding the Pentecostal experience to friends like, Solomon Kebede, during one of his summer vacations. Others testify that Zeleke had experienced a "divine encounter," while in Harar. This event, as reported earlier, seemed to provide the initial spark for the move of the Holy Spirit in Harar. Informant: Solomon Kebede (I: 09-12-02), Assefa Alemu, Zeleke and others. All things considered, the story of the transmission of the Pentecostal experience, at its inception stage in particular, is too complicated to provide a sound narrative.

<sup>45</sup> Informants: Dr. Solomon Mulugeta, Afework Kebede, Solomon Kebede, and others.

<sup>46</sup> It should be noted here that the young students knew what they were talking about. They maintain that they experienced something real with "authentic" results. It may be hard for the historian to substantiate the claims and put them on record, but one cannot hold a dismissive attitude of times of profound spiritual experiences that informants point to as the moment that radically changed their lives. The baptism of the Holy Spirit, to which my informants made a constant allusion, is a crucial event for the Pentecostals. They all recount to a special moment, a sudden supernatural experience, where after faith in God became natural, thus, opening a litany of spiritual insights, inspirations, revelations and manners of perception hardly attributable to normal intellectual experiences.

<sup>47</sup> Among them were: Solomon Kebede, Girma Tessema, Tilahun Yelma, Mulugeta Zewde, etc.

<sup>48</sup> Informants: Solomon, Paul Gingrich, Afework, Mulugeta Zewde, and others.

<sup>49</sup> For further details, see, Nathan B. Hege, *Beyond Our Prayers* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1998); Tilahun Beyene, *Yemeserete Krestos Bete Krestian Tarik* (Addis Ababa: Mega Pub. 2001/2002). Among those who also played a major role in the establishment of Meserete Kirstos Church are: Negussie Ayele (later professor), Beyene Chich Aybelu (later Professor) and Haile Woldemichael (later Dr.). Tilahun, p.74.

<sup>50</sup> Melese Wegu (later, Dr.), now Director Ethiopian Outreach Ministry based in York, Pennsylvania, and Kebede Wolde Mariam (later, Dr.), now residing in US, played conspicuous role in rallying the youth for the creation of an independent Pentecostal church in Ethiopia in the 60's.

<sup>51</sup> Informant: Paul Johansson. Paul Johansson, now President of the Elim Bible Institute, was the founder of the All Nation Gospel Church in Kenya was intimately connected with the East African Revival movement which gave rise to a number of Pentecostal churches and organizations such as Pentecostal Evangelical Fellowship of Africa (PEFA) established in 1963. Though he had had contacts with the Pentecostal missionaries in Ethiopia, his connections with the young Ethiopian Pentecostals increased because of the Kenyan preacher. Omaha Cha-cha's participation in one of the Pentecostal conferences in Awasa is reported in Elim's *Missionary News Report of 1965*. The report states, "The ministry of Chacha Omaha, a Kenyan overseer in training course in Southern Ethiopia was a great blessing. Two hundred Ethiopian brethren attended!" *Missionary News Report*, Elim Bible Institute, February 9, 1965, p. 1.

<sup>52</sup> Informant: Paul Johansson.

<sup>53</sup> The involvement and contribution of Omaha Chacha in the expansion of Pentecostalism, needs further inquiry. Informants are not quite clear as to when the Kenyan preacher came for the first time, how many times he had visited Ethiopia, and at which moment of his visits he made the most significant impact. Omaha died in 1991 after a long life of active service as a pastor of a church in Kenya. Informants point out that he was one of the key players in the spread of Pentecostalism in Ethiopia. For one thing, Ethiopians easily identified with him for he was a black evangelist. Second, he preached in simple, yet bold terms followed by some dramatic occurrence adding new vitality and strength to their religious convictions. His being a short-term visitor, unlike those Pentecostal missionaries stationed in Ethiopia, might have lent him the leeway to conduct his preaching and boldly exercise his spiritual gifts the way he wanted. Informants: Bekele W/ Kidan, Solomon Kebede, Assefa, and Dr. Melese Wegu, Gaati Chacha Maluki.

<sup>54</sup> Informants: Seleshi Kebede, Melese, Pastor Hirui Tsege.

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<sup>55</sup> Informant : Kebede Wolde Mariam.

<sup>56</sup> Helvi Helen Halmi, originally came not as a missionary, as such, but as a tutor of the children of *Ras Kassa*. As a result, she was very careful not to be openly identified as a Pentecostal missionary having influential role among the youth. This might have led to a misperception of her discrete attitude by the young Ethiopians who wanted to give a highly enthusiastic expression of their Pentecostal faith.

<sup>57</sup> Informant: Kebede Wolde Mariam. Kebede commented, "We grew quickly, we knew more than they expected, we became better than the women and we wanted to go beyond."

<sup>58</sup> Informant: Kebede

<sup>59</sup> Informants: Pastor Hiruye Tsige, Melese, Seleshi Kebede, and others.

<sup>60</sup> Those Ethiopians who chose to stay with the Finnish mission group later found a local church under the name *Sefere Genet*, the "land of the paradise." Because of its location, the church attracted mostly poor people and later merchants from the Guraghe ethnic community. Informant: Pastor Hiruye and Pastor Seleshi.

<sup>61</sup> Informants: Girma, Bedru Hussien, Solomon Lulu , and Bekele; Yoseph Kidane Wolde, "The History of the Pentecostal Movement in Addis Ababa," Department of History, Addis Ababa University, 1976, p. 17. According to Tilahun, some of the EUS returnees like Berhane Abreha, had already the experience of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit at the Awasa Conference 1965. Tilahun. *Bete Krestianen Eseralehu...*, p. 94.

<sup>62</sup> For the latter view, see, Yeshitla Mengistu, " History of the Meserete Krestos Church," Addis Ababa, Mekane Yesus Seminary, 1984, p.16.

<sup>63</sup> Bekle Wolde Kidan, *Rivaival*, p. 90.

<sup>64</sup> Informants: Girma Demissie, Philipos Kemere and Solomon Kebede.

<sup>65</sup> Chapel was the term the young Ethiopians used to refer to their worship center or prayer house. According to informants, they could not use the term *Bete Krestian*, which means church, since it is reserved for the national Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The church in the traditional sense, must have the *tabot* ( a wooden representation of the Ark of the Covenant) and *kahen*, an ordained priest. The young Pentecostals established chapels where ever they went, regardless of the size of the congregation, and used them as launching pads for evangelistic purposes.

<sup>66</sup> Informants: Girma Tessema, Solomon Kebede and Bedru Hussien.

<sup>67</sup> Informants: Bedru, Solomon Kebede, Solomon Lulu and others.

<sup>68</sup> Informants: Evelin Brant Thompson and Dr. Howard Brant.

<sup>69</sup> According to an American missionary who was in charge of the center in the early 60's, the radical students not only disrupted programs but also were engaged in verbal attacks and character assassinations. The missionary was sarcastically called "General Manzke" of the CIA, and Christian students associated with the center were labeled as disciples of " General Manzke." The opposition they faced from the radical students and some clergies from the Orthodox Church compelled the missionary to look for another site. According to Manzke, Prince Sophia Desta allowed one of her places near Afincho Ber to be used as the new youth center. Informants: Albert and Marian/ Manzke.

<sup>70</sup> Informants: Manzke, Philipos and Kebebew. The Crocodiles were small radical groups, characterized by their contemporaries as "communists" that has strongly influenced the student movement and set the tone for its future direction. Their history will be briefly touched in the next chapter.

<sup>71</sup> Among those taking part in these informal meetings were: Tessema Jembere, Kebede, Tessema, Zeleke, Philipos, Fantahun, Asefa, Melese and others. Informants: Assefa, Zeleke, Bete and others

<sup>72</sup> Bkele, *Rivaival*., p.97-99. Bekele applies the word "representative" with reservations because by then there were no organized Pentecostal entities except scattered fellowships. Participants, especially outside Addis Ababa, came by themselves through informal communications to take part in the conference just because they were key players of the Pentecostal movement in their respective localities. Bekele refers to such participants as *Yaltewekelu Tewekayoch*, literally, the "un-delegated delegates."

<sup>73</sup> Informant: Philipos Kemere.

<sup>74</sup> Though not articulated in the form of a slogan, the idea of "the Gospel for Ethiopia by Ethiopians" had already existed in its crude form among the pioneers of the Harari Pentecostals. Informants: Zeleke and Asefa.

<sup>75</sup> See below.

<sup>76</sup> In Addis Ababa alone, there were many groups with Pentecostal orientation that congregated in nearby neighborhoods and residential quarters such as Aware, Nefas Silk, Old Air Port, Gulele, Tekle Haymnot

Sefar, *Ras Desta*, Akaki, etc. There were also others who took either the name of the leader of the chapel or the name of the owner of the house where the meeting took place such as, Biredaw, Gaym, etc. Later on, groups began to adopt biblical names such as *Tsion* (Zion), *Peraclitos*, and *Tamere Iyesus*. Bekele, *Rivayval*, p. 104. Informants: Dr. Berhanu Habte, Assefa, Zelalem Tefera, and Asseged Kibret.

<sup>77</sup> Negussie Teheran, " *Ye Ethiopia Mulu Wengel Amagnoch Bete Krestian Chigroch, Tarikawi Getsita, Yewektu Hunetana Mefitihewoch*," A paper read on the 25<sup>th</sup> celebration of the foundation of the *Mulu Wengel Church*. 1992, p.4.

<sup>78</sup> Though not the first of its kind, the Awasa Conference was the biggest in terms of the size of participants it had attracted and the length of time it lasted, which all in all took more than two weeks. *Heywet Berhan*, p 9.

<sup>79</sup> Among the speakers of the Awasa Conference were: Omaha Chacha, the Kenyan Pentecostal evangelist, the American evangelist, Mattson Bosze Joseph, and Rev. Karl Ramstrand, the Swedish Pentecostal Missionary based in Awasa.

<sup>80</sup> Informants: Pastor Getu Ayalew, Solomon Kebede, Assefa, and Zeleke See also, *Heywet Berhan*, pp. 9-11.

<sup>81</sup> Informant: Solomon Lulu.

<sup>82</sup> Informants: Assefa, Solomon Kebede, Zeleke, and Mulugeta Zewde. All informants pointed out that the expenses for the participants including lodging and food had been covered by the Swedish Philadelphia Mission for most of the participants were students who could not have afforded the cost.

<sup>83</sup> Informants: Solomon Kebede, Girma Tessema, and Bedru Hussien.

<sup>84</sup> The Ethiopian Pentecostals who take the Bible literally picked the idea from the I Epistle of John chapter one verses one and two which reads: "we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life, which was with the father and manifested to us-that which we have seen and heard we declare to you."

<sup>85</sup> The verses from the Books cited stress the fact that salvation is provided by God' grace through the finished work of Jesus Christ and it is available for all who place their personal trust and faith on him. Informants: Yohannes, Bete, Asseged and Assefa.

<sup>86</sup> The concept of salvation had for a long time been a contested issue between the Orthodox Church and the evangelical church. It was one of the basic issues that led to the split between the priests of the evangelical conviction and those priests who did not embrace that conviction at the Church in Boji in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. *Qes Bademe* was banished from service in Wellega and forced to retreat in Gojjam. *Aleqa Taye* suffered stigmatization ( *Tsere Mariam*) and imprisonment for his insistence that the road to salvation is faith in the finished work of Christ. He was critical of practices and observances related to saints and the long held practices of fasting and commemorative events associated with the deceased like *Tezkar*( commemorative feast for the disease). Unlike the Pentecostal movement, these were localized tensions with no national visibility. It was the Pentecostal who brought the issue of salvation into the forefront of the public sphere of lay theology. On *Aleqa Taye* See, Eskil Forslund, *The Word of God in Ethiopian Tongues* ( Uppsala : 1993) p 63; See also the introduction section of, Taye Gebre Mariam, *Ye-Ityopyia Hizb Tarik: History of the People of Ethiopia*. Translated by G. Hudson and Tekeste Negash. Uppsala, 1987.

<sup>87</sup> The verse is cited from the Gospel of John chapter 3 verse 16. The verse is acknowledged by all Evangelicals and has formed the core of their message for evangelization. It is one of the most important verses in the Bible, which the Ethiopian Pentecostals cherished and memorized word for word. It is also one of the key verses, which they have effectively applied in their testimonies to bring new recruits. Informants: Asseged, Asefa and Zeleke.

<sup>88</sup> It has to be noted that choosing one's faith is not in keeping with the Ethiopian tradition. The religion you are born into becomes automatically yours. The Pentecostals broke this decorum and consequently, they were seen as bad precedent setters.

<sup>89</sup> Informants: Assefa, Bete, Zeleke, Kebebew Daka, and others. Concepts, like salvation and conversion, do not exist as vocabularies amongst ordinary adherents of the Orthodox Church. They may exist as theological concepts in the *Gedels*, but have not been part and parcel of the common people's expression of faith and lay theology. Informant: Professor Getatchew Haile. Partly due to the novelty of the concepts, and partly due to the powerful meaning they generated, the two concepts have played key role in drawing many people from the Orthodox Christian background into the Pentecostals, for that

matter, the evangelical faith in the context of Ethiopia. For the young converts, the model provided both an experiential form of faith and an assurance of the guarantee of eternal life.

<sup>90</sup> Informants: Tenagne Lemma, Yenagu Dessie, Kebebew, Solomon Kebede. Virtually all Pentecostals in Ethiopia have a special moment (the event) in their lives on which they narrate their stories in terms of before and after. Transformation in behavior, character, style of life, priorities, constitute major themes of their testimonial narratives. See also Eide, *Religion and Revolution...* p.62.

<sup>91</sup> Some scholars employ the “diffusion of innovation theory” to explain the dynamics of the spread of renewal movements. According to Eveett Rogers, diffusion is a process by which an innovation spreads from its source to its ultimate users. It involves three interrelated ideas: the innovation itself, the communicants(the agent/messenger), and the communicated(the message). An innovation is an idea that is promoted by individuals who perceive them to be new. Key characteristics of an innovation are: relative advantage, compatibility and observability. The spread of the Pentecostal movement in Ethiopia, by and large, bear these imprints of diffusion of new ideas. The group’s assumption that their faith was a rescued truth was a relative advantage, the incorporation of healing and exorcism was compatible with the spiritual worldview and existential needs of their society, many of the young men who embraced the new faith, through their claims of supernatural transformations introduced observable changes that other could noticeably see and even emulate. On diffusion theory, see, Everett M. Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovation* ( New York: The Free Press, 1972).

<sup>92</sup> An overwhelming number of my informants intimated to me that they came to embrace their faith by this simple method. Cultural elements, as reflected through bonds of friendship and other social ties and networks, constitute ingredients through which the witnessing activities were vehicled. Witnessing, for the most part, was a deliberate act involving multi-faceted activities. It required identifying the man one wanted to witness to, praying, visiting, dialoguing, distributing tracts and sharing salvic oriented verses from the Bible. It involved doing those thing over and over, success or no success. Informants: Assefa, Dr. Abera Tilahun, Seifu Kebede, Zeleqa, Evangelist Abere Darge, Evangelist Tadesse Feisa, and others.

<sup>93</sup> Informants: Pastor Ashenafi Zemat, Dr. Berhanu Habte , Abere Darge, Evangelist Fasil Kebede, and Abera Tilahun. The issue of personal salvation, which the Pentecostal share with other evangelicals in Ethiopia, is the most contentious and the one that strikes a sensitive chord amongst members of the Orthodox Christians for whom Christianity was something given. It is a matter of being a Christian once someone was born in a Christian family and had a baptismal experience in his childhood of which, the most important mark had in the past been the wearing of the *mateb* around the neck.

<sup>94</sup> Later, the name changed to EvaSU, Evangelical Student Union. For more see, *Hebron*, 1, 1 (1993), pp.11-14.

<sup>95</sup> According to Hege, the list of those joining the Pentecostal movement include; Bedru Hussein, a student from a Moslem background, Teka Gabru, Girma Tessema, a distinction student who later became one of the finest soil experts of the nation, Asnake Erque, Tilahun Adera, currently a professor in Pharmacy (US), Tekeste Teklu, university professor in US, who played a foremost role in organizing the Ethiopian youth to withstand the challenges of Marxism through a student association called EvaSU, Chaltu Geffawossen(now deceased), wife of Goshu Wolde, one of the former ministers of the *Derg*, Tenagne Lemma, currently Country Director of Compassion International, Yenagu Dessie, and Tiruwork Mesfin, now assistant pastor of an Ethiopian church in California. Hege. p. 151. Informants: Dr. Tekeste Teklu, Pastor Tiruwork Mesfin,, Solomon Lulu, and others.

<sup>96</sup> Hege, p.152.

<sup>97</sup> The tension between the Pentecostals and radical elements of HSIU students, definitely requires a separate study. At the moment of their history, the Pentecostal students, small as they were, keenly understood the danger of Marxism, perhaps more than any group in the university or even outside of it, and combated it on all fronts, be it in dormitory discussions, public meetings, EUS service stations. Solomon Lulu, now chairman of Ethiopian Christian Business men’s association, and a key person behind the creation of the fellowship, recalls that they were at loggerheads with the “small but pernicious” group called the Crocodiles, springboard of Marxism in the HSIU. It is reported that this articulate Christian group conducted a highly organized campaign to foil the plan of the Crocodiles and other student radicals who were working hard to make the late student leader Tilahun Gizaw, the President of USUAA. The Pentecostals were deeply offended by the radicals’ open censure of God. According to Randi Balsvik, most of the candidates during the student election of 1971 vigorously

attacked the church, but the statements which received the most spontaneous and loud applause was : "we, the students teach the Ethiopian mass that there is no God." R. Ronning Balsvik, *Haile Sellassie's Students*. East Lansing: 1985.p. 240. The Pentecostal students collaborated with those who campaigned for the election of Mekonnen Bishaw, a relatively more liberal candidate, who at the end of the day won the contest. Informants: Mekonnen Bishaw and Solomon Lulu.

<sup>98</sup> From the point of view of the Pentecostals, the student radicals were not only anti-God, but also of low moral standards, who could not be emulated as examples. Balsvik, p.242; Informants: Ayalew, Solomon Kebede and Solomon Lulu.

<sup>99</sup> Informant: Solomon Lulu

<sup>100</sup> The original seven members of the leadership team were: Asefa Zeleke(Dr. Rev, pastor of an Ethiopian evangelical church in Kansa), Bete (Dr., Director of International Bible Society in Africa, based in Kenya and founder of the Assembly of God Church in Ethiopia), Philipos Kemere (Dr. now residing in Washington), Kebede W/ Mariam(Dr. now residing in US), Zeleke Alemu (now Rev. serving as a pastor in Maryland), Dr. Melsese Wegu( founder of the Ethiopian Outreach Ministry based in US), Fantahun Gebre (deceased).

<sup>101</sup> Informants: Bedru, Assefa, and Girma.

<sup>102</sup> Informants: Melese, Assefa, Bedru and others.

<sup>103</sup> *Meserete Krestos*, literally, Christ Foundation Church (based on I Corinthians 3:11), was a name proposed by men like Dr. Negussie, then active participant of the emerging local church. See also footnote, 24.

<sup>104</sup> Bekele, pp.100-101.

<sup>105</sup> This is the case even to this day. Some informants have also told me that, next to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the Catholic Church is the only recognized religious community legally bearing the designation, "Church." in Ethiopia. This situation forced early converts of evangelical missionaries to adapt names, such as, "*yestelot ber*", "*maheber*" and latter, "chapels." All associations, simply referred to as mission churches, whether Lutheran, Mennonite or SIM background, in effect, had no legal basis, until the local leadership emerged and obtained permit from the government.

<sup>106</sup> According to Engelsviken, the name finally adopted was "Old Time Full Gospel Believers Association," which is strongly indicative of a restorationist tendency. T. Engelsviken, "Mulu Wengel; A Documentary Report," 1975, pp. 45-45. Ethiopian Christians of this time opted out for indigenous names, such as the *Qale Heywet*, *Meserete Krestos*, *Mesgana*, *Berhane Heywet*, etc., unlike the Christians of the present generation, for whom exotic names( the Crusaders, the Winners chapel, Victory Chapel, etc) make strong appeal.

<sup>107</sup> This version of the approval of the request is contradicted by the government statement that was released in the heat of the tension between the Pentecostals and state officials in 1971-72. A statement that came in *Ethiopian Herald* in 1973, observes that the Pentecostal have been "operating illegally." The newspaper notes that, "some years ago application was made to the Ministry of Interior for registration, a requirement for all foreign associations in this country. After the investigation of the record of their activities, the permit was refused." "Newsweek's Report on Pentecostals Unfounded," *The Ethiopian Herald*, Vol. XXIX. no. 630, 13-01- 73, p. 2. It is interesting to note that the Mulu Wengel Church has never been officially recognized neither by the monarchical regime nor the *Derg*. It only received its formal registration in 1991 after the change of government following the collapse of the military rule.

<sup>108</sup> Informants: Ashenafi Zemat, Bete, Melese, and others.

<sup>109</sup> Haile Michael was not only the first evangelist but also a man who later on played a key leadership role in the Mulu Wengel Church. He later completed his Ph. D. from Fuller Theological Seminary and became an itinerant preacher having his base in the US serving the Ethiopian nationals and the Diasporic communities. He passed away while conducting his ministry in the southwestern part of Ethiopia seven years ago.

<sup>110</sup> Informants: Ashenafi, Yenagu, Asefa, and others.

<sup>111</sup> Informants: Kebede and Bete.

<sup>112</sup> The history of the expansion of the Pentecostal movement out side the vicinity of the capital and the role of the young Ethiopians who were involved in the process needs to be documented chapter by chapter. Most of the actors are still alive they can tell the story very well. To mention, but few: Endalkachew and Itafa, now Rev. and the current General Secretary of the EECMY, influential in the



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area of Illubabor; Tsadiqu, a Moslem convert, now pastor and principal of the Mulu Wengel theological seminary in Addis, active in the former province of Bale; Merid Lemma, a man who spent a number of years in Gojjam and Wellega together with evangelist Taddese Negewo and Mekuria Mulugeta; Pastor Tekle Medhin, active in the area of Harar, Dire Dawa and Jijjiga area; Pastor Taye Takele, active in the area of Arsi; Pastor Tehsome Worku and Belete, in the area of Welayta; Dr. Bete and Sewhit, in the former province of Eritrea, etc.

<sup>113</sup> Informants: Asefa, Melese, Ashenafi, Ferne Miller and Earlin Scottman.

<sup>114</sup> On the concept of “geographical peel off” see, Luther P. Gerlach, *People, Power, Change: Movements of Social Transformation* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1970), p. 46.

<sup>115</sup> This is based on information obtained from those who were then in the leadership position. Informants: Zeleke, Bete, Assfa, and Melese.

<sup>116</sup> See above.

<sup>117</sup> A report submitted to the Mekane Yesus Church by one of the Swedish missionaries states that the ties of the Ethiopian Pentecostals with foreign missionaries was extremely loose and that the movement had basically remained indigenous with Ethiopian leaders and without financial support from outside. T. Eengelsviken, “Report on the Pentecostal Movement in Ethiopia and its Relations to Evangelical Church of Mekane Yesus” (MY Seminary library) 1972, p. 2.

<sup>118</sup> One such a missionary was Manzke, who believed that the young students deserve freedom of space to keep their religious identity and legitimacy in order to preach the Gospel in their own ways and understandings to their generation and their Ethiopian fellows. Informant: Manzke

<sup>119</sup> Brian Fargher notes that the Pentecostal movement, which he describes as, a “renewal movement,” was not imported into Ethiopia from outside, but sprang up from within and remained to become a part of Ethiopian Christianity. Brian Fargher, “The Charismatic Movement in Ethiopia 1960-1980,” *Evangelical Review Theology*, vol. 12, 1988, p. 344. Brian Fargher was an SIM missionary with long years of service in Ethiopia.

<sup>120</sup> Informants: Asseged, Tesfahun Agidew (I: 29-06-02), Tesfa Lidet (I: 20-06-02), and Zelalem.

<sup>121</sup> Paragraph 9 of the confessional statement of the Mulu Wengel church states, “When a person has come to faith and has confessed, he should be baptized by immersion in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.” This put the confession mainly along the Baptist line as distinct from Lutheran and that of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, which pronounce and exercise infant baptism. Adult baptism lays stress on confession of faith, which per force, requires conscious decision. With respect to Spirit baptism, Paragraph 10 states, “All those who believe in Jesus Christ can receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit according to what is written in Acts 2:4.” Paragraph 11, which deals with healing states, healing is for the believers to claim and serve others in accordance with the work of redemption Christ performed in the cross. According to the Norwegian theologian who had served as a missionary while the Pentecostal movement was in the offing, the confessional statement of the Mulu Wengel Church places it within the historical stream of Baptist/Methodist/Holiness/ Pentecostal traditions. Tormod Engelsviken, “Gudina Tumsa, the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, and Charismatic Movement.” a paper presented at MYS, 2003, p. 9.

<sup>122</sup> Addisu Legges now lives and works in Los Angeles, California is still continuing his service among the Diaspora. Legesse Watero, now a professor at Addis Ababa University, one of the few Astrophysicist the country has, is still singing and composing songs. Tesfaye Gabisso suffered 7 years of imprisonment during the military regime because of his refusal to deny his faith. Tamirat Haile, a singer who composed and sang many encouraging and comforting songs (as well as songs of social and political nature) through out the duration of the Revolution is now a pastor of a church in Addis.

<sup>123</sup> For more on this see Chapter III.

<sup>124</sup> In fact, according to Addisu, the Emperor was so fascinated by the songs he heard aired through Voice of the Gospel that he wanted to know more about the singer. Addisu was called by the Emperor and held brief, as he described, “intense conversations.” The Emperor offered him a scholarship in appreciation of his talent so that it could be used for the advancement of modern music in Ethiopia. Addisu faced some bureaucratic hurdles in the process of going through formality procedures, and as a result, he could not make use of the opportunity offered. He later came to the US on his own and studied something else. Informant: Addisu Worku.

<sup>125</sup> Informants: Fetle Abate, Debebe, Addisu, Tamirat Yirgu, and Gezahegn Mussie..

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<sup>126</sup> In this section, I will use the term persecution in its ordinary sense to refer to the act of harassment people experience because of their different religious convictions. Harassment could take the form of public or verbal condemnation, ostracizing or exclusion, physical attack and obstructions of public worship and banning including imprisonment of participants. Evangelical Christians in Ethiopia have experienced any or a combination of these elements of harassment either in a deliberate or spontaneous setting. Pentecostals experienced them with more severity because of the radical commitment to expand and the strong influence they exerted upon young adherents of the established church.

<sup>127</sup> "Bedebre Zeit Ketema Lijochina Welajoch Tegachu," *Addis Zemen*, vol. 27, No., 826, 20-09-67, p. 1; *Ethiopian Herald*, 13-01-73, p. 2.

<sup>128</sup> Informants: Assefa, Melese, Solomon Kebede, and Zeleke.

<sup>129</sup> Among those who became converts were famous singers like Tirunesh Yemer, Istifanos, Melese Mergia, Mustefa Ali, Tilahun Gizaw and the wife of a famous song composer, Gezahegne Desta. Informants: Tirunesh Yemer, Assefa, Berhanu, and Bete.

<sup>130</sup> Sandra Rickard reports a similar cultural clash transpired as a result of the first encounter between the American Peace Corps and the students of HSIU where the students felt that some of the behaviors of the Americans did not auger well with traditional cultural sensibilities. The students expressed resentment for the "digressions they are making and the moral corruptions they were creating." For further see, Sandra Rickard, "The Ethiopian Student and Ethiopia's Transition into the Twentieth Century," A paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the Student Project for Amity Among Nations (SPAN), University of Minnesota, 1967, p. 22.

<sup>131</sup> Informants: Asefa, Bete, Debebe, Zelalem and others.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Fargher, "The Charismatic Movement...", p. 351.

<sup>134</sup> Informants: Tilahun Haile, Bekele Wolde Kidan, Girma Tessema, Pastor Bark Fahnstock, Paul Gingrich, Paul Balisky, and Carl Templin. It is interesting to note that there were some missionaries who had been strongly influenced by the Pentecostal movement as a result of intense interactions with the Ethiopians. Former missionaries such as Earlean Scotman and Ferner Miller and Paul Gingrich intimated to me the change they had experienced through the touch of the Holy Spirit by attending either prayer meetings or spiritual conferences organized by the young Pentecostals such as Bete, Itefa, Enadalkachew, and Assfa.

<sup>135</sup> Informant: Tilahun Haile. The Mekane Yesus Church also had a difficult time to accommodate the Pentecostals. It was the wise leadership of Qes Gudina Tumsa and the increasing influence of Pentecostalism in diverse local chapters in Addis Ababa and the provinces in late 60's and early 70's that made the church tolerant and open to the movement. On the latter, see, Engelsviken, "Report on the Pentecostal movement in Ethiopia and its relations to the EECMY, EECMY, 24,-07-72 (material at MY seminary Library).

<sup>136</sup> Informants: Debebe, Assegid, Bedru, and Assefa. *Ityopis* mentions that the government passed circulars to provincial governors and various line ministries to vigilantly watch the movement and suppress it. The letter is dated, November 3, 1967, no.1492/3077. Girma, *Ityopis*, p. 137.

<sup>137</sup> Informants: Zewde, Tirunesh, Assefa and Debebe.

<sup>138</sup> This is not the proper space to deal with this issue. When and under what exact circumstances had this commonly invoked statement come into existence, needs further study. One should also address the issue of whether the statement was said earnestly or was of a rhetorical nature. Informants who approached the emperor for the second time, specially after the investigative report was released, related to me that the Emperor's response to their invocation of the same statement was, "*egna yelnewen egna ansherewem ende?*", literally, is it not possible for us to renounce what we have pronounced before? Informants: Ashenafi Zemat, Tirunesh Yemer, Zewde Jimma.

<sup>139</sup> Some of my informants noted that the Emperor received them well during their first meeting and that he even showed sympathy, but was very upset the second time they met with him. It seems that the Emperor gave serious considerations of his relations with the national church. He did not want to strain relations with *Abune* Theophilos, the Patriarch of the Church, by his approving of the Pentecostal faith. *Abune* Theophilos, was reported to have said in his 1971 inaugural address that he was not prepared to see a rival religion "unfit" to the Orthodox Church in Ethiopia. In fact, according to Engelsviken, the Patriarch even threatened to resign if the Emperor granted Pentecostals permission to establish a church.

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Tormod Engelsen, *Mulu Wengel: A Documentary Report on the Pentecostal Movement in Ethiopia* (Oslo: The Free Faculty of Theology, 1975), p.153.

<sup>140</sup> Informants: Zewde, Assefa, Debebe, Tirunesh, and others.

<sup>141</sup> A 1975 report of the MYC indicates that 14 evangelical Christians in the province of Sidamo were found guilty of teaching and preaching (*Sisbkuna Siasebeku*) to others the Pentecostal faith (*Ya-Pentecostis Haimanot*) and were placed under arrest for over a month while waiting trial. Here what looks like a critical issue is propagation not the religion per se. Annual Report of the Mekane Yesus Church for 1975. The report was referring to an incident that happened in January 1966 just a couple of months before the Ethiopian Revolution of 1974.

<sup>142</sup> Colonel Selomon Keder to Dr. Haile Giorgis Werkinah, City Administrator of Addis Ababa, 30-02-64. A copy of the letter is found in Girma's *Ityopis*, p.139-142( See the appendix).The letter encourages "all Ethiopians to cooperate with the police in fighting and destroying the false religion, which is spreading rapidly." As result, many of the lay leaders and members have been beaten and stoned by mobs aroused by Orthodox Church leaders." *Logos Journal*, Persecution in Ethiopia," May-June, 1973, pp.13-14.

<sup>143</sup> *Logos*, p.15.

<sup>144</sup> Informant: Philipos Kemere.

<sup>145</sup> This was a direct conflagration of article 40 of the existing constitution, which clearly stipulates that "Ethiopian subjects shall have right in accordance with conditions prescribed by law to assemble peacefully and without arms." Perhaps the context used for arresting this group was a memorandum released by Major Derese Dubale and Akale Work Habte Wold on November 03,1967 following the Debre Zeit incident. The document that was passed to the provincial governors stated that founders of the Pentecostal movement had been notified that they could not conduct meeting under the guise of holding prayers and if they continued to meet, their activities would be considered illegal. Girma Zewde, *Ityopis* (Addis Ababa: Negde Matemia Derigit, 1985), p.137, 138;Yoseph, p.24. *Ityopis*, also contains the full text of a letter that was released in October 7, 1971 by Solomon Kadir which banned the *Mulu Wengel* church for good. Girma Zewde, *Ityopis*, pp. 138-142.

<sup>146</sup> Yoseph, sets the estimate at 165: Yoseph, p. 48; The figure reported by the official newspaper, *Addis Zemen* 480; *Addis Zemen*, September 1, 1972.

<sup>147</sup> *Lagos* contains the statement of one of the Pentecostals, which said, " no matter what the conditions are we will stand take the risk for our Jesus Christ's sake. We do not worry as it is all for the glory of God. Though a lot of our friends have lost their jobs, schools and businesses, we have Jesus." *Logos*, p. 16; *Newsweek*, " Persecution in Malawi and Ethiopia," *Newsweek*, January 15, 73, p. 50.

<sup>148</sup> Douglas Michael, " Christians in Marxist Ethiopia," *Religion in Marxist Lands*, 4, 2(1986), p. 142.

<sup>149</sup> Informants: Assegid Kibret(I : 10- 08- 01), Kasahun Mulat, Menker Abebe, Zelalem Tefera, Sisay Ferew, and Bedru.

<sup>150</sup> Life of Faith, " Evangelicals Imprisoned in Ethiopia," October 14, 1972

<sup>151</sup> Bedru Hussien, *Ye Ityopia Mulu Wengel Amagnoch Bete Krestian*. Yekatit 1985/1993 (manuscript), p. 4; Mulu Wengel Church, "Jubilee for a Church," *Ye Mulu Wengel Amagnoch Bete Kristiyan*, 1992, p.30.

<sup>152</sup> What cannot be denied is that the Pentecostals have judged the national church wanting so much by its close association with a regime that was viewed by them and by their contemporaries as inefficient and corrupt. Hence, the movement can partly be seen as a non-secular defiance of the existing order.

<sup>153</sup> Informants claim that there was a lack of understanding of the nature of such an "unauthorized version" or "non recognized version" of Christianity and the attraction of the youth towards it by the public at large and the government officials both at the local and national levels. The government feared that the Pentecostal movement had the possible effect of introducing *rebsha*, (unrest/instability), considering the situation that another political *rebsha* was already brewing amongst the youth in the university. Informants: Bedru, Solomon Kebede, Assegid and Abera.

<sup>154</sup> Informant: Bedru Hussien.

<sup>155</sup> In a document that shows such a reversal of decision concerning a group of evangelical Christians in the south who had been convicted of being criminals, the Chief Judges defined criminality and absolved the victims from alleged crimes and rebuked the local judges for their ignorance of an internationally accepted norm that religion is a matter of ones conscience. The judges specifically pointed out that the victims faith's association with the mission Christianity does not exclude them from enjoying the benefit

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of being Ethiopians and the protection of the law. *Blata Kifle Egziabher Yehedego* Supreme Chief Justice, December 12, 1959( see appendix section).

<sup>156</sup> Informants: Kebede, Yohannes, and Zeleqe. Shenk, *The Ethiopian Orthodox Church...*, pp.323-334. Shenk points the clergy assembly, the Synod in particular was vocal in expressing its opposition to the Pentecostal movement.

<sup>157</sup> Messay Kebede, *Survival and Modernization : Ethiopia's Enigmatic Present: A Philosophical Discourse* (Lawrenceville: The Red See Press), 1999, p. 255.

<sup>158</sup> Informant: Philipos.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Informant : Philipos. This was also confirmed by Kebede. According to Kebede, the Pentecostals made repeated efforts to dialogue with the leaders of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, particularly with *Qesis* Solomon but for no avail. The allusion, *tekesha yamymolu*, clearly shows that one dimension of the clash had to do issues of age and the associated cultural sensibilities. In a way, the clash between the Pentecostals and the clergy was also a result of the big dad's complex. In a society that goes by cultural prescriptions, it is the big daddy's task is to instruct and while the kid's job is to listen and obey. In the view of the clergy, the Pentecostals have no cultural, theological and institutional mandate to preach God's words.

<sup>161</sup> Informant: Bedru Hussien.

<sup>162</sup> Messay, p. 255. In essence, what Messay is saying is that the Orthodox Church did not learn much from all these encounters. I think recent developments indicate that the church is making major improvements because of the challenge of the Pentecostal movement. These changes may not affect its basic theology/ doctrine but approaches and philosophy on how to handle its diverse constituencies.

<sup>163</sup> Messai, p. 343. Messay's generalization that the deadlock of the Church was simply the impasse of the Ethiopian mind though true in principle is too much of an indictment of the national Church that leaves out many elements from the equation. This is a view strongly shared by Dr. Berhanu Abebe one of the Ethiopian historians who has the blessing of long life and closer knowledge of the dynamics of change in Ethiopia because of his long experience working within the key institutions of Haile Sellassie's government.

<sup>164</sup> Informant: Dr. Tilahun Mamo. This is also a view shared by Philipos. Philipos, in fact, gives the interpretation a theological spine by stating that, "the Almighty God raised a new generation of Christians to counter the challenge of atheism that was already there and that was to come." Informant: Philipos.

<sup>165</sup> Informant: Afework Kebede

<sup>166</sup> Endale G/ Meskel believes that if the Pentecostal had the benefit of reflection and somehow succeeded in integrating some of the traditions of the Orthodox Church, the tensions might have been mitigated, if not avoided. Informant: Endale G/ Meskel.

<sup>167</sup> For a partial explanation, see Fargher, "The Charismatic movement...", pp. 349-350.

<sup>168</sup> This is an opinion widely shared by pioneers of the Pentecostal movement. Informants : Solomon Kebede, Girma Tessema, Bedru Hussien, Assefa, Debebe and others.

<sup>169</sup> Informant: Doctor Tilahun Adera.

<sup>170</sup> Informants: Asseged, Abera, Bete, Seifu Kebede, and others.

<sup>171</sup> Gerlach, pp. 183-198.

<sup>172</sup> The issue of carving out a separate social, cultural and religious space, as new reference points, be it induced by persecution or because of the need to draw borders, seems to be a wide-spread phenomenon. For a perspective from Latino experience in the US see, Sanchez Walsh, *Latino Pentecostal Identity: Evangelical Faith, Self, and Society* (New York: Colombia University Press, 2003).

<sup>173</sup> Informants: Asseged, Evangelist Abere Darge, Meskerem Asefa, Evangelist Shiferaw Feisa, and Pastor Tekle Medhin Ketema.

<sup>174</sup> Informants: Tesfay Gabiso, Teshome Worku, Abera Darge, Assefa, Assayehegne Berhe, and others.

<sup>175</sup> Informants: Tamirat Haile, Tesfaye Gabiso and Debebe.

<sup>176</sup> See, "Persecution in Ethiopia," *Target*, 2, 25 (1972), p. 12; "Persecution in Ethiopia and Malawi," *Newsweek*, January 15, 1973; *The Ethiopian Herald* published material in defense of the action of the police raid and subsequent imprisonment *The Ethiopian Herald*, September 1, 1972, p. 1. By providing pictures of some of the imprisoned Pentecostals, *Logos Journal*, also reported on the existence of severe persecution in Ethiopia and appealed to the international communities for interventions. See,

"Persecution in Ethiopia," *Logos Journal*, May-June, 1973, pp. 12-16. The Norwegian bishops brought the matter to the attention of the World Council of Churches, though the leaders of the Council hesitated to take step because of the sensitivity of the subject. Eide, p. 62. What might have triggered the persecution is rapid expansion of the movement. A movement that started from a scratch in the early 1960's garnered followers to the tune of 4,000 by 1967, rising to 50, 000 at the commencement of the persecution. *Logos*, p.12; Nona Freeman, *Unseen Hands. The Story's of Revival in Ethiopia* (Hazle: World Aflame Press, 1988), p. 42; Balsvik observes that the Pentecostals claimed 15, 000 in the town by 1972 without being specific about the towns she was alluding to. The figure for 1972, according to Engelsviken, is any where between 20, 000 to 50, 000. By the year 1986, the number of the Pentecostals at least members of the *Mulu Wengel* was estimated to be 100, 000 which by 1993 rose to 150,000 by 1993. Haile Wolde Michael, "A Comparative Study of Leadership Development Methods with Reference to the Ethiopian Full Gospel Church," Ph. D. dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1993 p.201.

<sup>177</sup> The comment on the Pentecostal movement in Ethiopia appeared in the international version of the *Newsweek* magazine under, " Persecuting the Sect" on January 15,1973.

<sup>178</sup> *The Ethiopian Herald*, "Newsweek Report Unfounded," vol. XXIX, no. 630, 01-21-73, p.2.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Informants: Zelelem Tefera, Kassahun Mulat, Sisay, Asseged, Tesfahun Agidew, Tesfa Lidet, and others. According to informants, the young Pentecostals faced the dilemma of either continuing to meet in their chapels defying government orders or just dispersing. It became a thorny issue that almost caused split among them until Haile, now deceased, intervened and the case was settled in favor of the latter.

<sup>181</sup> Informants: Debebe , Zelalem Tefera, Sisay, Fikre, and Abera. It was not easy for most of the young Pentecostal Christians to adjust. There were some who moved from one church to another to find a home. Those who endured eventually demonstrated vigorous participation in the various services of the churches they joined such as in the choir and prayer services and as a result became influential venues for the expansion of Pentecostalism.

<sup>182</sup> Informants: Pastor Daniel Mekonen, Girma Tsige, Debebe , Zelalem Tefera , Fikre, and others.

<sup>183</sup> Fargher, p. 345. This is also a view shared by Bedru, a prominent church leader and one of the pioneers of the Pentecostal movement. See his, *Ye Ityopia Mule Wengel Amagnoch Bete Krestiyen*. February, 1985, p. 5.

<sup>184</sup> Informants, who played a strategic role in leading the church during the revolution, maintain that their generation was supernaturally prepared for the task ahead. The evangelical church, with its rural background and limited resources, could have had tremendous difficulties to overcome the challenges of the military government. Organizing underground churches and maintaining their operations required spiritual and intellectual abilities. Informants: Dr. Solomon Mulugeta and Dr. Melesachew Mesfin, Dr. Alem Bazezew, Tekeste Teklu, Abera, and others.

<sup>185</sup> Informants: Solomon Kebede, Solomon Mulugeta, and Bedru Hussein.

<sup>186</sup> Following the fall of Haile Sellassie, Ethiopia's political culture has changed twice-to communism and to ethnic pluralism. The encounter between religion and politics during these changed periods, in the broader sense, including universal religions ( Islam and Christianity) as well as the local ones, is a subject that needs critical inquiry.

<sup>187</sup> This a view advanced by many Pentecostal leaders in Ethiopia. Pentecostals firmly believe that God does not work apart from history, as he uses all circumstances to bring the message of salvation home to every one. Informants: Bete, Solomon Kebede, Abera, Tilahun and Berhanu Habte

<sup>188</sup> Richard Shaul, *Pentecostalism And the Future of the Churches: Promises, Limitations and Challenges* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication, 2000), pp. 21-32.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid, pp. 115-124; Aylward Shorter, *New Religious Movements in Africa* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2001), pp. 89-98. According to Paul Gifford, the preaching of faith Gospel with its stress on prosperity is also one of the major factors attracting to poor to the Pentecost faith. For further see, Paul Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role* ( Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 19980), pp.333-340.

<sup>190</sup> Peter Berger, *A Rumor of Angels*( New York: Anchor Books, 1990), p. 16.



<sup>191</sup> Informants: Getachew Regassa, Million Belete, and Dr. Solomon Mulugeta. The Pentecostal movement might have helped the poor to cope up with the challenges of poverty. However, unlike Pentecostals in countries such as Brazil, where the formation of solidarity groups and networking facilitated economic advancement, the Ethiopian Pentecostals did not seem to have exhibited similar tendencies. For the situation of Pentecostals in Latin America, see, Richard Shaul and Wado Cesar, *Pentecostalism and the Future of the Christian Church: Promises Limitations Challenges* (Grand Rapids: Eerdnabs Publishing Co. 2000).

<sup>192</sup> Haile Sellassie I, *My Life and Ethiopia's Progress, 1892-1937*: translated and annotated by Edward Ullendorff (London: 1976), p. 3; 69.

<sup>193</sup> Harold Marcus, *Haile Sellassie: The Formative Years, 1892-1936* ( Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p.57.

<sup>194</sup> This does not mean that the Emperor had not made some gestures to bring the National Church aboard but in general it appears that Haile Sellassie moved away from the Church and opted to use other institutional channels he has created like the Ministry of Education to advance modern education. For further see, Abebe Fisshea, " Education and the Formation of the Modern Ethiopian State, 1896-1974," Ph. D. dissertation, University of Illinois, 2000, pp.154-167.

<sup>195</sup> This was the view of a prominent Historian Dr. Berhanu Abebe. Informant: Berhanu Abebe.

<sup>196</sup> Balsvik, pp. 240-241.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Rickard, p. 56.

<sup>199</sup> Rickard picks and develops the concept based on its first application by Donald Levine in his groundbreaking book of *Wax and Gold* (Chicago, 1965). See Richard, pp. 22-32.

<sup>200</sup> Indrias Getachew, *Beyond the Throne: The Enduring Legacy of Emperor Haile Sellassie* (Addis Ababa: Shama Books, 2001), p.134.

<sup>201</sup> Robert L. Hess, *Ethiopia: The Modernization of Autocracy* ( New York: Cornell University Press, 1970), p. 75.

<sup>202</sup> For a mild version of this perspective see, V. H. Norberg, *Swedes in Haile Sellassie's Ethiopia, 1924-1952* Uppsala: SIAS, 1977), pp. 38-55. For a radical and overly critical view, see Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855-1974*(London: James Curry,1991), pp. 201-215. Overall, the envisioning and meaning of Haile Sellassie's modernization, its philosophical and political assumptions, purposes of the program and its accomplishment, still require critical investigation. The debate swing between Bahru Zewde's radical assessment of the Emperor's modernizing effort, which in his view, was bereft of any social purpose and Harold Marcus' critical yet sober analysis of the monarch's achievements which posits the view that, in spite of its contradictory nature his initiatives still mark progress. Messay Kebede blames the Emperor's modernization policy for its lack of vision to appreciate and enhance the rich cultural repertoire of the country and hence did more harm than good to the nation and the people.

<sup>203</sup> Donald Donham, *Marxist Modernity*( Berkeley: University of California, 1999), p. 94.

<sup>204</sup> Norberg, pp.276-277.

<sup>205</sup> John Markakis, *Ethiopia: Anatomy of a Traditional Polity* (Addis Ababa: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 359. John Markakis, who is critical of Haile Sellassie's regime, contends that the Emperor's modernization program did not focus on increasing the production of social values through the process of resource mobilization and massive investment and planned economic growth. Markakis, p. 335; For a similar view, see, Rickard, p. 48.

<sup>206</sup> Harold Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia* ( Berkeley: University of California, 2000), pp. 164-165. Markakis is poignant in stating that a monotonous similarity characterize most Ethiopian towns, its main characteristics being an air of vagrant shabbiness...public utilities are unknown in the smaller towns..', Markakis, p. 166; Bahru Zewde also points out that the Emperor's program of change through the country's modernization program was bereft of vision and as such did not do much by way of preparing the country for the future. See, Bahru, p. 202.

<sup>207</sup> Charles McClellan, *State Transformation and National Integration*(East Lansing: Michigan State University 1988), p.p. 4-5

<sup>208</sup> Messay, pp. 301-302.

<sup>209</sup> Harold Marcus, Foreword section of Indrias' *Beyond the Throne*, p.8

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<sup>210</sup> Patrick Gilkes, *The Dying Lion: Feudalism and Modernization in Ethiopia*. (London: 1975), p. 89; Charles McClellan also maintains the view that it was to counterbalance the feudal forces that the Emperor created a modern educated military and bureaucratic elite), McClellan, p. 5.

<sup>211</sup> Indraias Getachew, p. 149.

<sup>212</sup> According to Teshome Wagaw, at the inception of the national university, the public expressed concern and apprehension as to the manner of the creation and organization of the university and how it could effectively address Ethiopia's economic and cultural situation and herald national renewal and development. Teshome G. Wagaw, *The Development of Higher Education and Social Change: an Ethiopian Experience* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1990), p. 153.

<sup>213</sup> For more on this see, Daniel Lema, "Development of a Student Personnel Program for Ethiopia's National University to Meet the Needs of Ethiopia's Youth," Ph. D. dissertation, Michigan State University, 1976, pp. 1-59. This is an opinion strongly expressed by Dr. Taddesse Wolde Giorgis who sarcastically remarked that the university's education prepared him to be good at teaching in western universities rather than being useful to his country. Informant: Dr. Taddesse Wolde Giorgis.

<sup>214</sup> According to Alem Asres, Haile Sellassie's opening of Ethiopia's previously closed feudal structure to the infusion of external ideas posed a challenge to the youth and to himself. He observes, "As in any previously closed system, new ideas flowed in rapidly across a pressure gradient. Among those most affected were Ethiopia's new elite, especially young students, whose hungry minds and anxious bodies were most receptive to and demanding of change." Alem Asres, "History of the Ethiopian Student Movement: its impact on internal social change, 1960-1974," Ph. D. dissertation, University of Maryland College, 1990 pp. 173-174. Perhaps a concept that best captures the situation of the Ethiopian youth which was experiencing the pressures of new ideas and new thoughts coming from a variety of sources and directions (missionaries, modern education, peace corps, Marxism, movies, etc.) and how these forces affected their self-understanding and shaped their behavioral patterns and actions is "encounter." A senior essay by Gemechu Moreda partially addresses the issue. See, Gemechu Moreda, "Modernity and Its Challenge," Addis Ababa, MYS, May, 2000.

<sup>215</sup> For more see, Mulugeta Wodajo, "Postwar Reform in Ethiopian Education." *Comparative Education Review*, 2, 3 (1959), pp. 24-27.

<sup>216</sup> Daniel Lema, Abstract section unpagged and introductory remarks, pp.8-22.

<sup>217</sup> Rickard, p. 40. Rickard further notes that the youth in the 60's live in a torn world, their identities made up of inconsistent beliefs and attitudes. Concerning the impact of education on the formation of negative attitudes see, Negewo Beyene, "The Impact of University Education on the Formation of Political Attitudes: Sources of Negative Political attitudes of Ethiopian Students" Ph. D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1977.

<sup>218</sup> For further on this see, Alemayehu Mekonnen, "Effects of Culture Change on Leadership in the Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia," Ph.D. thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1995, p. 93. Informants: Dr. Taddesse W/Giorgis and Dr. Melaku Mekonen.

<sup>219</sup> Teshome Wagaw, pp.203-221

<sup>220</sup> The expansion of schools both elementary and secondary, which picked up pace in the 50's began to register impacts even in remote regions such as Gamu Gofa, Ilubabor and centers of traditional education such as Gojjam. Most of the pioneers of the Pentecostal movement came from the rural areas of the various provinces. For instance, Bete was from Gojjam, Teka Gebru was from Tigray, Philipos Kemere was from Sidamo. A study carried out in 1966, indicated that approximately 60 % of the students entering the university were under 25 years of age, the largest single group of students (38%) of them came from farms. The study also indicated that about 70% of the students received no support of any kind from home. Teshome, pp. 154-155.

<sup>221</sup> John Summerskill, *Haile Sellassie I University: A Blue Print for Development* (Addis Ababa: Haile Sellassie I University, 1970), p. 110. Balsvik, pp. 44-45.

<sup>222</sup> Here I am paraphrasing the views and observations of informants who were university students in the period under review who shared me their experiences of tensions and anxieties. Informants: Wubshet Dessalegne, Ayalew Teshome, Kebebew Daka, and others.

<sup>223</sup> Informants: Professor Yilma Tilahun, Professor Negussie Ayele, Dr. Daniel Lemma, and Dr. Haile Woldemikael.

<sup>224</sup> A study conducted in 1966 indicated that HSIU students from the mission background formed about 10 % of the student population. Teshome, p. 154. By the year 1968, HSIU students of mission

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background had grown to 15 %. Oyvindi Eide, *Revolution & Religion in Ethiopia; The Growth and Persecution of the Mekane Yesus Church, 1974-1985* ( Oxford: James Currey Press, 2000) , p.29.

<sup>225</sup> Informants: Ayalew, Wubshet, Temesgen Gobena, Syum Gebre Sellassie.

<sup>226</sup> Daniel, Abstract section (unpaged); Informants: Ayalew, Daniel, Wubshet, and Seyum Gebre Egziabher.

<sup>227</sup> Informants: Daniel Lemma, Dr. Muleta, Professor Negussie, and Desta Wedajo. See also Teshome Wagaw. pp. 209-221; Balsvik, pp. 138-140. Asres, pp. 78-80

<sup>228</sup> Among such people are distinguished scholars, university professors in Ethiopian and abroad. Some of them discontinued their education from the university and served as preachers of the gospel and completed university at a later time. Some have gone into the monasteries of Debre Libanos for a while and returned to start normal life. Informants: Daniel Lemma, Temesgien Gobena, Desta, Million Belete, Bete, and others.

<sup>229</sup> For instance, consider titles of articles, such as, "the hyphenated Ethiopian" that came out in *Addis Reporter* by Gadamu Abreha and Solomon Derresa; *Addis Reporter*, 1, 7, (Feb. 14, 1969), pp. 10-14. A quick survey of the views and opinions expressed in the student's magazine of HS I U in the 60's, such as, *News and Views*, also surface both the sense of anticipation and dilemmas of the time. For further, see *News and Views*, January 13, 1965, p. 8 ; March 3, 1966, p.2; May 1, 1966, p.8; (Institute of Ethiopian Studies). There are numerous materials on the modernization and its consequent problems in Ethiopia. The work that captures the problem at the earliest moment was by Girma Amare. See, Girma Amare, "Education and the Conflict of values in Ethiopia: A Study of Socio Moral Problems Arising out of the Introduction of Modern Education in Ethiopia," MA thesis, Southern Illinois University, 1964.

<sup>230</sup> Paulos, Milkias, " Traditional Institution and Traditional Elite," *African Studies Review*, XXI, 3 (December, 19760), p. 87.

<sup>231</sup> Simon D. Messing, "Changing Ethiopia," *The Middle East Journal*, 9, .4(1955), p.429. The process must have started earlier but it was ever intensified since the 60's and by the 70's for most educated Ethiopian religious dietary restrictions lost any serious meaning.

<sup>232</sup> Teshome, p. 156. According to Tehsome, "this rejection was then extended to include values, ideas, and beliefs of most authorities, including those in high positions in traditional religious and political situation." Tehsome, p. 156.

<sup>233</sup> Balsvik, p.48.

<sup>234</sup> Donald Levine, "Understanding Ethiopia Today: Some Observation of a Sociologist," A paper presented at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Convention of Ethiopian Student Association of North America, Washington D.C, September 9, 1961, p. 8.

<sup>235</sup> For more on the theme of alienation concerning the youth in Ethiopia, see, Desta Asayehgne, " Student Alienation: A Study of High School Students in Ethiopia," Ph. D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1977.

<sup>236</sup> According to informants, para-churches, especially youth centered activities including the SIM youth center, the Red See Mission and Youth for Christ, emerged in the late 50's. The distribution of the Bible also picked pace in the 50 and the 60's with the active encouragement of the Emperor and the advent of mission agencies such as the Gideons(beginning official work in 1970) whose main thrust was Bible distribution. Informants: Wubshet, Professor Seyoum G/ Sellassie, and Mesfin Lessanu.

<sup>237</sup> Emperor Haile Sellassie himself played an instrumental role in the printing and distribution of the Amharic Bible. He was the one who organized the corps of scholars from the BCMS, the EOC, and the Anglican Church, as the team to work on the first Amharic translation of the Bible. This is again an issue that needs to be seen in light of his modernization initiatives.

<sup>238</sup> A statement that was released by some members of the clergy in 1974 under the heading, *Yeteresa Mastawesha*, expresses lamentation at the fact that the youth is hearing the Bible from foreign agents who have crossed the see ( "*kebahir mado*") and accused the national church for failing to meet her call. It caricatures the church's radio program as "*Yesebeka teyater*" (a theater of rhetoric), and the role of the Patriarch as some one who appears(in the media) twice in a year just to give *Burake* (blessings with the Cross). See, *Ye Tarik Mastewesha*, File number 2396/0116, 1966, Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Amharic document section.

<sup>239</sup> Informants: Bete, Assefa, Zeleke, Abdela , and Asseged. The significance of this point can be appreciated given the fact that, excepting perhaps the devoted monks living in the monasteries, who read their Psalms (in fact the term used is *medegem*, repeated reading ) regularly, reading Scriptural materials,

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by and large, has not been a common/regular practice of the ordinary adherents of the Orthodox Church in Ethiopia. Though reading the Bible has increased due to the availability of the Bible, the same tendency is exhibited to this day. In contrast, Pentecostals are generally known for reading their Bible not only at church services but at home and where ever the situation allowed them. The larger public identifies the Pentecostals by the Bibles they carry with them.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid. The verses are found in Philippians 4: 13 and Romans 8: 37.

<sup>241</sup> Informants: Tamirat Haile, Yoseph Ayalew, Zeleke, Debebe, and others.

<sup>242</sup> Haile, "A Comparative Study of Leadership.." p. 177. According to Haile, the Bible became the most important book to be read daily, it was read discussed, studiously studied individually and corporately.

<sup>243</sup> Markakis makes a very interesting remark about the rise of student radicalism in the university. He notes that, "the social and political awakening of the Ethiopian students has been a spontaneous, self-accomplished process achieved in a situation of great isolation." Markakis, p.358. It is interesting to notice the striking parallel in the manner in which the Pentecostal movement also arose in Ethiopia.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid. p. 359; .Balsvik, pp.93-100. For a recent analysis of the coup of 1960 see, Harold Marcus, "1960, the year the Sky Began Falling on Haile Sellassie," *Journal of Northeast African Studies*, New Series, 6, 3 (1999), pp. 11-25.

<sup>245</sup> Asres, "History of the Ethiopian Student...", pp. 74-75.

<sup>246</sup> Ethiopian Pentecostals, for the most part, showed little interest in politics. They generally adopted a pacifist rather than an activist line. Though Pentecostalism has succeeded in embracing fine intellectuals of the country (from the field of social as well natural sciences, including many university professors at home and abroad), political voice is conspicuously absent from their discourse. This is unlike many countries in Africa, Ghana for instance, which has produced Pentecostal like Mensa Anamuah Otabil, whose political articulation approached an African version of liberation theology. See, Emmanuel Kingsley Larbi, *Pentecostalism: The Eddies of the Ghanaian Christianity* (Accra :SAPC Series, 2001), pp. 235-366. In my field research, I noticed that the young generation of Pentecostals in Ethiopia are showing an unusual interest in social and political activism.

<sup>247</sup> Informant: Professor Legesse Watero, Astrophysicist, currently teaching in the AAU, Faculty of Science.

<sup>248</sup> According to Shimelis Mazengia, members of the young generation of the 60's who took separate paths, one the religious and the other the political, essentially were of the same specious both were driven by idealism and a sense of mission. He makes the case that they both arose from the same conflictual situation and encounters both in the political and religious arenas that obtained in Ethiopia in the 60's. Informant: Shimeles Mazengia.

<sup>249</sup> Girma Amare pointed out that the church was a strong base and source of strength for many Ethiopians in the past, but has increasingly failed to be so for the emerging youth. On the contrary, unable to move with the time and adjust its teachings to changing conditions, it has become an object of bitter attack by its "enlightened" children. Amare Girma, "Need for Strong Convictions in the Student Body," *News and Views*, April 30, 1966, p. 16. In fact, most of those who turned their backs against religion and became fervent apostles of communism, were mostly men and women who had been ardent Orthodox Christians, and to a degree active members of the Catholic and evangelical faiths. For instance, Tselote, an activist of the student movement who later became a key leader of EPRP, was a committed Orthodox Christian; Tesfaye Debessai, a Catholic, who was to be ordained as priest, was also one of the key leaders of the EPRP; so was Dr Nega Ayele, an EPRP member, killed by the *Derg*, who as a student in the Harar TTI, had strong evangelical Christian commitment; Simon Galore, a former student activist and who later became a prominent government official of the *Derg*, and a Politburo member of the Workers Party, was an evangelical whose father was a well-known preacher in the south; Dr. Haile Fida,(later killed by the *Derg*), the leading figure of the MESON Party, came from a strong evangelical tradition( he even taught at a Mennonite mission school), Esubalew, a radical student who was running the candidacy for USUAA, was a student from the College of Theology of the Orthodox Church, and Dr. Senay Like, who also came from an evangelical background.

<sup>250</sup> Their claim of righteousness is based on Romans 3:22, which says, "Righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe;" and Ephesians 2:8, which reads, "For it is by grace you have been saved through faith-and this not from yourselves. It is the gift of God, not by works so that no one can boast."

<sup>251</sup> Paul Gifford, *African Christianity : Its Public Role*, p. 329.

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<sup>252</sup> It has to be emphasized that the Pentecostal movement arose out of encounter-situations resulting from a congruence of several happenings, the increasing presence of foreign communities, be it missionaries, the peace corpse or other foreign agencies bringing new ideas, urbanization and its dislocating influence, the rise of modern institutions, changing ethos and ways of life, etc., expressed in different ways. One has to put the rise of the movement within the context of the encounters between traditional pattern of belief system/practices and the new ones coming from the west, through human agencies or the vehicles of literature, and radio programs and the sparks that these encounters might possibly generate.

<sup>253</sup> The three "Self" principles advanced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by leaders of the missionary movement in England and US had been popular in the 60's in Africa in tandem with the mood of independence. The Ethiopian Pentecostal could have picked it from the literature. According to Girma Tessema, one of the original leading members of the movement, the Swedish Pentecostal missionaries, in fact, gave lessons on the three "Self." Informant: Girma Tessema. Though its indigeneity could hardly be denied, using the term "independent" raises some problems in the Ethiopian context. The movement was independent, in the sense that it was self-initiated and self-instituted and self-sustained. Otherwise, its application in the sense that it broke away from a given established institution, as most so-called independent churches did, could be a bit misleading.

<sup>254</sup> Informants: Bete, Girma, Tesfahun, Assefa, Yoseph Imana, and others.

<sup>255</sup> Members of the new generation raised by modern education and exposed to critical thinking, questioned accepted codes, ethos and practices of their religion and found no satisfactory explanation to uphold and comply with them strictly. Informants: Dr Berhanu Abebe, Wubshet, Ayalew, and Shiferaw Wolde Michael.

<sup>256</sup> This is an opinion strongly expressed by Wubshet a prominent church leader and a man of extensive public service in the Ethiopian government and a student of HS I University in the early 60's, and Captain Ayele, also a man of distinguished government service who had been in charge of the Imperial Naval Academy. Informants: Wubshet and Captain Ayele Zewde.

<sup>257</sup> In many higher learning institutions the *Haymanote Abew* Christian groups and those identifying either with Pentecostals or the evangelicals, represented two poles competing to win the attention of the fellow students. The tensions resulting from this keen competition, often led to acrimonious relations characterized by bickering, blackmailing and character assassinations. The Pentecostal viewed member of the *Haimanote Abew* group as conservative, while the *Haymanote Abew* saw the former as stooges of foreign missions. Informants: Dr. Melaku Mekonen, Captain Yohannes, Solomon Kebede.

<sup>258</sup> This was a statement made by one of the key players of the *Haymanote Abew* movement and who joined the Pentecostal group in 1970, as a freshman student and later became one of the prominent leaders of the Mulu Wengel Pentecostal church. Informant: Dr. Alem Bazezew.

<sup>259</sup> The Pentecostal movement in Ethiopia can also be viewed as a restorationist movement. The appellation *Tintawi*, is strongly indicative of the youth's desire to restore an idealized past as was exemplified by the communities of Christians the Bible describes in the book of Acts.

<sup>260</sup> Informants: Melaku, Yohannes, and Solomon Kebede.

<sup>261</sup> This is an observation that has been reiterated by informants who participated in the early phase of the Pentecostal movements. Informants: Solomon, Bete, Assefa, Zeleke and others.

<sup>262</sup> I have pointed out the conceptual problem involved in making use of the term "independence" as is often used in the larger framework in African Christianity. What cannot be doubted is that the Pentecostal movement in Ethiopia gave a considerable impetus and inspiration for leaders of local churches from mission backgrounds to initiate bold moves to indigenize their leadership and liturgy, a process which started prior to 1974, and reached maturity in the period of the revolution.

<sup>263</sup> Informants: Bete, Solomon, Zeleke, Assefa, Bedru and others.

<sup>264</sup> According to Paulos Milkias, post-war generation of students and bureaucratic elite were beginning to take the view that "being a Christian without being an Ethiopian Orthodox, professing no allegiance to any religious denomination, being indifferent or questioning the essence of all religious dogma" as something normal. Paulos Milkias, "Traditional Institutions and Traditional Elites: The Role of Education in the Ethiopian Body Politics," *African Studies Review*, XIX, 3(December 1976), p.88.

<sup>265</sup> The main recipients of the evangelical Christian faith had mainly been the Oromo people of southwestern Ethiopia and the diverse ethno-linguistic communities of south. Many Evangelical Christians agree that it was the Pentecostals, who either as volunteers (government employees working in line



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ministries, school teachers, etc) or local missionaries, spread the evangelical faith to many parts of Ethiopia thus turning it into a potent national faith embraced by millions followers from varied groups in Ethiopia.

<sup>266</sup> Concepts like, “Pentecostalization” and “Charismatization” are beginning to appear in some theological circles. The term “Charismatic Renewal,” is a more fitting to describe the spread of the new spiritual waves in established churches that are not Pentecostal doctrinally. According to Peter Hocken, a Roman Catholic Scholar, Charismatic Renewal refers to the “occurrence of distinctively Pentecostal blessing and phenomena, baptism in the Holy Spirit with the spiritual gifts... outside the denominational and /or confessional Pentecostal framework.” Peter Hockman, “Charismatic Movement,” in Stanley Burges, *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movement* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), p. 130.

<sup>267</sup> Ethiopian Pentecostals had in the past tended to exhibit a life of holiness, which according to their perception, meant to be set apart, as they understood it from their readings of the Bible by abstaining themselves from what they considered is “worldly,” example, drinking, smoking, promiscuous relations, etc. They also reinvented the culture in the areas of wedding events, greetings styles, funeral ceremonies, moral conducts, prayer life, social interactions, etc, that to a degree, set them apart as distinct communities.

<sup>268</sup> Informants: Bete, Zeleke, Solomon, Bedru, Assefa, and Dr. Tilahun Maomo.

<sup>269</sup> Engelsviken, p. 5. Historians who view the history of Christianity from a theological perspective, insist that the history of Christianity reveals a perplexing mixture of divine and human factors. This perspective has been summarized by Richard Lovelace, who observed, “.. this history when viewed without the proper awareness of the spiritual forces involved is as confusing as a football game in which half of the players are invisible.” Richard F Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Renewal Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downes: 1979), p. 87.

<sup>270</sup> The postulate that new religious movement emerge as an answer to social deprivation or anomie had long been challenged by distinguished scholars of religious studies. John Peel for instance, states that factors related to crisis situation may contribute to the emergence of new religious movements but offer “too easy as an automatic and knock down explanation of very complex phenomena.” P.J.D Peel, *Aladura a religious movement among the Yoruba* (London Int. African Studies, 1968), p. 6.

<sup>271</sup> Harold Turner, *Religious Innovations in Africa* ( Boston: G.K. Hall, 1979), p. 19. For an overall discussion and assessment of such views see, Allan H. Anderson, *African Reformation: African Initiated Christianity in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (Trenton: Africa World Press, Inc. 2001), pp. 3-39.

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## **Chapter V**

### **The Evangelical Church and the State**

#### ***Behind the Scene: The 1974 Revolution***

In 1974, the new military rulers seized power after deposing Haile Sellassie, the last imperial monarch from the Solomonic Dynasty. What partly made it possible for the military rulers to rise to power was the initial popular backing they received from peasants in the rural areas and the working class, mainly concentrated in the urban centers. They also received guarded support from the enlightened sectors of society whose languages and slogans they so rapidly appropriated. The country also had unresolved historical and structural problems related to issues such as ethnicity, land and justice and the monarchical rule that had not been responsive to the incessant pleas for reforms from many Ethiopians, particularly the intelligentsia.

The Emperor made gestures towards reform in the 40's and 50's, which received considerable applause from many scholars, and, as a result, many in the international community dubbed him "progressive." No doubt, more than any ruler in Ethiopian history, he introduced modern administrative institutions, expanded educational services, and opened his country to the modern world. His zeal for change, however, waned in the 60's and early 70's, the crucial decades before his final denouement. In fact his over-centralization of power has alienated him from the provincial nobilities, the army and the national Church.

The military made the first unsuccessful attempt to overthrow Emperor Haile Sellassie in 1960. The brainchild of the abortive coup was a radical with a Marxist

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leaning, Germaine Neway. The coup was a failure, but terribly shook the Monarch's image of apparent invincibility, and opened the road for a litany of social and political protests in the ensuing years. Threatening as it was, the Emperor hardened his position in spite of the wake up call. As Harold Marcus put it: "He asserted with uncharacteristic feistiness that there will be no change in the system of government or in government's program."<sup>1</sup> Haile Sellassie missed the loud signal of the coup for expedient action. Even trusted men, who held distinguished positions in his administration, repeatedly alerted him to the grave consequences of his inaction and his procrastination. Berhanou Dinke, Ambassador to the United States from 1961-1965, resigned his post when the Emperor ignored his incessant plea for making changes by challenging him to relinquish his outmoded conception of divine right.<sup>2</sup> Advisers told the Emperor that unless he rapidly introduced much needed reforms, the embers of discontent would burst and debilitate the foundation of his rule. Yet, he did not seem to have the wisdom to appreciate the weight of the serious warning blinded by age and his insulated position.

The abortive coup of 1960 had more far-reaching consequences, more than the Emperor Haile Sellassie had realized. The emerging elite saw the leaders of the coup as martyrs. The emperor did not pay attention to the agitated spirit of the intelligentsia, university students in particular. In the absence of open space elsewhere in the society, where expressions of discontent were channeled and new ideas were debated and tested in an organized fashion, centers of higher education, particularly the university, became the locus of political activities. It was in this setting that the students viewed themselves as the conscience of the nation and began to press for reforms under their rallying slogan, "Land to the Tiller."<sup>3</sup> The emperor did not need to consult his advisors to read what was

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Haile Sellassie mistakenly dismissed the rising clamor of discontented voices and the alarmist views of his advisers. He considered them the outlandish murmurings of the restless, impatient and inexperienced people. Haile Sellassie's problem was that he saw him self as a Pater Patrae, the father figure of the nation, "All the people in his realm were his children, and as the father, he knew what was best for his children. In return for his benevolent paternalism, he demanded loyalty and filial obedience."<sup>4</sup> The Emperor lost sight of the fact that, "the empire was too modern, and therefore, too complex for one man to govern."<sup>5</sup> Following the coup, students began expressing their anger, frustration and dismay in a variety of ways. These should have served as a cautionary flag for the Emperor to address the issues, which precipitated the failed coup and later were at the forefront of the student's concerns. The absence of response, at least in the manner of introducing a modified and liberal constitutional monarchy, an inexpensive concession by any standard, increased the simmering resentment and radicalized the voices of discontent and protest in the late 60's and early 70's.

Scholars have viewed the Ethiopian revolution from multiple perspectives: class, ethnic, economic, institutional, etc. Most of our perceptions of the revolution have been influenced by radical leftist analysis, which has heavily stressed institutional/structural and economic forces. Resulting from that, the key factor has been substantially glossed over. Historians and political scientists need to more closely scrutinize the history of the student movement particularly, the rising intellectual culture, in order to gain insight as to what actually brought about the fall of Haile Sellassie.<sup>6</sup>

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I fully concur with the view of Teshome Wagaw, a scholar of education, who claims that more than any other forces; the activities of students in higher education were the most crucial factor in the demise of the monarchy.<sup>7</sup> In tracing the beginning of social and political unrest among university students, the immediate years that followed the attempted coup marked a watershed. Student agitation, prior to that, had either been grievances expressed in religious terms against the Jesuits who held influential administrative and faculty positions in Haile Sellassie I university, or had been centered on localized campus issues. Over the years, other mild voices with political overtones, asking for constitutional reforms, were heard. Even then, liberal arts, was the dominant motif. By 1968, the scale tipped in favor of revolutionary rhetoric and dominant radical voice that demanded a total overhauling of the system.

The most important concerns for the generation of university students in the 50's were nation building, professional excellence and deference (expressing indebtedness) to the emperor, in that order. Politics was not their agenda, though it is hard to say, the students were not apolitical.<sup>8</sup> In the early 60's, there was a growing interest expressed by university students in social involvement, such as welfare activities and in entertaining the idea of constitutional monarchy and a desire to see the political system to shift in that direction. Ethiopianism, however vague, was the guiding motto. The position of university students shifted radically by 1969 as they began to raise broader structural issues such as land reform and questions of nationalities, and the democratization of the political system.

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There were several things contributing to these shifts. One significant element accounting for the rising radicalism was the African factor. According to some sources, starting in 1958, Haile Sellassie had provided close to 200 scholarships to students from various African countries to attend the National University.<sup>9</sup> Having experienced colonial administration, they were much more politically aware than their Ethiopian counterpart. Through their verbal and written interactions with Ethiopian students, they transmitted radical political philosophies, arising from debates on de-colonization and anti-colonial discourses, which found receptive ears among some of the student constituency that came from non- dominant ethnic backgrounds. Some of these young students re-interpreted the political thoughts their Africans friends were sharing to apply these concepts to their own local situations. Informants who belonged to that generation recollect that the Africans were instrumental in politicizing the Ethiopian University students.<sup>10</sup> This is also supported by a research report prepared in 1966 by Sandra Rickard. According to Rickard, “these visiting students were instrumental in leading the cause of political freedom and in demonstrating methods of political organization.”<sup>11</sup>

Another important development of considerable significance was the spread of Marxist literature through the cultural and educational offices of the embassies of communist countries, mainly the Soviet Union, whose influence had been growing since 1956, and Czechoslovakia. Such writings took hold of the minds of the young generation extremely rapidly.<sup>12</sup> This was the age of the cold war, where the battle for the minds and hearts of the youth of the Third World countries was raging in a subtle manner. There was a highly agitated intellectual climate. Instrumental to the expansion of radical Marxist thought was a group known as the Crocodiles, established by student radicals in

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1964.<sup>13</sup> Little is known about the history of the group and its overall “agenda,” for it was a secretive organization, with its membership being strictly based on dedication to its “cause.”<sup>14</sup> Sandra Richard, who visited the National University in 1966, observed that the crocodiles represent communist organizations, “who are apparently receiving support from either the Yugoslavian or Czechoslovakian government or both.”<sup>15</sup> Most informants, who were contemporaries of the group, also confirm that members of the ‘crocs’ were very sneaky and secretive and seemed to have a hidden agenda, and they became the key players behind the activities of the student movements.<sup>16</sup>

The roots of Marxism and how an ideology so alien to the mental constitution of the Ethiopians had such a powerful sway and the mechanisms and conditions of its spread, intriguing as it is, is little studied. An important background factor, however, was the religious alienation of the youth and the rapid growth of educational institutions, which bred a relatively more informed generation exposed to new thoughts.<sup>17</sup> Added to that is, the social and academic stress that estrangement and the strain of rigorous education brought, which partially fostered a rebellious spirit that made them easy prey and highly susceptible to radical ideas. We do not know for certain why Marxism had been embraced as an unchallengeable truth and why it was so much lionized by the Ethiopian students of the late 60’s. According to Dawit Wolde Giorgis, Marxism was seen as a panacea for the country’s ills. Marxism promised scientific technological progress, i.e., modernization with a perfect community, the overcoming of divisions such as class, ethnic group, religion, gender, etc. “In a country as diverse as and non-homogenous and as backward as Ethiopia, this was fascinating. No wonder that many Ethiopians became followers of socialism.”<sup>18</sup> Books dealing with Marxism were read voraciously and were

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revered like the Bible. Ethiopian youth might not have fully grasped its deep philosophical underpinnings, but “That was beside the point. They were obsessed by it. Most accepted it as true even before they read about it...They were not seeking to establish truth. It was there already.”<sup>19</sup> The value void matrix generated by displacement of familiar constitutive norms, had to be filled by an ideology that had been absorbed with a religious zeal. This was well in accord with the old adage that says nature abhors a vacuum.

The Ethiopian youth’s embrace of Marxism did not stem from an inherited intellectual background or through a well-developed scientific and philosophical tradition that fostered revolutionary radicalism. Such a historical experience had not previously existed. What led the emerging elite to fall captive to a foreign ideology was mere indignation at a system that was impervious to change, the plight of the poor and lack of exposure to other alternative discourses. The youthful anticipation of the possibility of making a new society, the inclusive and de-tribalizing nature of Marxism, and its promise of an all-encompassing solution were also strong attractions. Perhaps, added to this was the weakness of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in not developing innovative approaches to partially contain the spirit of restlessness that modernization was causing among the youth.<sup>20</sup> In the opinions of prominent scholars who were either students or teachers in the universities in the late 50’ and early 60’s, the Orthodox Church failed the young generation by not providing them with practical resources, spiritual or social guideposts, by which they could accommodate the challenges of secularization and modernization processes.<sup>21</sup>

Mekonnen Bishaw, a former leader of the student movement in the University observed

Most of us came with our own traditional faith whose core values we had not fully grasped and internalized. What ever was in our hands, we carried it around by going to some Orthodox churches near Sedest Kilo. The university environment was a complex one for most of us coming from the rural areas. We were bombarded with new ideas that challenged our faith and no one had prepared us for the challenge, and we had little resources in our disposal to withstand it, as a result, each of us responded to the challenge in ways we deemed fitting.<sup>22</sup>

One must not fault the Church wholly, for it lost its authority, moral and spiritual, over the youth as a result of the expansion of modern education. On the corner was the equally assertive and authoritative voice of Marxism, whose newness and rebellious element matched with the temper of the youth caught between the “glorious” reality of their past, the challenge of the present and their dreams for the future.<sup>23</sup>

Marxism was a rejection of one’s tradition, and in the context of Ethiopia, it was mainly a rejection of the religious tradition of Orthodox Christianity, which was the dominant form of faith in the nation. The Ethiopian youth could not be satisfied with what their tradition had bequeathed them, they wanted more and yet had few options. Hence, when existing resources could not quench their craving, they looked for “something else.” That something else came either in the form of Marxism or newer forms of expressions of religious faith.<sup>24</sup> For the most part except for a few “diehards,” most of the young students in the university were easily drawn into a myth that appeared to promise much.<sup>25</sup> Since the Ethiopian youth had been one of the major conduits of new ideas, once Marxism was embraced, it rapidly expanded, much like a domino effect.<sup>26</sup>

The appeal of Marxism to the youth was it provided them with a worldview or a philosophical outlook. The Ethiopian youth were primarily concerned with promoting broader societal change, be it political, religious, or cultural. As the youth viewed



Ethiopia through their new lens, they saw a contradiction between the glamorized image and the hard reality. A former student leader, as well as a former member of the Politburo of the *Derg*, noted, "...the classical image of Ethiopia, the Ethiopia that books and our fathers told us about seemed to have some fatal error in our perception and that deeply constrained us. We could see the paradox of being a great nation. Something needed to be fixed very quickly. That was the motivation of the generation."<sup>27</sup>

Getachew Belete provides an interesting insight as to the causes of the Ethiopian Revolution. He argues that the locus of the revolution lies in the University campus and he relates it with the grievances that the HSIU students had with the Canadian Jesuit administrators and instructors. Though it is not clear why the Emperor recruited the Jesuits to assume such influential positions in the National University, he might have been attracted by their strong tradition of committed scholarship and their disciplined life, which he might have desired to impart upon the Ethiopian students.<sup>28</sup> The Jesuits, however, did not impress a welcome image among the young students who looked upon them distrustfully for historical and religious reasons. Those grievances had a hidden transcript, which was mostly expressed by leaders of the Haymanote Abew Christian group of the Orthodox Church who held deep resentments and suspicions towards the Catholic faith. The African students attending the university also stirred up Ethiopian students by presenting the Jesuits as representative of neocolonialist forces. Informants who were contemporaneous to this development concur that at a fundamental level the grievances of the students was religious. What began as an expression of religious grievance slowly transmogrified into social and then political protests that, ended up questioning the legitimacy of the entire system, not just its sub-elements.<sup>29</sup>

A sound historical evaluation of the connections between this subjective factors and the Ethiopian Revolution still awaits a well-nuanced study that takes into account the exceptionally open years of the 60's. For the purpose of this work, it can be said that the socio-psychological displacement wrought due to the ill planned process of modernization was a major condition for the creation of social rebels, who soon easily transformed into political rebels. The unresponsive nature of the establishment and the absence of a benign guiding hand exerting restraints on disruptive influences fostered the rebellion. This, undoubtedly, was compounded by a growing sense of frustration that stemmed from the social, economic and political stagnation of the country.

#### ***Modern Education and Its Discontents:***

Haile Sellassie promoted the expansion of higher education in Ethiopia in the post-war years at amazing pace. In less than two decades major institutions of higher education, including the HSIU, mushroomed in Addis Ababa, Harar and Jimma as well as in other areas. Higher education drew young students from their villages and brought them into a new social setting where, more often than not, books and ideas rather than inherited wisdom became their guideposts and their referees. The purpose of education was to create an elite, loyal to the Emperor and to the institutions he was building, particularly the expanding bureaucracy. Haile Sellassie hoped to create a new cadre of professionals who would easily join his state machinery and thereby reduce his dependence on the traditional forces whose power he was tactically undermining. Ironically, the fulfillment of his dream became his nemesis. As Andargachew Tiruneh argues, "...though the new elite was the product of the modernizing drive of the

monarchy....the allegiance of that class was no longer to the traditional institutions of the country but to *European ideologies and political processes*. ” <sup>30</sup>(emphasis mine). In doing so, the Emperor lost at the same time his former power base, and the confidence of his new recruits, who proved to be unreliable allies.

The process of attracting the able youth from their rural villages and inserting them into the national education system, left the masses dis-empowered, for there was not a well-thought system set up to reintegrate the new elite into the society from which they came promote development and spark enlightenment. Haile Sellassie also failed to provide new core values of nationalism that required a new framework, as distinct from the traditional warrior-like model, to a new breed of Ethiopians. Perhaps, it was implicitly in his educational program, but conspicuously missing in practical terms.<sup>31</sup> So the great divorce between the past and the present, between the traditional and the modern, between the rural and the urban continued as the reconnecting mechanisms and creative social bridges were not formed. Halile Woldemikael, a noted scholar observed, “ In fact, the system of education tends to produce people who are more and more divorced from the material and cultural life of their own people, but who are better integrated with technologically advanced societies.”<sup>32</sup>

Long before the emergence of radical envisioning of change, keen observers had seen the dangers and consequences of such a skewed philosophy of education as early as 1951, although coming from a different perspective:

It is very easy for an educational program to develop ahead of the general development of the country. This happens because it is much easier to raise the level of the educational standards in a nation than it is to raise the level of living standards and the general conditions of its people. This condition will cause the complete breakdown and downfall of the country in the future if not corrected timely.<sup>33</sup>

Modern education doubly disadvantaged the youth. Not only did it become a source of alienation, but it also provided the lens to look upon their traditional values as obsolete stumbling blocks to change and modernity. The most radical outgrowth of this is the intelligentsia's uncritical imagining of their society as "feudal" and hence their call for its dismantling. Though some aspects of feudal type of relations existed in some portions of Ethiopia, the term feudal is a misnomer for imperial autocracy and a hierarchical political structure. But the radical elite of the generation influenced by Marxism, a Euro-centric philosophy, continued to dub the society as feudal despite the fact that Haile Sellassie had already created a modern centralized institution based on the western nation state that rendered its use unnecessary. This rejectionist attitude permeated virtually all sectors of the youth and had the far-reaching consequence of equating traditionality, with backwardness, hence the imperative to jettison it. Before the deposition of the monarchy, the students had already developed an alternative vision of a new Ethiopia. In their search for a macro historical model, they found Marxism, which bred a new social myth as opposed to the passé, "Solomonic" myth. It also lent to the youth the illusion that it would provide a shortcut route to lift the country from its backwardness. The students perceived that it would allow them to act more authoritatively and autonomously in reshaping their society. In short; it held the key, the new magical spell, to create a brand new society. Marxism provided the venue as well as the organizing principle to exorcise backwardness and offered the script to establishing a new society. Marxism captured recruits from this displaced and disgruntled generation of students that found itself in the new social space, created by modern education and its paraphernalia. Lying outside the value matrix that nurtured them, uncertain about the new values that secular education

was providing, they became restive and reacted in different ways, some mildly and others vociferously.

In the late 50 and early 60's, there were individuals who, feeling unhappy about the contradictions they saw between their mystical past and the impoverished economy and reality of Ethiopia, vindictively left the university to be agents of change in the rural areas. Yet, they lacked an articulated philosophy and none of them embraced an overarching ideology to frame their perspective. There were some who wanted to engage in social services or welfare programs such as literacy campaigns, to initiate more widespread changes in society. Others were religiously inspired and sought to bring about changes within the established church, with the belief that changing the church was a vital condition for changing the society.<sup>34</sup>

The perplexing condition of the youth in the 60's was summarized by Mezgebe Abate, "The youth is on the crossroad confused as a result of the invasion of ideas without some one filtering for them, without a watchman (*agafari*) that would interpret and appropriately channel ideas coming from every direction, east and west, lamentably, the youth had no guidepost as to which way to go."<sup>35</sup> These were energies wanting to be channeled creatively. Gradually, however, a new voice appeared that was saying national redemption only comes by systemic changes, hence their call for a revolution."<sup>36</sup>

I would not consider members of the armed forces who overthrew Haile Sellassie as different species just because they wore uniforms. They were not spectators to the country's developments cut off from the emerging political ideas and visions affecting the youth. They were not just men in uniform, who had been lurking in the background and jumped at the opportune time to seize the moment. There had been generational,

ethnic, regional, ideational and friendly ties with the students formed at various institutions through a process of social osmosis that include various informal connections at different levels. Members of the armed forces, therefore, felt justified to arrogate themselves the task of becoming the conscience of the nation. They picked the concerns, visions, and vocabularies of the student radicals and acted on them.<sup>37</sup> In fact, during the outbreak of the revolution, some leading members of the *Derg*, the term used to designate the Coordinating Committee of the Armed Forces, Police and Territorial Army, were university students, enrolled in either the regular or extension programs.

There are a number of insightful works done by Ethiopian and expatriate scholars concerning the nature of the Revolution, its history, progress and trajectories.<sup>38</sup> Some have emphasized the structural approach (Halliday, Ottwa, etc.), while others place the stress on political transformation (Clapham). To entertain further discussion on the subject would be to belabor the obvious.

The main reason for going this far is to provide the background for my material as well as share my perspective with respect to the pivotal role played by what I would like to describe as the “critical minority,” preferably the “critical yeast,” of the “subjective factor,” particularly the students of the institutions of higher learning and the intelligentsia that came out of it. The genesis of the Ethiopian Revolution, its historical locale, is found in this sector of Ethiopian society. Despite its numerical insignificance in relation to the size of the population, the political impact of the new elite was striking. Any critical examination of the revolution should take this factor into serious account.

### ***The Coming of the Derg:***

The deposition of the last monarch from the Solomonic line was a slow one. The military adopted a strategic policy of slowly killing the system while it was alive. After the February uprising of 1974, the military stepped in the vacuum to spearhead a popular movement. The image they gave to the aged Emperor, initially, was one of guardians rather than usurpers. Without assuming official state power, they began to arrest ministers, provincial governors and top ranking officers. Haile Sellassie succumbed to the pressure of the *Derg* when he accepted the resignation of his long time Prime Minister, Aklilu Habte on February 28, 1974.<sup>39</sup> The Emperor's ability to act adroitly was clouded both by senility and his long harbored paternalism. Martha Gabre Tsadiq, a confidant and a former MP, warned the Emperor that his demise was imminent unless he intervened quickly and skillfully. His response was, "Martha, you are acting like a worrisome woman, are you not? You fret when there is no need. We have raised these men from childhood, they won't harm their country nor us." This was, of course, a very demeaning and lamentable response, as the Emperor could not appreciate the weight of Martha's concern. With the same paternalistic over confidence, he told her that this was only a woman's hysteria and the soldiers were not going to put their father to shame.<sup>40</sup> The *Derg* members were emboldened by the Emperor's silence and continued to move cautiously strengthening their position.

The *Derg*, then adopted a gradualist approach of dismantling the age old monarchy, first by dissolving the edifice of is financial institutions, followed by massive political campaigns directed against the Emperor, and then removing him from the picture altogether, once the public had been readied. After tactically eliminating the Emperor's

political and economic base, the military quickly dropped their pretense of loyalty to the king and deposed him on September 12, 1974. Such was the nature of the “creeping coup” that put an end to the age-old system of monarchical form of government in Ethiopia.

The officers took no time to hastily organize a Committee, named, Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC), through which they formally took state power. The *Derg* elected General Aman Andom, a hero of the Ethio-Somali (The Ogaden war as is commonly known) of 1963, and a legendary figure among the army and civilians alike, as the new head of the government. His leadership was short-lived. He and prominent members of the old cabinet were systematically eliminated in a cold-blooded manner on November 22, 1974. This bloody event, which seemed to signal the *Derg*'s commitment to uprooting the system, in keeping with the philosophy of the end justifies the means, turned them members into overnight revolutionary heroes.

As has been put succinctly by Donald Donham, “In doing so, the soldiers had come to see themselves in a fundamentally new way. With ghosts of Mao, Lenin, and Robespierre, in the wings, they had become revolutionaries acting on a world stage-dreamers of ‘progress’ rational designers of a new Ethiopia.”<sup>41</sup> The execution of 60 prominent figures of the Ancien Regime in November 1974 was the defining moment for the *Derg*. It truly revealed the nature of the new Ethiopian rulers. The terrible action spoke both for the past and for the future, the expensive character of the military's punitive measures.

The *Derg*, being an amorphous group coming from different military factions did not develop a well-articulated revolutionary philosophy. Their initial ideological



statement was expressed in terms of *Ityopia Tiqdem*, with a subtitle: *Yale Menem Dem*, (literally, Ethiopia First, without any bloodshed). The motto obviously was devoid of any reference to Marxism. In fact, in its broader sense, it even appeared to regard foreign ideologies with disdain. This was the leading slogan with which the *Derg* members presented themselves to the Ethiopians since the proclamation of the Provisional Military Administrative Council in 1974. *Ityopia Tiqdem* was a soft, diffuse and amorphous ideology that left a lot of room for interpretation. It might have originated from enlightened radicals like Michael Imiru.<sup>42</sup> In a later declaration, the *Derg* also announced the initiation of a new ideology, termed as *Ye Ityopia Hebrete sebawinet*, (Ethiopian Socialism), a derivative and improved version of the slogan, *Ityopia Tiqdem*.<sup>43</sup> Like *Ityopia Tiqdem*, this too was a vague ideology, which resembles more of communalism, rather than of communism. Its main tenets were: equality, dignity of labor, common good and nationalism. The new guideline, which was a coupling of a homespun socialism and Ethiopian nationalism, publicly revealed at least the new regime's leaning towards the left. Following this, further articulation was lent to *Hebrete sebawinet* when on December 20, 1974, the new rulers proclaimed "scientific socialism" to be the guiding ideology of the Ethiopian Revolution.

Undergirded by this vague ideology, the new leaders began to take drastic actions such as the nationalization of government institutions (January 1, 1975), major private enterprises (February 3, 1975), land reform (March 4, 1975), and nationalization of urban lands (July 1975). On December 21 1974, prior to the land reform act, the military rulers dispatched young students from grade 11 onwards, including university students, into the rural area under a program called, *Edget Behebret*, Development Through Cooperation,

popularly known as *Zemecha*, the Amharic translation for “campaign.”<sup>44</sup> Under this program about 60, 000 students and teachers were sent into various station around the countryside.<sup>45</sup>

Despite all the measures taken by the *Derg*, after the first anniversary of the Revolution, its position appeared to be embarrassingly passe. Opposition forces, mostly leftist leaning, began to appear on the stage demanding the transfer of power to civilian rulers. Partly to stave off opposition and partly because of the need to articulate the philosophy of the revolution, more clearly the *Derg* made a slight shift of its policy by announcing the New Democratic Revolution Program on April 21, 1976. The Program, more than any of the preceding guidelines, was couched in clear Marxist terms. It provided the framework, which would eventually lead to the establishment of a Marxist-Leninist State. It also advocated the establishment of the Peoples Democratic Republic and the party of the working class.<sup>46</sup> Following this, the regime spelled out its guiding policy to be “Scientific Socialism” and hence began to implement a full fledged Marxist-Leninist propaganda campaign across the Nation with the support of the Soviet Union and the Cubans, East Germany and other socialist counties.

Pragmatic consideration, rather than a genuine appreciation of the tenets and a realistic assessment of its full implications, led to the adoption of “Scientific Socialism”. For one thing, this was the language of the progressive intelligentsia with whom the *Derg* sought to identify. Marxism presented itself as a reasonably coherent and all encompassing position that could be seen to promise modernity and progress hence it’s being sucked into the *Derg*.<sup>47</sup> Second, they needed a unifying ideology, one which would replace the old Solomonic myth. Third, it was a ready-made ideology that provided

legitimacy for their continued rule, justified their actions, and allowed them to map out the new socialist order in Ethiopia.

On November 29, Brig.-Gen. Teferi Banti, was elected chairman of the *Derg* replacing Aman Andom. Following this, Mengistu Haile Mariam, representing the radical wing of the *Derg*, was given responsibility over matters of security and political affairs. In a palace coup of February 3, 1977, Mengistu eliminated the General, put himself at the helm of political power and soon emerged as the undisputed leader. Mengistu's rise to power also provided the edge for the officers from the Holeta military institute to consolidate themselves over the few yet elite officers from the Harar Military Academy who tended to be more sober and less doctrinaire.<sup>48</sup>

The Ogaden war of 1977, which gripped the attention of the nation because of the fall of a large portion of the eastern part of Ethiopia to the Somali forces, ended with a resounding victory for the Ethiopian army due mainly to the massive support and direct involvement of the Russian, Cuban and the Yemeni forces. The military success in the Ogaden boosted the image of the *Derg*, particularly that of Mengistu, who capitalized on the moment to lash out against internal opposition forces.<sup>49</sup> This was the time when Mengistu spoke of the Ethiopian Revolution as advancing from the defensive to the offensive position. This was also the period when anti-American rhetoric rose to a new crescendo, eventually leading to the closing of the American cultural establishment and the severing of long standing military ties to the U.S in April 1977.<sup>50</sup>

With the rise and consolidation of Mengistu's leadership, Ethiopia saw a litany of terror unprecedented in its history under the infamous slogan, "We shall beat back the White terror with Red terror." As of February 1977, Addis Ababa and other major towns

in Ethiopia became sites of horrible battles between unequally matched opponents. Bodies of young men and women littered the streets as thousands perished in the ignoble program of Red Terror.<sup>51</sup> After crushing opposition forces, internal as well as external, Mengistu and his colleagues proceeded with the idea of forming a rigid Marxist and Leninist Party. The Commission to Organize the Party of the Working People of Ethiopia (COPWE) was announced on 8, December 1979, and following that the party was formed.<sup>52</sup> The creation of the party greatly intensified the government's ideological commitment and considerably changed the course of development of the country. This led to the dangerous phase of the revolution for it resulted in the creation of a highly intrusive political apparatus and the rise of new political barons who exercised their power with impunity. Incidentally, several informants confirm that it was after the formation of the party that the National Church and the various evangelical groups began to feel the brutal hand of the regime.<sup>53</sup>

### ***Church and State Encounter***

#### ***The Derg and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church:***

The *Derg* did not have a well-articulated official policy towards religion.<sup>54</sup> In fact, it has not been possible to find a single document that clearly highlights the leaders' understanding of religion and how they wanted to deal with it. The *Derg*, from the outset, declared the separation of the state from the church, a radical departure in Ethiopian history. The draft constitution of August 1974 announced the separation of the state and the church.<sup>55</sup> We know as a certainty that in the initial years of the Revolution, the new rulers attacked the established Church by associating it with the Ancien Regime. The

Orthodox Church in pre-revolutionary Ethiopia had been an integral part of the power structure of the monarchy. As a state supported church, it had also enjoyed a monopolistic status among all other churches and religions in Ethiopia.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church was accused of being an accomplice of the state and was held responsible for Ethiopia's backwardness. Following massive propaganda via radio, television and the press, the military stripped much of the economic power of the Church and eroded its former prestige. In February 1976, they deposed *Abune Tewflos*, the Bishop of the Orthodox Church, when he apparently objected to the legal separation of the Church and the State and refused to collaborate with the regime. The *Abune* was replaced by an illiterate monk, Tekle Haymanot II, dubbed by the military leaders as "the man of the people."<sup>56</sup> The new Bishop was an unknown monk coming from the South, without any political orientation and lacking the benefit of modern education. After installing a harmless Bishop, the military leaders imitated a well-considered policy of tactically handling the giant institution. They well knew that the Orthodox Church had for centuries played a pivotal role in the political life of the country because of its close relation with the state and was an unrivaled institution in defining nationhood. Hence, it was not the kind of institution that could be dispensed with the stroke of the pen.

Their strategy was to strike some kind of *modus vivendi*, keeping the giant institution at a distance, while at the same time invoking its service in times of need. The Church, for instance, was indispensable in garnering public support during popular mobilizations. The *Derg* allowed the Church to operate openly but with a considerably weakened position. In fact, the appointment of Tekle Haymanot, an effete and an

apolitical person bereft of modern education as a Patriarch was in itself, an act of calculated enfeeblement. For instance, as of January 17, 1975, religious holidays pertaining to the Orthodox faith were reduced when the rulers redefined the official holidays. Party members received strict instructions not to attend traditional occasions and social meetings associated with the Orthodox faith, such as religious-oriented weddings, baptismal celebrations and other religious ritual like *tezkar*. The new rulers also deprived the church of its influences in the Ethiopian school systems when it replaced moral education with secular philosophy of dialectical materialism.

Most of all, the nationalization of land in 1975 drastically undermined the economic base of the Church for it was an institution with significant land holdings on which it also depended. The rulers wanted to co-opt the Church either by winning the support of some of the key leaders or penetrating it through the installment of some priests compliant to its manipulation. There were also priests who had obtained their theological degrees from Eastern countries, mainly, USSR, who wanted to go along with the direction of the Revolution and the *Derg's* leadership. Some of these priests even developed the slogan, "the Bible on one hand, the hammer on the other."<sup>57</sup> It does not appear that the military rulers succeeded in co-opting the Orthodox Church, though they managed to gain a handful of supporters.

Though the authenticity is still questionable, a document purported to have been released by the Ministry of Information, contains strategies of how to destroy the national church.<sup>58</sup> Throughout the period of the Revolution ambiguity characterized relations between the Orthodox Church and the state. The church maintained a conciliatory approach, more of silently absorbing the odds, whereas the State continued with its love-

hate relationship without succeeding to create a co-opted institution modeled along that of the Orthodox Church of the Soviet Union. The Orthodox Church developed, perhaps without going through a process of conscious internalization, a stance which Bannaci termed as “adaptation theology,” expressed in the form of “social gospel” as opposed to assuming the more demanding task of being a “prophetic” voice.<sup>59</sup> The Orthodox Church and its members might have responded in some complex fashions, albeit hard to pinpoint for lack of proper investigation. It is hard to imagine such an established and giant institution to remain docile throughout the Revolution. According to some informants, one of the ways by which its adherents expressed their reactions to the Revolution was to engage in feverish local church constructions and in increased commitment to Church attendance.<sup>60</sup> Since it is not the intention of this dissertation to discuss this issue at length, I stop pursuing it any further and move ahead to consider the situation of the Evangelical churches during the times of the Revolution.

### ***The Derg and the Evangelical Church***

Evangelical Christianity was embraced by the people in the peripheral region, mainly the southwestern and southern parts of Ethiopia. As was discussed earlier, the people of these regions had never been quite happy with the Ancien Regime. Obviously, the Revolution that ended an oppressive social and political structure, had much appeal for them. This was something that their local prophets had been whispering about. The memory of the *Gebbar* system and the religious persecution they had experienced at the hands of local clergies and the officials, most of whom were strong adherents to the Orthodox Church, was still fresh. In fact, there were even some popular movements in

the south, like the one that took place in Gedio, which to a certain extent had been inspired by the teaching of the evangelical faith. The stress on the equality of men, the dignity of the human person, the message of the liberating power of the Gospel that the Bible spoke about, stirred a new consciousness.<sup>61</sup> It was to be expected that at the early phase of the Revolution, they gave full and enthusiastic support to the moves of the new leaders. The dismantling of the “feudal” system was something that the people of the south had eagerly been awaiting. Such support puzzled foreign missionaries, who obviously showed strong sympathy to the people, but at the same time had doubts about the government’s schemes.<sup>62</sup> This was true also for the majority of Christians in the urban centers, particularly the Pentecostals, who had suffered terribly at the hands of the officials of the previous regime.<sup>63</sup>

By and large, Evangelical Christians in Ethiopia came from a tradition that had little interest and even less experience in politics. They had often exhibited a disinterested relationship with the state. That became a significant setback that impaired a correct reading of the new political situation and the Revolution in general. Moreover, the attempt evangelical Christians had made to create a unified institution to speak with one voice had not been realized. By the time the Revolution erupted, the various evangelical Christians formed disparate groups scattered around the country. As was to be expected, there was no organized and systematic response to the revolution. The rhetoric of the *Derg*, as indicated in its public pronouncements, were very deceiving. For instance, both *Ityopia Tiqdem* and *Hebrettesebawinet*, acknowledged the equality of all Ethiopians and all religions before the state. The new leaders made it a point that the state would not interfere in the religious freedom of the people and that people are free to choose and



follow their own religion. In fact, *Hebrettesebawinet*, is said to have been inspired by the ideas of the religious values of the Ethiopian people.

The so called *Ye Lewt Hawaria*, Apostles of Change, who in the initial years traveled from one corner of the nation to the other, sounded like itinerant preachers. In their public discourse, the Apostles of Change expounded on the theme that socialism and Christianity were two sides of the same coin. *Tenasa Teramed*, the popular song the *Derg* aired on the radio in the initial phase of the revolution contained refrains like “*enebel hale luia*”(let us say Hallelujah) and had the tone of a gospel song.<sup>64</sup> Some members of the *Derg*, like Colonel Atnaфу, also made public statements in the media that religion and socialism should not be viewed as two irreconcilable elements.<sup>65</sup> Those clergy who had been trained in the communist counties amplified the rhetoric by indicating that socialism is modeled along the teaching of Jesus and the Bible. They insisted that it was based on the Biblical principle that states: let the haves share with the have-nots.<sup>66</sup> Official newspapers, like the *Ethiopian Herald*, reiterated the same view affirming that socialism and Christianity are two sides of the same coin. In fact, the newspaper condemned those who would like to drive a wedge between the Christian faith and the philosophy of socialism.<sup>67</sup> In a speech he delivered at the General Assembly of the Mekane Yesus Church, under the title, “The New Ideologies and the Church” Baro Tumsa, a member of the Politburo, went to great lengths to explain that the ideology pursued by the state could coexist with the church as long as the latter can introduce re-orientation in certain areas.<sup>68</sup>

The various slogans and ideological statements pronounced by the *Derg* also had religious tones that appealed to the public. For instance, the slogan *Itoypia Tiqdem* stressed unselfishness, common welfare, justice, equality, and other popular themes. For

the people of the periphery and for that matter for all who considered themselves progressives, *Ityopia Tiqdem* was the embodiment of a cherished dream. Leaders of the evangelical church in the south even openly praised God for the change of government.<sup>69</sup>

The *Derg* tried to get hold of the attention of the Ethiopian people in various ways. One of the ways by which it showed its supposed harmless faces was its open espousal and encouragement of ecumenical relations between various religions. Under the auspices of Mohammed Qaddafi, the Libyan President, a congress of Christians and Muslims was organized in Libya, between January 30-February 6, 1976, under the theme of “Religion does not Divide Us.” The military rulers applied a double-pronged strategy. On one hand, they were trying to create the platform by which they could gain influence and control over the leaders of the two great religions in Ethiopia. On the other hand, the leaders were keenly aware of the troubled relations between Ethiopia and Somalia and the importance of obtaining the confidence of Muslims for all eventualities. The committee that was set up under the banner of “Religion does not Divide Us” became defunct after the war with Somalia was over.<sup>70</sup>

In March 1978, an inter-faith seminar was organized by the government in Addis Ababa as an extension of the theme “Religion does not Divide us.” The three-day seminar was held at Africa Hall and attended by about 2000 representatives from the Orthodox Church, Muslims, the Catholic Church and the evangelical faiths. Among invited participants to the Seminar were representatives of foreign-based religious organizations, including NGOs. One of the pretexts for calling the seminar was to discuss grievances lodged by religious leaders concerning purported interference of the state on their religious freedom. Various papers were presented by delegates representing the

Orthodox and the Islamic faiths on topics such as “socialism and religion” and “religion and politics.” At the end of the seminar a nine-point statement was released by the participants, the overwhelming number of which were members of the Orthodox clergy. The statement expressed the delegate’s “firm support for the ongoing popular revolution,” and the government’s effort at safeguarding the territorial integrity of the nation. At the end of the consultation, the religious leaders applauded the policies and actions of the government and pledged to actively participate in building a democratic society.<sup>71</sup> The press release issued not only hailed the revolution, but also ended in condemning imperialism.<sup>72</sup>

Playing a dominant role in the consultation was a leading member of the Orthodox Church *Qesis*, Solomon Gebre Sellassie, who presented a paper on the compatibility of socialism and Christianity.<sup>73</sup> His conclusion, that socialism was the fulfillment of Biblical prophecies of human hope, came under sharp criticism from delegates of the Catholic church and evangelicals. *Qes Gudina*, a leader of the Evangelical Church of Mekane Yesus and chairman of Council for Cooperation of Churches in Ethiopia (CCCE), objected to the pretence that there was religious freedom in Ethiopia by disclosing the existence of government persecution against evangelical Christians in the south and southwestern parts of Ethiopia. The support for the government as expressed in the press release mainly stemmed from the position taken by representatives of the Orthodox Church. Such a stance should not come as a surprise from a Church whose attachment to the state had stripped her of an autonomous voice and initiative.<sup>74</sup> These state sponsored initiatives were attempts by the military rulers to bring religious groups under one

umbrella so that they could exercise some kind of control over the religious affairs of the country.

At the end of the conference the delegates were maneuvered into establishing formally a standing committee, "As members of One Nation, Religion does not Separate us." This Committee whose members came from different faith groups elected *Ato Tekle Wolde Giorgis*, an evangelical from the Qale Heywet Church, as its secretary. In collaboration with the government, the committee organized a series of seminars on topics related to socialism, Christianity and politics. The Committee convened its first meeting at the National Theater in 1979 to discuss issues of ideology and religion. In this gathering, speakers invited from the Russian Orthodox Church, reiterated the compatibility of Socialism by invoking Biblical allusions attesting to that fact.<sup>75</sup> A resolution passed at the end of the gathering affirmed the government's position that the country enjoyed full religious freedom. It condemned religious and international human rights organizations that were falsely accusing the state of conducting religious persecution. Tekle Wolde Giorgis, was asked, impromptu, to read the resolution without prior notice. It appears that the selection of Tekle, who represented the evangelical church, was a well-intentioned and deliberate move. This, essentially, was a propaganda show meant to be a face saving action to stave off criticism from international organizations affiliated with Evangelical Churches.

No doubt, the *Derg* expediently used the forum to advance its political agenda, which was to gain the support of the religious groups for its war efforts against mounting opposition from secessionist groups and internal opponents.<sup>76</sup> It appears that the intention of the government was slowly to indoctrinate the religious leaders and eventually cajole

them into serving as propaganda tools. To a certain extent, the *Derg* was successful in blunting possible opposition from the various religious groups by its pretense of embracing them through such calculated seminars and by the effects these overtures produced in the minds of a largely illiterate mass. As a result, the *Derg* managed to mobilize support from all faith groups who had made significant material and moral contributions to its campaigns against secessionist forces. This included the reluctant evangelical church, which expressed its solidarity with other faith groups to stand in defense of the nation's sovereignty and territorial integrity with contributions ranging from finance, preparation of provisions for the soldiers at the war front and through direct participation through enrolment in the army.<sup>77</sup>

According to informants, the dilemma of evangelical Christians was that they had in the past been accused of being unpatriotic and they were also conscious of the fact that their past association with foreign forces from the west made them suspect. At the same time, as a minority group, they had to develop some kind of survival strategy given the relative free space that was available. Their somewhat Puritan tradition and lack of participation in the complex web of Ethiopian politics was a considerable drawback to adjust their relationship with the state. Evangelical Christians, overall, had a poor track of social engagements because of their otherworldly-orientations and their strong stress on piety, holiness and purity of faith. They lack a tradition of social involvement and hence did not in a visible way constitute a voice in terms of speaking against structural and other forms political injustices. Leaders of the evangelical churches knew very well that the ideology that the state was advancing was inimical to their faith and were hesitant to identify with it and give it public endorsement. They were not willing to allow

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themselves to be used as stooges to the state. They found themselves suddenly caught up in a quagmire of a complex politics without the benefit of conducting critical theological reflections to interrogate the new situation. Until circumstances forced them to go underground the leaders of the evangelical church did not seem to get the time to contemplate the political developments and work out a well-considered and well-articulated strategy on how to handle the new challenge. This explains why they had been forced into being reluctant allies of the state during the initial years of the revolution.<sup>78</sup>

The responses of the evangelical churches towards the revolution followed the line of thought, the political direction, and the course of action of those at the helm of power. The absence of a common forum also apparently forced the various denominations to react in various ways, depending on their strength, the attitudes of local officials and the capacity of their leaders to map out strategies of survival. Overall, despite some local and denominational variations, the line and course of actions pursued by evangelical Christians during the revolution appear to be fundamentally the same.

Over all, despite some tangential remarks made by the *Derg*, concerning the churches with mission backgrounds, there does not appear to be a well-defined official policy, written in black and white with respect to its dealings with evangelical Christians. No doubt, the new leadership looked upon the evangelical faith as a foreign product having its roots and connections with the West. This was true at least until the end of the Ogaden war. Informants are unanimous in reporting that it was only after the Ogaden war was over that their churches began to face serious troubles. First the Ogaden war lent to the military rulers the image of being defenders of Ethiopian nationalism. In fact, it was dangerous in those days not to support the war efforts of the regime while the Somali

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forces had occupied a big portion of the eastern provinces. Second, it was the Ogaden war that provided the occasion for the strengthening of ties between Ethiopia and the communist countries. Third, the war also created the context for the military leaders and their cohorts to demonstrate heightened interest in Marxism that they soon vented in anti-western rhetoric.<sup>79</sup>

The *Derg* announced its own version of the Chinese Cultural Revolution on September 12 1978. The announcement of the Cultural Revolution came as a surprise when Mengistu Haile Mariam was delivering one of his usual harangues during the 4<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Ethiopian Revolution, notwithstanding the fact that it (the Cultural Revolution) had already been abandoned by the Chinese government because of its regrettable consequences.<sup>80</sup> The media began to echo Mengistu's speech calling for the eradication of backward practices and the rooting out of alien values associated with foreign influences, an allusion to the evangelical faith to which the tag *Mete*, literally new comer, was applied.<sup>81</sup> For instance, one of the official Amharic language newspapers, *Addis Zemen*, openly stated that there were some foreign agents who under the guise of religion were subverting the revolution. The newspaper mentioned that the government would not tolerate the hidden schemes of imperialists who seek to derail the revolution by numbing the mind of the youth through idealistic thoughts.<sup>82</sup>

Unlike other references to evangelicals, such as *Tsere Mariam*, *Pente*, which mainly signified cultural or theological orientation, the term *Mete*, was a politically loaded concept, purposely chosen. The term *Mete* was used deliberately as an exclusionary tool targeting the evangelicals for the perpetration of isolated attacks. Reports indicate that after 1979, there was heightened anti-religious rhetoric expressed over the media and

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public meetings, gradually evolving into localized harassment both in Addis and the provinces, especially in the area of Sidamo and Wellega where the concentration of evangelical Christianity was relatively high. Beginning from June 1979, flagrant denunciations of religion began to appear in official newspapers such as *Addis Zemen*. Apparently, the new leaders were beginning to pull off their masks and reveal their true selves as they took steps to root out religion, albeit without an official clear statement. Dawit Wolde Giorgis, a former authority in the *Derg* period, noted that the highest echelons of the government had given instructions to the cadres to eliminate religion. By providing a personal witness of his close participation in several high level meetings, he testified that religious practices had been “disparaged in every manner possible.” Dawit adds that the military rulers began to make sweeping attacks against evangelical Christians of the south and southwestern Ethiopia in the early 1980’s with an unimaginable hatred. Dawit did not explain the reason for singling out the evangelicals and subjecting them to such a ferocious attack. He simply observes that the fact that they were new arrivals made them easier targets than the inherited established faith.<sup>83</sup>

Having apparently chosen the kind of society they wanted to construct, the *Derg* went ahead not only in formulating its ideologies but built institutions to legitimize and enforce them. The new rulers concluded that it was mandatory that the Ethiopian society be educated to adopt a socialist consciousness. For a long time it appeared that the government’s strategy was to erode the edifice of faith in Ethiopia through media propaganda and mass campaigns at the local and national level, so that it would experience a slow death through attrition. Re-education was another strategy the *Derg* applied to bring about the change in worldviews. In fact, *Zemecha*, according to the

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*Ethiopia Herald*, was launched basically to redress the problem of religiously oriented thinking especially in areas where mission education was prevalent.<sup>84</sup>

Though it is true that the new rulers did not formulate a well-defined policy written in black and white for the historian to read and examine, their steps suggest a coherent program of action. For instance, religious education and church-run private schools were abolished by a decree in September 1975.<sup>85</sup> Ethiopia sent several cadres abroad, mainly in the Soviet Union, to be trained to become potent agents for transmitting atheism across all levels of society and combat a religious outlook. The much-detested *Weyeyet Kebeb*, Discussion Forum, was officially instituted in April 1976 with the sole purpose of indoctrination. The intention of establishing *Yekatit* Political School in 1976, and followed by other smaller training centers, was basically to train cadres and government officials to be loyal communist and propagators of communist ideology. The school system offered basic tenets of Marxism and Leninism at all school levels to propagate atheism. As of late 1970's Marxist Leninist political education was incorporated into the curricula of the university and it was mandatory that students took these courses before they graduated.<sup>86</sup>

In September 1984, the Workers Party of Ethiopia (WPE) was formally instituted and it stated its chief target to be the creation of a "new socialist man."<sup>87</sup> With the formation of the party the regime sought to reinforce its control over Ethiopian society. This was one of the most ambitious and deceptive projects ever embarked upon, a feat of engineering on human souls, which suggested political and social salvation was possible with the adoption of Marxism. The establishment of the party increased the *Derg's* capacity to undertake massive political education and created the condition for a steady

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campaign against evangelicals.<sup>88</sup> From 1985 on the study of Marxism and Leninism was extended to elementary schools. The emphasis was to reeducate the young while their level of receptivity was high so that they would become new “socialist citizens.”<sup>89</sup> Educational materials were written for children and curricula were retailored with the specific purpose of indoctrinating the youth.

Informants attest that *Qebele* (urban *dwellers*) and *Gebere* (rural dwellers associations) had been set up among the urban and rural populations not only to serve as bottom level administrative units, but also to inculcate the Marxist ideology through trained cadres.<sup>90</sup> *Qebele*-based obligatory indoctrination sessions were deliberately scheduled on Sunday mornings to compete with the religious observances of Christians. The battle for winning the souls, especially the youth was conducted on all fronts, through distractive activities like youth festivals and rallies called *Kinet*, literally, revolutionary art and music shows, where the youth were forced to participate in songs and dramas that glamorized the revolution.<sup>91</sup>

Strategies the *Derg* adopted to dent religion included: conducting thorough mass propaganda via the media, the political cadres and *Qebele* officials, instructing people to spread atheism through ideological training institutions like *Yekatit 66* (or February 1974 in the Ethiopian Calendar), and taking intrusive measures to weaken the position of the church. As far as weakening the church was concerned, the process of debilitating it included both the arresting of its leaders and the weaning away of the youth from the church. The methods used were: obstructing the youth from attending church services, closing Sunday schools, establishing age-based organizations like RWWA (Revolutionary Ethiopia Woman’s Association), REYA (Revolutionary Ethiopia Youth

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Association) for the young and the Young Socialist League for those in the teenage categories.

On the cultural front, the political cadres discouraged the use of religious greetings such as *Egziabher yemesgen*, thank be to God, (substituted by *Dehna*, I am alright), and holiday greeting expressions like *Enkuan aderesacheu*, thank Thee for thus far (substituted by *Enkuan deresacheu* meaning, thanks for thus far). By attempting to eliminate religious pronouncements so engrained in the minds and habits of Ethiopians, the *Derg* wanted to destroy habitual religion. They also sought to desacrilize religious spaces by changing names. A good example of this is the former *Meskel Adebabaye* (the Square of the Cross), changed to *Abyot Adebabay* (Revolutionary Square). Many schools bearing religious names, especially those confiscated from missionaries, were given names that reflected the revolution. One good example is the SIM Christian Girls Academy, which was changed to *Ye Abiot Qerse*, meaning the heritage of the revolution after being confiscated. All the churches confiscated had either been converted into schools bearing revolutionary names or turned into party and *Qebele* offices and stores.<sup>92</sup> Though there were no legal measures taken to stop people from adhering to any religion, the propaganda conducted at the local village levels through the cadres and other state functionaries, had a major impact upon many ordinary Ethiopians who temporarily toned down their faith and followed along with the communists.<sup>93</sup>

Overall, there were concentrated and well-coordinated efforts to root out religion from Ethiopia and substitute it for communist doctrines. Paradoxically, however, spiritual activities and expressions of religious sentiments escalated rather than declined. Cognizant of this, the rulers opted for more aggressive and more blatant actions to

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eradicate religious faith in Ethiopia. The evangelical church, which showed some signs of vitality, became one of the chief targets of attack of the government.

The government began persecuting evangelical churches if not directly, by proxy, through its party and state agents, the cadres and officials of the *Qebele* the *Gebere maheber* (association). The government cadres and the leaders of the *Qebele* and *Gebere* associations began to arrest first of all key leaders of the various institutions, crippling the church, gradually advanced towards taking away property belonging to churches, eventually culminating in their closure. In fact, in April 1984, the state organized a vigilante committee in all the *Qebeles*. Members of the vigilante committee were given authority to forbid religious worship in private homes, seize religious audiocassettes, prevent trafficking of religious materials, and to tape worship services for review by the security forces. Broadly speaking, not only violence, but also civil disabilities, public humiliations, threats, discrimination, harassment, intimidation, and coercion, were invariably used by the local cadres and officials to immobilize the church.<sup>94</sup> The state was conducting all these overt activities while at the same time openly denying the existence of persecution to the outside world, including human rights organizations.

As defined, Marxism purported to answer all philosophical questions, social, economic and political, and left no room for competing philosophies. Religion certainly provides an alternative philosophy of life and value system for which the embrace of a watertight ideology left no room. For the *Derg* and its political party functionaries, the Marxist ideology had apparently become a consuming reality. For the *Derg* members, whoever did not stand on their side, or whoever was not on the revolutionary “camp,” a term that was in vogue in the days of the *Derg*, represented a threat. In the imagination of

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*Derg* members, evangelical Christians constituted one such a threat, despite the fact that they formed diffuse groups scattered in different corners of the country. In the perception of the *Derg*, the scattered nature of the evangelicals and the absence of a single hierarchical organization uniting them, was a liability. Under this condition, it was feared that they might present an elusive force hard to control. Belief in the total sufficiency of Marxism and Leninism led to denying legitimacy to alternative belief systems except those which were *nebar haymanot*, established religions, with large followings where some concessions had to be made for practical considerations.<sup>95</sup>

There were many reasons why evangelical Christians could not stage organized responses to the new challenge. The evangelical churches were totally unprepared for a challenge on such a scale. Moreover, the disillusionment of the evangelical Christians towards the state came too late after the fact. For the most part, in the past, the evangelical church had grown through persecution, but at this time it greeted the challenge not from the position of strength but from a position of weakness. Hence, it did not muster sufficient strength to confront in a well-organized manner the challenge the new state presented. Added to that was denominational differences, which deprived evangelical Christians of the capacity to act in unison. They had to learn what to do with the new situation as they passed through the challenge.

One of the initial organized responses the Evangelical churches made was to found a common informal forum. In 1974, interested groups from various denominations started to hold prayer and discussion meetings at the Bible Society in Addis Ababa. Their major concern was to discuss how the churches might adjust to the new winds of change, especially to the growing influence of communism. Interested leaders of various

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denominations such as Gudina Tumsa, Captain Yohannes Ijigu, Tesfa Tsion, Hailu Wolde Semayat, Ement Araya, Meskel Kebra, Wubshet Dessalegne, and Tilahun Haile, broached the issue of the role of the evangelical church with respect to its involvement in the larger societal affairs and what kind of a part it would play, viz.-a viz. the current situation. The group reached the understanding that the evangelical church must present a message to the Ethiopian people to demonstrate its concern and relevance. As an initial step, it was decided to present a series of lessons to the Ethiopian people on themes of repentance, reconciliation, justice and peace, subjects which the church had not engaged in seriously, over the Radio Voice of the Gospel and *Mesekre Berhan* Magazine.<sup>96</sup> The move was definitely mingled with guilt as to past lack of action and was also a call for inclusion.

Another step taken by interested leaders of the various evangelical churches was the calling of a conference at Langano in 1975. The Langano conference, which was sponsored by the Qale Heywet and the SIM was primarily intended to serve as a time of repentance for invited leaders for failing to work together as a body and for not being a voice of the people in the midst of so much injustice. In 1976, Qes Gudina, Berhanu Deres, Tesfa Tsion, and Shemshedin picked up the idea of unity and soon set up an umbrella organization under the name of *Ye Abyate Krestian Guba'e*. Most of the young people who took active part in youth fellowships in the university had by now assumed key leadership positions in their respective denominations. They used their social capital to create networks and chart strategies for interdenominational harmony. Qes Gudina Tumsa, the General Secretary of the EECMY, played a noteworthy role in conveying the

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message of unity and the need for establishing an inter-denominational platform at this critical juncture of the history of the church and the nation at large.

In February 1975, *Qes Gudina Tumsa* together with the World Lutheran Federation took the novel initiative of organizing an ecumenical colloquium at Mekane Yesus Seminary on the theme of Christianity and Socialism. Leaders of the various evangelical churches were invited to attend the seminar in order to have an enlightened understanding of the country's contemporary situation and to help them be conversant with pertinent issues of the times. In this seminar, he outlined the basic ingredients of socialism and compared them with Christianity and concluded that the evangelical church ought to know about the basics of socialism and that it should essentially be sympathetic to the plight of the poor and the oppressed. The seminar expressed its support for change and welcomed opportunities the new situations offered for a change to take place in Ethiopia. It also underscored the fact that a socially responsible church might invalidate much of the religious criticism of socialism. Gudina stressed that the church could not afford to be ignorant of some of the basic issues the revolution had raised such as equality, freedom and the dismantling of oppressive structures. Yet, he also spelled out, in clear terms, that the Christian approach and the road map that socialism charted out, were two entirely different routes. According to some informants who participated in the seminar, the inclination of Gudina and the WLF was to move the evangelical churches in the direction of the revolution so as to demonstrate sympathy to the cause of the people and provide critical solidarity with the state.<sup>97</sup> The approach was premised on the claim that the revolution created a new moment in Ethiopia's history for the church to engage in practical social concerns.<sup>98</sup> This seminar was significant in the history of the church for

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social, ideological and political issues had rarely been discussed openly among leaders, thus its contribution in starting the new conversation.

It was in one of these conferences that the Council for the Cooperation of Churches in Ethiopia (CCCE) was conceived. Known locally as *Yemetebaber Gubae*, CCCE, was formed on October 2, 1976. CCCE was an ecumenical forum that was created to draw together various Christian groups with the intent of creating a corporate voice for the faith groups in the evolving political and social reality of Ethiopia.<sup>99</sup> Ostensibly, the reason for creating such a forum was to build a mutual basis for the various churches to better serve the emerging Ethiopian society. In essence, from Gudina's perspective, the main purpose for setting up the forum was to establish a joint front to counter the growing influence of atheism and stave off possible attack from the new state. For Gudina, the more the unified the churches, the less the chances for the state to divide and weaken them. Founding members of the CCCE were: the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (represented by its Mission Department), the Ethiopian Catholic Church, Qale Heywet Church, EECMY, Mulu Wengel Church, Heywet Berhan Church, Berhane Wengel Baptist Church, Meserete Krestos Church, and Sefere Genet Church. The hope was that the CCCE would help Christians to work in unison to promote change in Ethiopia in light of the new development in the country, engage the church more actively using the rights guaranteed in the new constitution, and preach the Gospel without politicizing it. The forum was also designed to serve as venue to express solidarity between the various faith groups in times of need.<sup>100</sup>

In a way the CCCE was a creative effort pioneered by the evangelicals to save the image of the church that had already been tarnished in the past by its lack of social

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involvement while at the same time to help outline the parameters for a responsible participation in the new social processes. In this sense, it was a preemptive move to guard the church against the danger of being swallowed by the state, or face marginalization, as had been the case in the past. *Qes* Gudina was elected as its first chairman and worked to foster cooperation and harmony between the Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church. Gudina came from a new tradition as a man who has combined his deep theological reflection with informed political convictions. According to people who knew him, he was a man who could see what was on both sides of the coin. It is interesting to note that in spite of the small constituency evangelical Christians represented, his election as the chairman of CCCE is a remarkable testament to Gudina's abilities and influence. This was the first initiative ever taken to bring together adherents of the three main Christian groups in Ethiopia to engage themselves seriously and systematically with social and political questions from a theological and practical point of view. It was a well-calculated move to create a common bloc that would enable Christians to uphold their integrity and maintain a common position in the new church and state relations. In short, CCCE was an ingenious response to the burning question of the church: How should the church survive, operate and serve in a socialist state?

CCCE joined the inter-religious seminar involving Muslims and the Christians held at the OAU in March 1978. The *Derg* called for this seminar after an investigation committee from the government, established in June 1977, reported that there were a large number of people who sought refuge in religion by running away from the Revolution. Gudina participated in this seminar though hesitantly. He harbored the fear that such an interfaith forum initiated by the government might easily be manipulated. At

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the same time, however, he saw the possibility that the seminar might provide the opportunity for a considered dialogue between faith groups and the state and he opted in favor of taking part. The seminar proved to be a set up case by the government. *Qes* Gudiana and delegates of the Roman Catholic Church expressed some reservations about the way this seminar was being handled. They leveled criticism on the propagandistic tone of the seminar. In fact, they had open confrontations with *Qesis* Solomon who tried to dominate the discussion by presenting himself to be more a Marxist than a priest through the domination of discussions.<sup>101</sup>

In spite of its good beginning, the CCCE did not survive long. The Orthodox Church, withdrew from the CCCE suddenly without announcing its intention. The interest of the Catholics also flagged and they soon followed suit after lingering for a while. In spite of the historic episode of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Catholic Church in Ethiopia worked closely with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Its calendar and liturgy also bore close affinity with the national Church. Both religious institutions, unlike the evangelicals, seemed to be much more tolerant of indigenous culture and did not insist on conversion and separation of believers from their cultural matrices. It was becoming clear to both the representatives of the Orthodox and the Catholic churches that Gudina and his evangelical counterparts were entertaining a critical, if not oppositional, stance towards the new state. This was a departure from their familiar approach of peaceful coexistence with the state. Gudina and his colleagues introduced a new discourse and a new debate within the church, the issue of critical engagement that required open conversations on issues of ideology, socialism, and theology-something that lay outside the familiar terrain of the religious institutions that had their fate tied with the state.

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There was an implicit paradigm clash between the classical approach of church-state relations and the daring vision of the novice religious leaders. *Derg* officials, who knew the critical posture of Gudina, also saw the CCCE as a religiously oriented forum of opposition that had to be nipped in the bud. According to some informants, the Orthodox Church withdrew from CCCE under the duress of the *Derg*.<sup>102</sup> Contributing to the short-lived, otherwise lively inter-faith experiment was the very fact that historically no love had been lost between Ethiopian Orthodox and evangelical Christians. To begin with, it was Gudina who went the extra mile to make informal contacts with the various leaders of the Orthodox Church to enlist their support in the setting up of CCCE, despite the bitter memories of the past. An ingenious step to create a collective space for faith based organizations to set up a coalition against the atheistic state and its interference with religion came to a quick end.<sup>103</sup>

After the exit of representatives of the Orthodox and the Catholic Churches, the group remaining within CCCE were delegates of the various evangelical churches, who, in the absence of the other two, clung to the organization and tried to work for its objectives. But since two of the major wings of the original founders were no longer there, the evangelical leaders did not see its continuation under the existing name and hence decided to blend it with another umbrella organization called Council for Evangelical Christians in Ethiopia(CECE).<sup>104</sup>

The Council for the Evangelical Christians in Ethiopia, was formed as an umbrella organization in response to the need to establish an alliance of evangelical churches, distinct from CCCE, though the legal recognition of it was delayed until March 10, 1979. CECE was born out of the first Pastors Conference held in 1976 at the Bible Academy.

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The leaders of the evangelical churches saw it as imperative that they come under one umbrella to establish a common front to combat the rising tide of atheism and enhance their capacity as a mutual support group. Playing prominent roles in the formation were *Qes Gudina*, *Tesfa Tsion*, from the Meserete Krestos Church, *Solomon Lulu* from the Mulu Wengel Church, *Hiruye Tsige* from Genet Church, and others. The forum began to organize annual conferences for the pastors of the various evangelical churches. CECE played a pivotal role in organizing the annual conferences for church leaders.

The first pastors' Conference was organized in September 1976 with the substantial help of World Vision Ethiopia and the committed efforts of interested Christians at Nazereth Bible Academy. The weeklong conference held in September, attended by more than 1300 participants, was perhaps the first of its kind and a landmark for it brought together evangelical leaders from various denominations from all corners of Ethiopia at a crucial time in the revolution.<sup>105</sup> According to informants *Qes Gudina* spelled out his position when he announced to the participants that socialism and Christianity were not two sides of the same coin as they held separate kingdom visions and implored participants not to conflate the two and fall into the traps of the murky political affairs of the nation as things stood then.<sup>106</sup>

The Pastors Conference, which had been the only forum to bring church leaders from various denominations, could not continue due to ongoing harassment from the government. According to informants, the leaders changed their venue from the Bible Academy to the MY seminary. In their last meetings in 1980, they narrowly escaped mass arrest when a truckload of police came to arrest them only a few minutes after the conference was over.<sup>107</sup> The Pastor's Conference established solid foundation for a strong

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bond amongst evangelical churches. The Conference selected new themes every year that resonated with the evolving challenges of the day. This is evident from themes the leaders selected for every conference: “Strengthen your self (1976), “Thy will shall be done” (1977), “Thou are faithful through all ages/generations,” (1978)) “Let us do Your work unfailingly” (1979), and “Be filled with the Word of God.” (1980) <sup>108</sup> The forum provided spiritual strength for the leaders to stand together amidst the storm and to stay focused in their faith and mission. The Pastor’s Conference was one of the most important avenues that helped leaders of the various denominations develop strong ecumenical ties through out the period of the revolution and afterwards. <sup>109</sup>

Such annual gatherings, however, could not provide clear-cut guidance to local churches. Each group had to engage the challenges according to its internal strength and the specific challenges it was facing. For logistic and other reasons, it was difficult for the Evangelical churches to act in unison to deal with the changing local dynamics, the country’s situation and the unpredictable nature of the regime. As a result, each evangelical church faced the challenge of its specific problems, navigating new approaches and going through a process of adaptive responses. This was especially true after the arrest of *Qes Gudina*, a man who had a towering influence both at his church and across the wider ecumenical spectrum. Gudina Tumsa was first arrested in the Fall of 1978, and later in June 1979 after which nothing was heard about him except his reported disappearance. Gudina Tumsa was the most prominent leader, who was capable of reading the times, interpreting trends, and providing theological articulations to the Church. The fact that missionaries had not in the past stressed the need for training theologians put the evangelical church at a considerable disadvantage. <sup>110</sup>

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### ***Survival Strategies: Selective Case Studies***

The leadership that emerged during the revolution overwhelmingly came from the laity. This is true both at the larger ecumenical level and at the various local settings. A lay leadership consisting of dedicated volunteers emerged, essentially due to the vacuum that had been created, either because of the arrest or the flight of the church's top leadership from the country. In the first place, the new situation in which the church found itself required a new kind of leadership. Second, most evangelical churches lacked trained leadership except for a very few pastors and volunteers serving the church. Overall, this was the country's problem even at the political front. During the Revolution, whoever served in the capacity of a church leader became a key target of the local officials. Being a voluntary association of believers, there were always some who were ready to take the brunt of leading the church and pulling it through difficult days. In the following paragraphs, I shall provide a selective illustration of the level of persecution some evangelical churches underwent and the various adjustment processes and survival strategies undertaken by them.<sup>111</sup> The four churches I have identified as a case study are: Mekane Yesus Church, Meserete Krestos Church, Qale Heywet Church, and Mulu Wongel Church. Mekane Yesus Church has been selected for it represents one of the foremost evangelical churches from the Lutheran background with a substantial followings among the Oromo population of southwestern Ethiopia. The selection of Meserete Krestos Church is based on the premise that it constitutes one of the few urban-based churches from the Mennonite background with strong influence on the youth and other sectors of urban society. The rationale for selecting the Mulu Wongel church is the fact it is first independent Pentecostal Church in Ethiopia that has significantly attracted

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the youth and strongly influenced other churches with the spread of the Pentecostal variety of faith expressions. The reason for selecting the Qale Heywet Church is the fact that it is one of churches from SIM mission background with the followings of the most numerous evangelical Christians with heavy concentration in southern Ethiopia.

***The Case of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church of Mekane Yesus (MYC):***

The attitude of the *Derg* to the Mekane Yesus Church was indecisive and marked by inconsistencies. The MYC was one of the leading evangelical churches in Ethiopia, with a relatively high number of followers as compared to other denominations. It had a comparatively long history in the country and was a member of the World Council of Churches. Moreover, in many ways the church had pioneered new initiatives in social services and stimulated development projects in rural areas that had earned it a positive image in Ethiopian society. It is also a church which had its followings predominantly among the ethnic conscious Oromo of Wellega region who considered themselves disfavored and hence saw the revolution with some merit. The *Derg*, therefore, chose to treat the MYC, if not exceptionally, at least, somewhat differently. It kept its activities in Addis Ababa open, while it clamped down on most of the churches in the rural areas, especially in Wellega. Wellega, which is considered to be the cradle of evangelical Christianity, was an area where the concentration of evangelical Christians of Lutheran background was high. Wellega was also of the bastion of the Oromo Liberation Front. Hence, the persecution of the church in Wellega had a political dimension. The state feared that local evangelical churches had provided some kind of haven to the Oromo Liberation Front and it treated the church somewhat harshly.<sup>112</sup>

The MYC had a well-organized leadership consisting of people with relatively high levels of education and experience. There were great concerns among the leadership on how socialism, presented in its local variant, may affect evangelical Christians. They were keen to observe, understand and interpret the evolving political realities of Ethiopia and act accordingly. At a time when most Ethiopians, especially evangelicals, had very little understanding of socialist development in the country, the MYC leadership proactively led a series of seminars to create awareness and equip church leaders with the foundations of socialism and reflect on the implications of the country's going in this direction. Starting from February 1975 and continuing through October 1976, the MYC offered seminars to representatives of various Christian groups from the Orthodox faith, the Catholics, and the Evangelicals to examine critically the relationship between socialism and Christianity.<sup>113</sup> The seminars were aimed not only at instructing the leaders on how Christians should deal with socialism, but were also meant to equip the church for responsible participation in the on-going change in Ethiopia. This was the time when the evangelical church was grappling with issues of class struggle, structural injustice, and Christian love.

Mekane Yesus invited guest speakers from the Lutheran World Federation to lecture on various aspects of Marxism-Leninism. The seminars concluded with the suggestion that the church, in its new encounter with the state, must make independent evaluations and judgments of trends, in order to be able to act judiciously. The seminars also focused on being prepared to take part in the shaping of the new society. For the first time in its history, the church was, in effect, saying, "I am also a stake holder in social change." The church was speaking as a voice from the margin, in the absence of a

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political party representing its constituencies. The consensus of participants was that the church should not stand aloof but participate advisedly in the current social change the Revolution had engendered, to express concern and identify with the people under those circumstances.<sup>114</sup>

This position assumed that the church had not played a “prophetic” role in the past, to speak for justice and to stand with the poor and the oppressed. The revolution had challenged the church, both by its concern for the cause of the broader masses and the actions it took to ameliorate their condition. Overall, evangelical Christians had a poor track record of social engagement and this challenged the church’s theology, and its silence, in the midst of oppression poverty and unjust structures.<sup>115</sup> It was feared that unless the church proved, somehow or other that it was socially relevant at this point in time, it would lose support and could be easily dismissed by the deluge of political radicals. For evangelical Christians to whom Marxism was, by and large, a little understood phenomenon, the seminars were both eye-openers and helpful in confronting the Marxist challenge.<sup>116</sup> It is interesting to note that such initiative was coming from the small evangelical circle, while the giant institutions with larger constituencies like the Ethiopian Orthodox Church with huge social capital at its disposal, were virtually silent. This is strongly indicative of the creative strain that derives more from marginal groups than from mainstream hegemonic-oriented religious institutions.

In March 1975, a Pastoral Letter was prepared by *Qes Gudina Tumsa*. The letter stated that the church was willing to promote efforts made to address the issue of poverty and social justice and appreciated the new government’s measures to that effect. It noted, however, that ideologies could not substitute for faith and should not be viewed as

absolutes. The letter affirmed that complete allegiance is due to God and God alone.<sup>117</sup> Admittedly, this was a church whose major constituencies came from people of the peripheral regions who saw the revolution as a welcome substitute to the oppressive regime. The Pastoral Letter was not an endorsement of the *Derg's* power, but a voice from the margin, acknowledging the new change but also seeking inclusion in shaping the process of change as a participatory agent in the process of rebuilding the nation.

The other important initiative taken by *Qes Gudina* was his novel idea of creating new frontiers of ecumenism by greatly supporting the University Student Christians Fellowships (USCF) and High School (HSCF) Christian Fellowship. The MYC not only provided an office for the students' fellowship but also employed a full-time coordinator to galvanize and direct the various youth initiatives. As a man of foresight, he knew that the battle for souls was going to be fought in the hearts of young Ethiopians. He wanted them to be fully armed in every possible way to stand firm in the face of the growing influence of atheism and to provide aggressive testimonies of their Christian faith in word, life and deeds. Among the great accomplishments of the Fellowship were the inter-Christian links it established among Christian students who were forced to go to the *Zemecha*. Evangelical Christians separated from their parents and their churches and bombarded by communist propaganda faced formidable challenges in maintaining their faith in their assigned *Zemecha* camps. Since Marxism was in vogue among the youth, evangelical Christians, who constituted minority groups, became obvious targets of Marxist ideologues, who ridiculed them and branded them as agents of the CIA.<sup>118</sup>

The MYC invited a Korean-American missionary from the US by the name Mildred Young in 1974 to use her expertise to lay the groundwork for a useful strategy of

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handling the new challenge. Miss Young gave training for the young Christians on how to effectively read, interpret and use the Bible for their Christian living. She networked with the students in their respective *Zemecha* centers through letters and other communication channels. She was primarily engaged in preparing a resource manual on how the Christian youth in the *Zemecha* stations could stay grounded in their faith and gain strength in their changed locale. She facilitated the preparation and circulation of weekly newsletters containing testimonies of courage and perseverance, words of faith, and encouragement, and exchanged useful information among the students. She also arranged and distributed a daily Bible study guide, including articles dealing with spiritual matters and selected news items.<sup>119</sup> The intensive Bible study program helped students who participated in the *Zemecha* program to be well grounded in their faith as they continued to apply it in their camp life. MYC collected scholarly books with messages on faith and science critiquing communism as well as apologetics and freely circulated them among the students in their respective campaign centers.<sup>120</sup>

An enduring impact Miss Young left among the youth, however, was in the way she trained them to systematically study the Bible, which required expository verse-by-verse analysis of context, meaning, interpretation and applications, by forming a small study circle. The open interpretative approach she presented was intellectual friendly and made the Bible alive to the students. It broadened the methodological scope of the students on their Bible studies and built their capacity to independently dig, analyze and appropriate biblical truth. This was a legacy that deeply remained and became a strong tradition of evangelical Christians. Though most evangelical Christians were committed Bible readers, they had never in the past received any formal training on inductive or deductive

methods of Bible study, nor were they exposed to the notions of hermeneutic and contextualization.<sup>121</sup> Miss Young also conducted several training and workshop sessions for the leaders of the various students and graduate fellowships. The University Graduate Fellowships, established by graduate students from the university, was closely cooperating with Miss Young to strengthen the HSIU Christian Fellowship by providing material, logistical and moral support apart from its principal goal of disseminating the evangelical faith among educated professionals.<sup>122</sup>

Leaders of the Graduate Fellowships, most of which came from the Pentecostal background, organized seminars for the university students at the MKC compound on diverse interrelated topics such as Socialism and God, Creation and evolution, God in History, Christianity and politics, ethics and morality, and a host of other issues related to the challenge of youth in their daily life. The seminars were intended to root the students in their faith tradition and equip them with the basic ideas of Marxism so that they would not be easily influenced by its strong appeal and drift away from their faith due to peer pressures or enticements. According to Alem Bazezew, this was a great investment in the youth and an asset whose importance proved to be invaluable for the church at a time when it was forced to operate clandestinely and beyond.<sup>123</sup>

The ecumenical experience gained in those days forged the strong unity evangelical Christians showed through out the period of the revolution as most of those involved in the student and graduate fellowship assumed the leadership in the vast house churches.<sup>124</sup> Most of the Christians who returned from *Zemecha* camps also took up various leadership positions in their respective Churches. They became the backbone of the new Bible reading movement that kept the church strong, alive and helped it keep



expanding in the midst of hostile situations. They were involved in organizing cell groups, in developing workable Bible study programs, and providing training sessions for leaders based on their former instructions and expertise.<sup>125</sup>

***The Mekane Yesus Church and its Persecution Experience:***

The new rulers nationalized Radio Voice of the Gospel (RVOG), popularly known as *Yemesrach Demts*, on March 12, 1977 after declaring it that it had no national useful purpose and that its service to the Ethiopian society was counter-productive. The staff members of the RVOG were suddenly told that they were terminated. The statement released by the government stated that the measure was a step foreword in the elimination of the tentacles of international imperialism. According to the government, the radio was a means utilized by imperialism to subvert popular revolution.” Interestingly enough, the statement closed with the remark: “During the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries when the scramble for Africa was going on, the road was cleared for colonialists by an advance party of spies in the guise of missions.”<sup>126</sup>

Although the Lutheran World Federation owned the radio station, the Amharic and Oromo services promoted the evangelistic program of the MYC, and hence, its confiscation was a great blow to the church. The station, which was renamed “Radio Voice of Socialist Ethiopia”, was turned into one of the propaganda tools of the regime. In December 1977, the Evangelical College at Debre Zeit was also confiscated while negotiation was taking place between the leaders of the MY Church and the Ministry of Agriculture on the modalities of a smooth transition. In November 1981, the government suddenly took over the newly built headquarters of the MYC and turned it into the much-

hated Public Security Office. These were attacks at the core institutions of the MYC, aimed at strategically weakening the church and frustrating its leaders.<sup>127</sup>

Following this, a wave of persecutions took place in the southwestern parts of Ethiopia, especially in the provinces of Wellega and Illubabor. Local leaders of evangelical churches were arrested, churches were closed, buildings were burned and the Bible was publicly ripped. Foreign missionaries were forced to leave their stations at short notices, being told by local cadres that their services were no longer needed in a new Ethiopia. Though there were some who lingered for a while, most of the missionaries left their stations abruptly.<sup>128</sup> According to informants persecution was intensified after March 1978 in the wake of the defeat of the Somali forces in the Ogaden. In the southern provinces, including Kaffa, local authorities continued imprisoning church leaders, evangelists and confiscating church properties without notice or explanations. Evangelical Christians could be branded as *Pentes*, and be thrown into jail.<sup>129</sup> The most banal pretexts by which local officials arrested Christians was that political activists, such as supporters of Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) and All-Ethiopian Socialist Movement (AESM), opposed the regime and were operating under the cover of religion. Informants point out that as of 1978, the leaders of the *Qebele* and the *Gebere* associations received a mandate to arrest anyone who was suspected of being *Tsere Abyotegna*, anti-revolutionary or *Tsere Andenent*, anti unity.<sup>130</sup> Defense squads were established in these associations to take actions against those they labeled to be anti-revolutionaries.<sup>131</sup> The local party and state functionaries applied various coercive measures against the youth, such as requiring them to attend indoctrination programs and inducing and compelling them to deny their faith.

Informants claim that as Christians were thrown into jail, they turned the prison houses into pulpits. Tesfaye Dinagde, an evangelist who had been imprisoned for more than five years mentioned that he was able to set up an underground church in the prison center consisting of 300 converts conducting every service that a church in a normal situation could offer, including Holy Communion, without drawing the attention of the security guards. Most of the converts were political prisoners from the EPRP, *ECHAAT* and *MEISON* political parties.<sup>132</sup> I have spoken to several people who had been jailed for political reasons and became converts in the prison centers. They testified to me that many of the inmates became very sullen and inward and turned to their old religions. Those who came from the Muslim faith reverted to their old religion and tried even to become more faithful and the same phenomenon was operating for those who came from the Orthodox background.<sup>133</sup> But there were also others who were converted to the evangelical faith through the testimonies and life witness of evangelical Christian prison inmates.

Evangelical Christians won some converts because they dared to witness to inmates and spoke out about their faith and shared their lives' journeys, taking risks of tougher penalties such as being detained in isolated cells and suffering hardships such as being subjected to intensive labor work. An informant, who currently holds a high post in the government, told me that though there were some among the converts who again went back to their former ways of life facing ridicule and insult from friends and relatives, most of the prison converts became ardent followers of their faith, "...who even brought more harvest to the church."<sup>134</sup> The issue of how to handle new converts had

assumed such significance that it even constituted one of the main topics of the annual meetings of leaders of the evangelical churches.<sup>135</sup>

As elsewhere in Ethiopia, the level of persecution dramatically increased after the establishment of Commission for Organizing the Party of the Working People of Ethiopia, COPWE, a government-funded organization that was set up in 1979 with the purpose of laying down the formation of the Marxist party of the working class. The party was formally inaugurated in September 1984 under the name of Workers' Party of Ethiopia. WPA established its branch offices in all regions and in all government offices becoming a powerful hegemonic tool of the state. Its Politburo members and their local cronies played significant role in dealing with opposition groups and in suppressing the evangelical movement. The establishment of the party intensified the campaign to draw the youth into the revolutionary camp. The Christians who refused to comply with the machinations of local propagandists were accused of being *Pentes*, a term that has acquired more of a political tone than religious.

Informants observe that starting from 1979, all evangelical Christians had been grouped under a standard name "*Pente*," which in the discourse of the Derg carried the accusatory meaning of hater of the revolution and the nation, unlike its former connotation hater of Mary.<sup>136</sup> Its generic usage of *Pente*, to apply to all evangelicals, clearly shows the lack of differential knowledge of the military officials and their cadres. Being branded as a *Pente* was a sufficient reason for someone to be accused of being *Semetawi*, sentimentalist/ subjectivist, *Hasabawi*, idealist, and *Tsere Abyotegna*, literally, anti-revolutionary and thus be subject to torture and imprisonment. Overall, the justification given by local officials for suppressing religious movements had a lot to do

with fulfilling the obligations of the demands of “Cultural Revolution,” a vacuous concept which could mean anything to semi illiterate cadres who were conducting the campaign with the passion of “the true believer” to use Eric Hofer’s expression.<sup>137</sup> Since 1979, the order for arrest could come from several organizations. According to a former official there were, at least 16 different offices, government or para-governmental organizations, that could arrest and imprison people without trial.<sup>138</sup> Authorities in the province of Kaffa made official pronouncement against evangelical Christians. Newspapers unabashedly indicted the evangelical faith by making specific statements such as: “These new religions, which are alien to Ethiopia, must be rooted out down to the last member.”<sup>139</sup>

In spite of such open and flagrant attacks against the evangelical Christians, the *Derg* still continued to insist that Ethiopians, without distinction, enjoyed religious freedom. In fact, earlier on, in an interview in *Africa Magazine* in March 1978, Mengistu unabashedly said that the various religious groups enjoyed freedom and equal opportunities in revolutionary Ethiopia, a claim that he had consistently maintained throughout the revolution.<sup>140</sup>

This being the overall situation of the MYC, the *Derg* began to turn their attention to the central leadership of the church, so as to weaken it from the center. Government officials at the local level had already tried to shear off the leadership of the MYC through imprisonment. This time, they concentrated more on the leadership at the central office in Addis Ababa, particularly *Qes Gudina*, an obvious target, because of his conspicuous role in providing brilliant leadership to the church. *Qes Gudina Tumsa* was the driving force behind the ecumenical initiatives, and a powerful figure in the

evangelical circle. Being the only theologian of significance, and a man with great experience, he fell under close scrutiny of government spies and informers. The *Derg* had summarily arrested and released *Qes* Gudina Tumsa on two occasions. During his imprisonment, it is reported that he was questioned about his role with respect to CCCE and asked to report the whereabouts of his elder brother, Baro Tumsa. Baro was a founding member of ECHAAT and a member of the Politburo, who by then, had turned his back on the regime and joined one of the fronts fighting for Oromo liberation.<sup>141</sup> Informants indicate that Gudina had been asked to submit to the government and was even requested to speak in international forums on behalf of the *Derg*, to deny the existence of persecution and re-assure them that the state had pursued a liberal religious policy, a position he found to be an affront to his religious convictions.<sup>142</sup>

In the evening of July 28, 1979, Gudina, together with his wife, was kidnapped by unidentified men as he was leaving the church's headquarters in Addis Ababa. His wife was later released but no one could track his whereabouts until diplomatic sources revealed that he was put under state detention, accused of involvement in the Oromo Liberation Front.<sup>143</sup> *Qes* Gudina, unlike *Qesis* Solomon of the Orthodox Church, did not entertain the idea of Christianity being compatible with socialism, though he was a man with a heightened social concern. He was not against the basic concerns of socialism as such. As discussed above, in the very early stage of the revolution, he had gathered leaders of the evangelical churches from all denominations and explained his stand as a theologian concerning socialism. He was a man who was well acquainted with the thoughts of Reinhold Niebuhr and many other theologians, such as Karl Barth and Desmond Tutu, and had witnessed the civil right movement in the 60's during his studies

in the United States(1963-1965). Gudina had attended some courses related to Marxism to understand the basis of its philosophy, and its approach to socio-economic and political problems. He sought to familiarize himself with certain critical concepts and vocabulary in order to be conversant and to be able to communicate thoughtfully with the emerging intellectuals who were being increasingly enamored of it. His knowledge of Marxism helped significantly to open a dialogue with young Ethiopians who had fallen under the influence of the new philosophy. He moved in circles with Marxist backgrounds, including his own brother Baro, with whom he could debate confidently.<sup>144</sup>

As an erudite scholar of wide ranging interests and knowledge, who was quite conversant on the ideas of socialism and the philosophy of Marxism and Leninism, he was better equipped than any other existing church leader to interpret the changed conditions in Ethiopia and to articulate the position of the evangelical church, viz. a viz. its relations with the state. Through various seminars and interactive discussions, he helped many Christian leaders create awareness of the new philosophy that the state had endorsed as its official doctrine. He called on church leaders to take on the path of critical engagement: Christian leaders should keep their distance in order to be able to criticize those in power.<sup>145</sup> He advised the leaders not to be ignorant of politics, or the ideas of Marxism, and to pay attention to current developments. The bottom line of his thought, “Scriptures and not socialist ideology,” formed an unambiguous founding principle for the church. This was the message that leaders of the evangelical church took seriously and pursued unflinchingly through out the period of the revolution, notwithstanding the fact that there were some truants here and there. Gudina Tumsa, as with many great Ethiopians who courageously spoke the truth and stood for their convictions, reportedly

“disappeared,” the word frequently used by *Derg* officials so as not to have to admit knowledge. The same term had been applied to the famous writer, Ba'alu Girma, who also reportedly “disappeared.”<sup>146</sup>

There were bold attempts involving several organizations, including the World Lutheran Federation and President Nyrere, to take Gudina out of the country in order to save his life, but he adamantly refused to submit by insisting that he could not leave his congregation and his country in the face of trials. He accepted what he knew was inevitable.<sup>147</sup> According to many informants, what in the final analysis led to his arrest and execution was his refusal to compromise on matters of faith, truth, justice. His emphatic denial of the Marxist's absolute claims on people's lives haunted officials of the *Derg*. He presented a direct challenge to the *Derg* on ideological, moral and political grounds. His creation of the CCCE and other faith-based ecumenical initiatives was something that deeply troubled the insecure military leaders.<sup>148</sup>

I would like to close this brief discussion concerning this eminent church leader with the following succinct summary of Gudina's life: “Gudina Tumsa was abducted and killed by strangulation. His murder, which had never been admitted by the government, brought to an end the possibility of creative and visionary theological reflection in the church, which was so much needed in Ethiopia at the same time.”<sup>149</sup> It was a blow to African theology as well as to the worldwide church.”<sup>150</sup>

In summary, the EECMY had been harassed in every direction. The closing of the churches in the provinces continued unabated through the 80's. This is, more or less, the picture for all the Synods, though the degree of repression varied slightly from place to place, depending on the temperament of local party officials and government activities,



and on the political thermometer in the location of the church. In the Western Synod, where the concentration of evangelical activity was relatively high, by the year 1984, more than 90% of the churches had been closed.<sup>151</sup> Confiscation of property, imprisonment and torture of leaders continued under various pretexts. Wellega, from the perspective of the *Derg*, suspected of being the base area of the OLF, no doubt, bore the brunt, for the repression also had political overtures. According to informants, the notorious administrator, Negussie Fanta, by and large, was responsible for the various atrocities and damages committed against Christians in Wellgea.<sup>152</sup>

The MYC in Addis continued even though it lost its head office and its great leader. For some unclear reasons, the *Derg* did not close the various branch churches of Mekane Yesus in the capital city. This was more of an image-making exercise. It appeared that the military rulers wanted to placate the World Lutheran Federation and the World Council of Churches of which the EECMY was a member. Spared from closure were, at least, four major churches of MKY spread out in strategic areas in Addis Ababa, two of them not far from the National University, one in *Kasanchis*, and another one in *Geja Sefer*. Perhaps, the military officials wanted to use this skewed openness as an example and reference point to defend their false claims that there was no persecution. Whatever the conditions that made their survival possible, the fact that these churches were open was of great significance for all evangelicals. These churches served important religious social functions for evangelical Christians whose churches were closed. It was here that people conducted services such as wedding ceremonies and celebrated religious holidays like Christmas which was otherwise impossible.<sup>153</sup>

### ***The Case of the Qale Heywet Church:***

The Qale Heywet Church came from SIM background. It has one of the largest evangelical Christian communities in the country. Like the MYC, the Qale Heywet Church (QHC) also represented the people of the periphery. The Qale Heywet church came into existence as a national church in 1956 as the Association of Evangelical Believers and later in 1971 as Qale Heywet Church. Qale Heywet was as an obvious target of the *Derg* because of its association with the American missionary group, the SIM. The *Derg* and its cadres were very aggressive in rooting out the evangelical churches in the southern parts of Ethiopia. They conducted massive propaganda activities against the church by labeling it as an agent of imperialism and accusing believers of being CIA stooges. No doubt, the military rulers saw the SIM as a symbol of American imperialism as one of the largest and foremost mission organizations with a long record of history and substantial followings in Ethiopia. It is interesting to note that, more than any group in Ethiopia, evangelical Christians in the south had welcomed the revolution by even showing eagerness to work closely with the new regime in shaping the new Ethiopia.<sup>154</sup>

The *Derg*, in fact, found a ready-made infrastructure in the human and social capital that they could easily have cultivated. The various church associations, *Maheber*, and their respective leaders were easily incorporated into the new Peasant Associations established after the Land Proclamation of 1975. Donham was correct in his observation that the arrangement of the new cooperative organizations the state was introducing was almost a replica of pre-existing church initiated structures. In his view, “ They were pre-adapted, as it were, to the revolutionary order.”<sup>155</sup> I would like to add to Donham’s

notion of pre-adaptation by stretching it further from its structural to its ideational dimension. The people of the south, constituting members of the peripheral regions, had embraced the equality and freedom the Christian faith promised, and in the unfolding revolution, they saw the prospect of their actualization. That was why the southerners were easily carried away by the drums and rhetoric of the revolution.<sup>156</sup> Arising from that, the leaders of the church and the educated youth demonstrated a remarkable disposition to advance the cause of socialist revolution, which from their perspective, brought liberation from ages of economic, religious and political oppression. Not only that, the people of the south gave their sons when the *Derg* made the call to the nation under the famous slogan, “Revolutionary Motherland or Death.” Thousands of peasants from southern Ethiopia enlisted, either as regular soldiers or militia, to participate in the ongoing war on the Ogaden and Eritrean fronts. Ironically, it was the Christian south that sustained the brutal hand of the *Derg*.

In most of the new *Qebele* and *Gebere* associations, the evangelical Christians had the upper hand in leadership positions. In addition to the stake they had in the revolution itself, what made this possible was mainly their past leadership experience in the church and the relative level of education they attained.

The Ogaden war of 1977 brought a decisive shift in foreign policy as the Ethiopian state completely threw its lot to the Socialist camp at the expense of the US, its erstwhile military ally. The war would not have been won without the massive military aid of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. This sudden switch impinged upon local politics as anti-imperialist rhetoric escalated in the media, public official discourse and small *Qebele* level meetings. This switch in the narrative progress, “at the center of

Ethiopian politics furnishes the context for understanding how evangelical Christianity came to be seen as both un-Ethiopian and a threat to socialism.”<sup>157</sup> Not only that, the level of Red Terror was intensified as the opposition forces were alleged to have links with the outside forces who were enemies of the revolution, the imperialist west, a convenient scapegoat. This also opened the way for the deluge of campaigns against “foreign religion,” as was sarcastically put by Donham, “The *Derg* appropriates Orthodox Christian Culture,” an irrational hysterical fear against any religion bearing the name Christianity outside its preserve.<sup>158</sup>

Donham raises an interesting point too often slighted when he noted, “As ‘foreign’ religions were suppressed, Orthodox Christian Amhara cultural commitments, *now secularized to a degree, were celebrated.*”<sup>159</sup> (Italics mine). Why the evangelical Christians of the south and Southwestern Ethiopia were persecuted with such ferocity could not be explained in terms of ideology alone. In most cases, the job of hunting and punishing was taken by adherents of Orthodox Christianity who became communists and political cadres in the service of the state. This does not mean that the evangelical Christians of the south and South-western Ethiopia had not participated with the state at the local levels. In fact, there were many deserters of the faith, who caused more harm than their Orthodox counterparts, against their own Christian brethren.<sup>160</sup> However, men at the top level of decision-making, giving instructions to local authorities, were disguised communists who, deep down in their instincts, were Orthodox Christians with deep-seated biases and prejudices towards evangelicals. As Samson noted, political legitimacy in Ethiopia draws from religion and the *Derg* member’s hegemonic

ideological umbilical chord had not been disconnected to their Orthodox roots in spite of their outside public confessions.<sup>161</sup>

After crushing internal opposition forces through the campaign of the Red Terror, the *Derg* began to launch a massive attack on evangelical Christians in most part of the southern regions. Among the pretexts used by the local officials to attack the evangelical Christians in southern Ethiopia was the platitude that they did not exhibit love and serious concern for their country and hence lacked patriotism. This stemmed from the general aversion of evangelicals to chant war mongering slogans and their alleged disinclination to enlist in the army. But this was not withstanding the fact that church leader's exhortation of their congregation to cooperate with the government and participate in national programs as long as their action did not jeopardize their faith. Their position was based on the Biblical precepts found in Romans 13: 1-2, which states: "Every one must submit himself to the governing authorities."<sup>162</sup> The attack was also conducted under the pretext of cleansing the south from the influence of imported religion. The *Derg* officials did not do this upon receiving a new revelation concerning the church. The evangelical church and its followers had a relatively long record of existence in the south. Christianity had also been sufficiently well integrated in the various communities in southern Ethiopia.

What explains this move is practical Marxist real politick. Mengistu emerged as an unassailable leader after the Ogaden war, which incidentally made him a national hero, at least in popular perception. Once he consolidated his power, he was bent in fulfilling his dream of creating a socialist Ethiopia across multiple fronts. One important precondition of that was strengthening the ground of atheism by eradicating all manners of religion,

especially those that appeared to be expansive and militant. The political rhetoric that linked the evangelical faith with imperialism and the CIA was only a smoke screen.<sup>163</sup>

Most American missionaries had left their mission sites in the south, either for fear of imminent danger or because of the harassment Evangelical Christians were experiencing at this stage of the revolution. The Evangelical Christians were scattered across the country without a unified institution to tie them together. After all, they still represented the religion of the periphery. Judged by any standard, there were no grounds for government fearing that evangelical churches presented a threat to the state except their faith was anathema to the state ideology. According to Petros, despite their small size, they had already proven to be men and women of strong religious convictions with unshakable faith in the Bible and in the God they trusted. The *Derg*, therefore, fought evangelicals in the south on ideological fronts with existential repercussions as faith came into conflict with the demands of politics.

Perpetrators of the persecution intended to weed out the Pentecostal faith into which the youth were being drawn in increasing numbers. The Pentecostals were very firm and vigorous in expanding their faith through their lively testimonies and aggressive witnessing. Above all, they were known for their outspoken resistance to the manipulations of the state trying to draw the youth into the revolutionary camp. Gradually, evangelical Christians were all labeled as *Pentes* and began to face the same treatment as the Pentecostals. The stereotypes applied to the *Pentes* such as “haters of the revolution” and “unpatriotic elements, were also extended to them.<sup>164</sup> There were many Christians who were arrested and imprisoned accused of being *Pentes*. They were subjected to the various forms of coercion to forego their faith. There were some who

submitted to the pressure and renounced their faith and received acquittal while many languished in prison for refusing to budge.<sup>165</sup> Many instances demonstrate that repression in the south was an all out attack to wipe out the evangelical faith as can be gleaned from the following accounts.

On February 22 1979, the British Council of Churches released a detailed and extremely well documented report regarding religious persecution in Ethiopia. The report disclosed the existence of severe religious persecution to the United Nations and other concerned international organizations. The documents identified names like Ali Musa, a notorious dictator in the south, brutally suppressing evangelical Christians and pointed out specified areas where the persecution was intense such as Gamu Gofa, Bale and Kaffa, where the Qale Heywet Church was operating.<sup>166</sup>

The response of the Ethiopian government to such allegations was to conduct orchestrated gatherings of evangelical Christians in selective sites of the aforementioned areas in order to obtain statements confirming that freedom of religion existed in Ethiopia. Often times, government-owned news stations even produced faked reports of outrageous public condemnation of imperialist activities with the insistence of firm actions being taken on the so-called *amstegna redfe*, fifth columns.<sup>167</sup> Unfortunately, spokesmen of the Ethiopian Orthodox Churches also joined the choir by officially endorsing government claims that the Ethiopian people enjoyed freedom of religion and denounced the Report of the British Council of Churches and other international agencies like Amnesty International.<sup>168</sup> It appears that the various international reports infuriated local authorities in the southern provinces rather than sobering their stand. What followed the release of the report was brutal suppression. A secret meeting held on December 5,

1979 by various officials of the *Derg* in Gamu Gofa ended with the decision to eradicate the Qale Heywet Church from the south. The principal reason given was the church's alleged linkage with the CIA and the support it was receiving from imperialist forces for conducting counter revolutionary activities. The nine -point document essentially outlined the procedures of how the Qale Heywet Church and its functionaries could be strategically dismantled and how its active members were either to be cowed or cajoled to line up with the state policy.<sup>169</sup> This was followed by direct harassment and arrest of church leaders, banning of church services, and arbitrary confiscation of church properties.

Villagization and resettlement programs were part of the *Derg's* strategy employed to disassemble religion. Removing people from their old sites, where they conducted their regular social and spiritual activities, and putting them in new areas, was considered to be a useful approach to the realization of the setting up of a new socialist society. The leaders felt as though they were writing a new history. As Dawit, a former prominent official recounts, "There are no churches or mosques on settlement sites. The whole idea of these settlements was to create the New Society without the "opium of the masses", religion."<sup>170</sup> Ironically, what the *Derg* officials did not realize was faith was a matter of convictions of the heart, which could not be stamped out through physical disconnections. The new villages became breeding grounds for many especially the youth to become evangelical Christians as confirmed by various studies.<sup>171</sup> As a result, the people turned their houses into churches and the number of believers increased, contrary to expectations of the state and local officials. In fact, evangelical Christians used the sociological crisis to share their faith to those who had been removed from their



traditional ritual sites, whether they were veneration sites, shrines, trees or oracles, and in the process succeeded in converting many.<sup>172</sup> The revolutionary leaders proclaimed mankind's domination over the God of nature, but in a country where faith is so much part of the people's lives, the people felt demoralized without it, and hence not only did they keep it alive but expanded it by throwing their net far and wide.

Apart from closing churches, local officials applied various actions to wean away Christians from their faith. People who were found secretly meeting in home churches were either imprisoned or fined 200 Ethiopian Birr per person, on charges of conducting an illegal meeting intended to promote invasive religion, *Mete*, as local officials called it.<sup>173</sup> Local officials jailed men who were found citing the Bible while leading funeral ceremonies accused of making false propaganda.<sup>174</sup> The other common tactic employed by the local cadres was to make the youth extremely busy with various youth-related activities such as forcing them to take part in revolutionary art/music shows, *Kinet*, which had one of the most devastating effects on the Ethiopian youth by forcing them to engage in degenerative social practices. In some cases, the local officials turned the previous church buildings into *Kinet* training centers as a psychological war against the believers. According to informants who served as prominent officials in the area, the strategy of the state was to keep the youth as busy as possible so that they had little time left to tend to spiritual things. The cadres also arranged youth oriented political meetings with obligatory attendance on Sundays, coercing the youth to be active members of the party's youth wing, Revolutionary Ethiopia Youth Association (REYA) with its *Male*, a shortened reference to an intensive study of Marxism Leninism Program. Participation was mandatory. Otherwise, the youth would be denied access to employment, scholarship

opportunities, and other educational benefits such as to get quotas to enroll in higher education programs.<sup>175</sup> Verbal attacks, intimidation, looting of personal property on different pretexts and rapes were reported to have been used to discourage people from following their faith.<sup>176</sup>

Informants also report that local officials conducted denunciation meetings (*Yemagalet Zemecha*) with the view of causing public embarrassment for the youth. It was in such meetings that the young Christians were exposed and verbally condemned as idealists and enemies of the revolution. Such public condemnation were followed by debasing acts, such as throwing or ripping the pages out of the Bible. The believers were made to parade through the streets and were ridiculed either as *Hasabawyan* (idealists) or *Pentes*, branded as enemies of the revolution.<sup>177</sup> There were some who shifted direction, unable to put up with the enormous pressure put on them, and joined the revolutionary camp. Among these were reluctant “fellow travelers” and those who served the revolution with religious ardency. There were also others who simply decided to distance themselves from the church without renouncing their faith. Those who were militant in their faith and were willing to pay the cost of standing true to their convictions chose the course of suffering. Examples of the latter abound. A case in point is the situation of Tesfaye Gabiso, Teshome, and 18 young men whose arbitrary arrest and detention in 1979, aroused international outcries.<sup>178</sup>

The South has produced nationally acclaimed gospel writers and singers in Amharic. Tesfaye Gabiso was a Pentecostal from Sidamo province who became a distinguished song composer and singer. Tesfaye’s songs were virtually taken from the Bible and had been a source of great encouragement for Christians under stress. He used

allegories and metaphorical allusions to the regime's passing nature, heartening believers to stand firm in their faith. His song *Egziabeher Sireda*, "when God's help reaches," which carries the message that God would come in due season to rescue his people from the hands of their enemies, almost became an anthem for Evangelical Christians.<sup>179</sup>

Tesfaye Gabiso, Tehsome Worku and several other friends were imprisoned for several years without any charge, except the accusation that they were *Tsere Abyotegna*, (anti-Revolutionary), and *Reiyotealem borbari*, (ravager/infiltrators of the revolution). While in prison, the guards tried to force the believers to deny God through a variety of tortures. They coerced them to abjure their faith with a promise of immediate release. Tesfaye and his friends did not budge to either of those strategies and preferred the choice of suffering, even if it led to further affliction, including death, a position they maintained until their release in 1981.<sup>180</sup> He continued to write and sing new songs, many of which were recorded in cassette after their release.<sup>181</sup>

These young prisoners had to be continually shifted from one prison center to another as they were found guilty of converting many political prisoners through ongoing heated debates that the tedious prison conditions fostered. The platform that prison centers provided for converting people had been wittingly dubbed as the "captivity conferences" for the Christian prisoners presented the story of their faith by preaching it in the jail houses and by their life's commitment and readiness to die for their beliefs.<sup>182</sup> The Christian prisoners accomplished this feat even though they were prevented from having access to the Bible. The only books allowed in most prison centers were the Koran and the book of the Psalms written in *Geez*, commonly referred to by the Orthodox

Christians as *Dawit*. If the Bible was found it would immediately be burned right in the face of the believers.<sup>183</sup>

Christians of the south went through exceptionally difficult times because of a notorious administrator, Major Ali Musa. Informants describe Ali Musa as a benighted diehard who made his way into this position by winning the loyalty of Mengistu through murdering opponents of the revolution.<sup>184</sup> Ali Musa's hatred of the Christian faith combined with his compulsive loyalty to the revolution made the persecution of evangelicals in the south relatively more severe compared to other places. Ali Musa is remembered by informants for his unsightly statement, "we will build the revolution upon the grave pits of the *Pentes*." Informants are of the opinion that persecuting Christians was a political move that he used to prove his loyalty to the regime.<sup>185</sup> Ali Musa who had been responsible for the imprisonment and death of many, a man who had been reported to have buried people alive, committed suicide when the *Derg* began to collapse as the EPRDF forces were advancing to seize power.<sup>186</sup>

The multi-sided pressure put on evangelical Christians in the south compelled them to devise various survival strategies to hold onto their faith and to develop mechanisms by which they could maintain regular religious services. Among the new strategies were: conducting secret meetings in houses, shifting services from days to evenings, changing the days of religious observance from Sunday to other convenient days, traveling to distant areas to conduct conferences, meeting in remote locations, like forested and mountainous areas, deep valleys, caves, and other measures.<sup>187</sup>

As noted earlier, one of the main reasons for the intensification of the plight of the youth was their refusal to salute the revolution with their left hands and chant slogans.

The Christians reasoned that raising the left hand was unbiblical. The youth abstained from shouting slogans, not to show disrespect to the state, but demonstrate fidelity for their faith as some of the slogans were found to be affronts to the basic tenets of their religious sensibilities. The young Pentecostals, in particular, were known for refusing to stretch their hands and to chant slogans like “Foreword with our leader Mengistu,” “We shall bring nature under our Control,” “Death to the enemies of the Revolution,” “Religion is drudging the Mass, ”and “ Above all, the revolution.” The last slogan, in particular, was bitterly resisted because the Pentecostals believed it contradicted with their core values, though the first two were tolerated. They insisted that chanting that slogan, in particular, was the supreme manifestation of dishonesty. According to informants, the crux of the matter was that endorsing the slogan was a denial of what is written in the Gospel of John 3:31, which says, “The one who comes from above is above all.” There were other slogans such as “We Shall Overcome,” which the Christians shouted louder to speak to their own situations.<sup>188</sup> Several young students who adamantly refused to chant slogans were thrown to jail for years accused of being anti-revolutionaries.

The issue of how Christians should handle slogans became a matter of serious concern for leaders of the evangelical churches. In fact, leaders gave so much attention to the issue that it even constituted one of their main discussion items in the inter-denominational annual gatherings. The consensus of church leaders on the issue of shouting slogans was that young Christians are at liberty to chant slogans and hence should not risk their lives. But, there was the cautionary note that if slogans were found to be defiling the integrity of God, they should not readily shout out. The problem with this

kind of cautionary statement was how to determine what kind of slogans were affronts to the integrity of the Christian faith and how it was possible to maintain uniform standards that applied to all evangelicals. The other thorny issue was the apparent discrepancy between the biblical view, which says Christians should submit to the state, and the refusal of chanting slogans. Above all, a practical issue that bothered church leaders was how should the church deal with the consequences of taking a position of refusing to shout slogans judged to be dishonoring God.<sup>189</sup>

The persecution in the south was committed in the name of fulfilling the mandate of the Cultural Revolution, something that had never been articulated outside Mengistu's pronouncement in one of his public speeches and its appearance in the *Ethiopian Herald* of October 29, 1978. It was becoming clear to the government officials at the national and local levels that many young Ethiopians had been increasingly turning towards religion. Even some government newspapers were admitting the fact and airing their concern about this situation. For instance, a letter written to the editor of the *Ethiopian Herald*, states, "Some youth are still under the spell of reactionaries... some youth have abandoned political sentiments and have become totally apolitical. The number of youth who are committing *themselves to biblical studies is on the upswing*." <sup>190</sup> In a way, the continued massive attack on Christian youth was intended to stem the tide of desertion from the side of the revolution into the side of the church.

The *Derg* officials had at no time admitted that there was any kind of religious persecution in the south and refused to take any responsibility for the massive repression being conducted there, despite international outcries. Provincial governors were adept at shifting blames on local cadres and *Qebele*.<sup>191</sup>

In the opinion of many informants, in those days it was not easy to be a Christian in the south. Compounding the problem was the fact that some of the government officials and the cadres operating in the region were southerners who had come from an evangelical Christian background. This is in accord with the old adage, “familiarity breeds contempt/trouble.” That is one of the reasons why the level of “desertion” was relatively high in the southern parts of Ethiopia compared with the situation in Wellega.<sup>192</sup>

By the year 1985, the *Derg* had literally banned official activities of the Qale Heywet Church in most parts of Ethiopia. By this time, there were more than 1,800 churches already closed.<sup>193</sup> For instance, in Gamo out of 142 churches only one remained open. In Welayta, the situation was even worse. Practically, all of the local churches (738) were closed. In fact, about 340 of them were destroyed and their wealth plundered.<sup>194</sup> Virtually, all Qale Heywet Churches in Kaffa province had been closed and believers were subjected to untold brutality and injustice under the order of its military administrator, Captain Tessema.<sup>195</sup> Grace Bible School, the only major theological training institution SIM established in Ethiopia, was taken over and tuned into a political school, a local equivalent of *Yekatit 66* school in Addis.<sup>196</sup> There were few pockets in the south that escaped the wrath. A case in point was the Kembata and partly Hadiya area, where Lt. Petros, the administrator, native to the area skillfully protected the church, listening to the insistent pleas of his own mother and elders of the area.<sup>197</sup>

The Qale Heywet Church, at the macro level, faced a huge challenge. The very task of leading and reconstituting the church in the absence of the missionaries was a daunting undertaking. Since its legal existence had not been denied, its leaders engaged in an

endless process of litigation and negotiations with local officials to obtain the release of many of their members who had been put in jail without due process of law, while at the same time helping relatives of those in prison in all conceivable ways.<sup>198</sup>

As part of the re-orientation process, the leader of the Qale Heywet Church invited church leaders from other countries who in the past had gone through similar experiences like that of Ethiopia. Pastor Ku Kwong Hseuh and his wife Lily, originally from China, came to Ethiopia in 1977 and visited many churches in Addis as well as in the countryside. They met church leaders secretly, encouraged them to be steadfast in their faith, and urged them to maintain unity and solidarity in the challenging days ahead. The couples inspired leaders by highlighting the lives of Chinese Christians who stood for their faith with unflinching commitment. They shared testimonies of faith heroes, such as Wang Ming-Tau, who had been incarcerated for twenty-three years, and Watchman Nee, who was kept in prison until he died because he was not willing to write a “repentance document.” Such stories helped to invigorate the spirit of the Ethiopians, to keep their faith alive, and to stay the course in the hours of testing.<sup>199</sup> The couples encouraged Ethiopians to emulate the faith of compatriots in other countries and to stand firm in their desperate situation. Pastor Hseuch shared with church leaders strategies of survival from the experiences of Chinese Christians and other evangelicals living in communist countries. The Chinese Pastor encouraged leaders to be very forward looking, even in what appeared to be a bleak situation, by paying less attention to the threats of communism and to convert the threats into opportunities of witnessing to others in love. This was a challenge that the Ethiopian leaders took very seriously.<sup>200</sup>



In sum, why the *Derg* and its local officials were so bent on destroying the church in the south that it could not be explained solely in terms of the alleged connection of the Qale Heywet Church with the CIA or imperialist forces. The most likely explanation one can provide is that the evangelical Christian community in the south formed one of the largest factions in Ethiopia. Weakening the faith from where its constituency was strongest seemed to be an effective strategy of rendering it impotent. Moreover, in the apparent thinking of the officials, the south represented an area of least resistance, bereft of the military and political threats posed by organized liberation fronts, unlike the situation in Wellega and other parts of Ethiopia. Evidently, the *Derg* also imagined that their possible success in the south in weakening the influence of religion would serve as a good model, which could easily be replicated elsewhere.

***The Case of the Meserete Krestos Church (MKC):***

The Meserete Krestos church, as noted earlier, was an offshoot of Mennonite missionary activities in Ethiopia. Also, MKC's establishment in urban areas, such as Nazareth, Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa, had attracted students from high schools and colleges. Some of these students later provided valued leadership to the church and proved to be great assets to the evangelical church at large during the period of the revolution. In the leadership were many capable individuals with university education and diverse experiences, who could understand the time, interpret social and political developments and guide the church in the proper directions.

The leaders of the MKC, in keeping with their Mennonite tradition, at first wanted to adopt a very peaceful approach to the revolution and the challenge of the new state.

The initial response of the leaders was ambiguous. On one hand, they wanted to identify with the mass of the Ethiopians who supported the revolution, and thereby express their support to the change of government without being directly associated with the new state in any political terms. Leaders advised the youth to participate in some of the government initiatives, like development and literacy campaigns in rural areas. To a degree, they tolerated the conscription of the youth in the armed forces to defend the nation from foreign aggression. This concession was made by the leaders at the time when the new military rulers appeared to be pro-justice and democracy and presented themselves as liberators of the people. Since they spoke in nationalistic and progressive terms, their true picture of the army in power was not fully clear to the church leaders as was the case with many Ethiopians. The church leaders made the cooperation with the government at the expense of their pacifist Mennonite position. But their position changed with the progressive revelation of the nature of the new power group. The leaders favored an approach that sought to advance critical support, according to which support for the state was subject to its rational conduct. In practical terms, this would mean that the church would provide its support to the state as long as it took democratic steps beneficial to the people at large and withdraw its support when the action contradicted those steps. In the long run, since the nature of the Ethiopian state proved to be so erratic, the MKC leadership was not in a position to develop a consistent stance.

Left with no option except withdrawing, the MKC leadership organized one of the most effective underground churches, drawing from experience in other countries and from the house churches of the Pentecostals in Ethiopia. All along however, as leaders who knew the benefits of education, their strongest preparation was in the area of

teaching. Their teaching strategy included not only helping their congregation to be strongly rooted in the Bible, but also to be conversant with the fundamentals of socialism, Marxism and Leninism. The MKC was one of the few mission-based churches that allowed Marxism and Leninism to be taught as a course in its Bible Academy. This was based on the rationale that one had a better chance of countering its influence upon Christians when one was better armed or knew the other side better. According to informants, this was a courageous step taken by the leadership amidst slighting by other evangelicals who saw the move as one of flirting with the new ideology.<sup>201</sup>

One of the initial undertakings of the MKC to meet the challenges of the revolution and the philosophy that was driving it was the ecumenical conference held in 1976. The Conference, deliberately conducted without publicity to avoid government attention, was attended by leaders invited from all evangelical churches. The Conference included prominent guests such as Roy Clemens from Kenya, Osei Mensah from Ghana, Bishop Festo Kivendere, from Uganda and Samuel Kemaleson from India, all invited to speak to the church leaders in Ethiopia. There were also Ethiopian pastors and evangelists speaking, one of whom was Kedamo, a well-known evangelist from the South. In their speeches, the invited guests placed special stress on the need to prepare the evangelical church to stand firmly committed to the Christian faith by teaching believers about the foundational truth of the Scripture through training and literature production so that they would not be carried away by the new ideological wind blowing in Ethiopia.<sup>202</sup>

Similarly, the leadership identified among its members those who could serve as resources to assemble materials and teach members of the church at all levels on the basics of Marxism, science and faith, creationism and evolution. In succeeding

conferences, lectures were given on important topics like “Christianity and Socialism,” “Christianity and evolution,” “the Church and its compassionate service to the society,” “when Jesus comes,” “the spiritual man,” etc. The various teachings were meant to educate leaders, evangelists and rank-and-file members to be well informed, not only about their faith, but about philosophies and ideas that might challenge them in order to be better prepared for any eventualities. The strategy adopted to spread the teaching was to follow the principles of “training trainers,” whereby those who received training on given subjects were expected to replicate the programs to their local constituencies.<sup>203</sup>

Another major step taken by the church was to set up a committee of knowledgeable people to study scientific socialism extensively and prepare resource materials to be distributed for members. The committee, which was composed of men with Social Science and Natural Science backgrounds, conducted extensive studies on communism and related topics and prepared documents in Amharic which were thorough but easy enough to be understood by Christians of average education. Some of the major documents produced were entitled: *Fitret Yemeskir* (Let Creation Speak), *Enkade?* (Shall we Deny it?), *Emenet Sifeten* (When faith is tested), and *Metsehaf Qidus Men Yilal?* (What does the Bible say?).<sup>204</sup> These documents were distributed not only to church members but also to other evangelical groups outside the Mennonite tradition.<sup>205</sup>

Literature production was a significant aspect of the MKC’s strategy of survival. Resource materials dealing with the issues of persecution and steadfastness, such as the *Eyesusen Meketel* (Following Jesus), were compiled and used for training sessions and teaching purposes. MKC had attracted a sizeable number of intellectuals who became a kind of conscientizing agents during the revolution in organizing and compiling materials

and arranging seminars for leaders and actively directing the underground church. The teaching materials had the purpose of equipping the leaders and evangelists with relevant informational tools so that they could be conversant with current ideas. They were also prepared with the view of assisting believers to meet the challenges of the Marxist doctrine, in particular its critique of religion, its vision of the future of human society, and to demonstrate the capacity of Christian thought in confronting materialistic interpretation of social development. Drawing on this, the trained leaders were expected to instruct and guide their people not to be swayed by the propaganda of the state, which was deceitfully equating socialism with Christianity--a rhetoric that was already beginning to influence more gullible Christians.<sup>206</sup>

One creative response of the MKC leadership was to increase the capacity of handling the church-state relationship by incorporating the experience of Christians in other countries who had gone through similar periods. For this reason, in early 1979, a delegation of six Ethiopians went to the Soviet Union where they made extensive tours lasting three weeks, visiting churches operating officially as well as clandestinely. The delegates gained insights on the working of underground churches, on retooling evangelism under communism, methodologies for training leaders and evangelists to assist them in adapting to the challenges of atheism. They invited Harley Wagner, a missionary with diverse experiences on the church and state relations in communist countries to come to Ethiopia and share his experiences with local leaders. With the assistance of the Eastern Mennonite Missions, the missionary was able to come to Ethiopia and meet church leaders in Addis Ababa and Nazareth. Wagner held seminars with various church leaders and discussed with them strategies by which the church could

reconfigure to ensure its survival and enhance its witnessing capacity under communism, based on the experience of the church in Russia and Eastern Europe. This sharing of experience greatly assisted the MKC Church to make a well-considered action in charting out the direction of the church.<sup>207</sup>

The MKC leaders' strategy of cooperation with the state without compromising its creed did not receive a corresponding response from the state. The *Derg's* propaganda against Christianity increased, especially at the local levels where MKC had branch churches. At the local level, the cadre's public pronouncement that religion is the opiate of the people was heightened. The rising state rhetoric began to point towards the MKC as a church that had connections with American missionaries. The rhetoric gave way to action, as government forces began methodically rounding up its key leaders, one by one, with the intention of crippling the church. As new leaders stepped in and the church continued its activities, the officials grew more infuriated and took the abrupt decision of closing the church in Addis and in the provinces.<sup>208</sup>

What particularly drew the attention of the government were the services conducted in one of the MKC's branch churches in the residential quarter of Bole, in Addis Ababa. The church, known as *Bole Atbia Meserte Krestos*, became famous because of the religious revival it was experiencing due to the work of Daniel Mekonnen, a Charismatic evangelist and preacher who had joined the church following the persecutions of Pentecostals in the early 70's. Daniel became the pastor of the church in 1979 when the previous senior pastor went abroad for higher education. As a pastor of the church, he had the latitude to turn the church into a more charismatic direction. The charismatic experience he introduced, such as prophesy and healing services, substantially changed

the character not only of the parish church, but also the entire MKC throughout the nation.<sup>209</sup> The church began to attract people from diverse sectors of society, primarily the youth, including administrative officials, and army officers who reported to have experienced miraculous healing, even from disabilities and physical injuries sustained on the battlefield.<sup>210</sup>

A popular choir group organized under the name *Tsion* (Zion), also from a Pentecostal background, joined the *Bole* Church in late 1970's. Inspired by the *Tsion* choir group, the church leaders organized a new choir, composed of talented young men and women, who were instrumental in bringing a new gospel tradition with a novel genre, well-adapted to the interest of the youth and to the tenor of the day. According to informants, they used an innovative approach of choir service that combined the use of modern musical instruments with the singing of highly inspiring hymns, that allegorically spoke about the passing state of the challenges of the day and the assurance of victory and the sovereignty of God.<sup>211</sup> Their refined songs, composed by highly gifted musicians, were both spiritually uplifting and informative. Some young men who were involved in the underground opposition movement were greatly influenced by the choir and joined the band after making decisions to become committed Christians. That partly explains the reasons why the gospel songs composed by the Bole choir had an abundance of social and political messages.<sup>212</sup> The choir service, together with the healing program, drew hundreds of young people who had suffered injuries from their participation in opposition politics, and as a result, the church began to experience a dramatic growth, forcing her to introduce shift services to cope with the new influx.<sup>213</sup>

The Sunday programs were extended by opening up additional services held every Saturday. The improved arrangement could not match the growing number of people regularly visiting the church, for each service was filled at every session and people had to sit in the compound outside the hall.<sup>214</sup> An average of 5,000 people gathered on every Sunday at the Bole MKC alone. An observer who visited the church in 1981 describes the scene as follows, "I looked at every crowd gathering in that churchyard and I still could not believe what I saw. The majority of the people were young... When the building was open, the surge toward the door began... Soon the benches were packed full, and those who didn't get in, filled up the shelters on either side of the outside wall."<sup>215</sup>

What really annoyed the *Qebele* officials was the growing attraction of the youth toward faith as was evidenced in the slackening of attendance in *Qebele* youth meetings which were intentionally held on Sundays to detract the youth from going to the church. The *Qebele* officials observed the difference in the mood of the youth as they came to the church with such eagerness to find seats, whereas the youth reluctantly dragged their feet when called to attend political meetings. It was irritating to the rulers and their local *Qebele* comrades to see the main street of Bole filled with multitudes of people coming from the church. That was something that the local officials did not want to see, for it provocatively contradicted the claims of the paramount view of materialist philosophy. Bedru, a prominent leader of the church commented, the event witnessed at the Bole MKC, in a way, provided them a microscopic picture of their doom. The government increased its surveillance of Christian worship by sending spies to check on who was coming and secretly taping messages, which were later analyzed at a higher level by intelligence experts.<sup>216</sup>



The activity of the Bole MKC parish, particularly the news of miraculous healings reported to have taken place, created such a stir throughout Addis that it caused considerable discomfort. Suddenly on January 25, 1982, *Qebele* officials came to the church and closed it with the simple verbal statement, "This church shall be closed and it will be the property of the Ethiopian Government." They posted a piece of paper bearing the statement *tashegual* (sealed) on the door post and around their four walls to indicate that the use of the church for services was illegal thereafter. The church was turned into a primary school under the name, *Ye Abiot Ermija*, Revolutionary Action. The Bole MKC remained closed until the collapse of the military government.<sup>217</sup>

Local government officials took series of measures against other MKC churches throughout the country following the closure of the Bole parish church. Between January 25 to August 17, 1982, twelve other churches were closed. The government ordered the confiscation of the Mennonite Bookshop and all educational institutions that belonged to the MKC, including the famous Bible Academy and a number of primary schools in Addis and the provinces. Fisseha Desta, Vice Chairman of the Council of Ministers and COPWEA, passed the instruction for the confiscation.<sup>218</sup> At the same time the government hunted down officers and elders of the church in their homes and work places and put them in jail on charges of being CIA agents and stooges of imperialism. The rulers vainly hoped that the church would be in disarray, once it had been shorn of its vital leadership. The MKC leaders remained in prison for nearly five years, except for one of them who was released after serving a year's prison term.<sup>219</sup> The ill-treatment and physical torture inflicted upon some of the imprisoned leaders were so severe that some

of the people experienced serious health complications. For instance, Kalifa, one of the youngest and most prominent leaders, died soon after he had been released from prison.

The developments in the MKC churches outside Addis Ababa resembled what had occurred in the capital city. In fact, in areas like Nazareth, persecution had started earlier. Apart from the usual harassment involving arrests and imprisonment, the local officials gave instructions for the church leaders not to allow youth below 30 years of age to attend church services. The choir services composed of young men and women had to be reorganized and made up of elderly men. Some young ladies tried to stay in the choir by wearing long outfits to disguise themselves as elderly women, but the scheme did not prove to be a useful strategy and was abandoned.<sup>220</sup>

Given the situation, the Church had no option but to retool itself into an underground structure and adapt a strategy called *Yegubegna agelglot*, the Gate Keeper's Service, which functioned to guard the gate of the church against physical and ideological attacks of the state. An interim leadership emerged to take the place of those in prison. The leadership met secretly to critically reflect upon the new direction the church ought to be taking. Eventually, it was decided to establish an underground structure with a clandestine leadership, based in Nazareth. Nazareth was chosen because of its strategic position, as most MKC churches were concentrated in the eastern parts of Ethiopia. A council named *Yewengel Komite*, Evangelism Committee, consisting of six members, was set up. The Committee elected Keder, Pastor of Nazareth MKC, to serve as its overall coordinator. This was a task, which he conscientiously undertook for six years, in addition to his commitment as an itinerant preacher.<sup>221</sup> The Committee members outlined the main tasks of the MKC and agreed to focus on the area of women's ministry,

children's ministry, prayer services, and evangelistic witnessing. As far as witnessing was concerned, the consensus of the leaders was personal evangelism, namely, witnessing a life of integrity filled with love, kindness and dedicated service. Many opted for such a life style considering its importance as effective evangelistic tools to spread the faith and defended it from undue attacks.

The leadership approved the idea of turning the MKC into an underground church and laid out the essential conditions for clandestine organization the details of which were worked out later. The underground church required designing a different persecution-friendly structure, revising existing constitutions and putting in place a different style of leadership that had to operate secretly, maintaining a low profile. Instead of a visible church as a place of worship common to all, cell groups, consisting of five to seven people, were set up in every *Qebele*. Each cell has its own leader. Each cell group would meet regularly for two or three hours each week to study. Scriptural materials were prepared centrally by the literature and resource division of the new underground structure. Members of the various cell groups studied uniform materials so that everybody was on the same page. Meeting places usually rotated by the suggestion of the group leaders and the agreements of participants. In general, early morning or evening sessions, were preferred for meetings rather than the usual Sunday service hours. Flexibility was allowed to leave room for local situations. At times, when meetings involved prayer and singing, radios would be turned high to distract the attention of government informants or prevent sounds from being heard outside. In principle, cell groups were not supposed to know about the functions of the others.<sup>222</sup>

At a higher level, two to four cell groups formed a house fellowship, meeting every month at a carefully selected site least likely to be noticed by the security men. Such programs were mainly conducted for special services, like the taking of Holy Communion, training, and revival conferences. Coordinators were assigned for each *Qebele* and *Kefetegna*, following the pattern of the political division of residential quarters. *Qebele* and *Kefetegna* coordinators met regularly to discuss issues and make plans. Beyond the level of the *Kefetegna* coordinators was the national leadership, serving as the executive committee, meeting twice a year. The sub-committee, set up for training leaders and evangelists, played a pivotal role in producing relevant teaching materials and ensuring their appropriate distribution. This committee played a key role in the preparation and distribution of literature for the underground churches and there were similar ones within the underground structures that handled matters such as finance, prayers, youth services, children's ministry, social programs and the like.

Public occasions, like religious holidays and birthday parties, were also used as occasions for Christians to meet together to share experiences, encourage one another and pray together. Women displayed an unusual interest and commitment in the underground work. The new situation provided them with fresh outlets and expanded opportunities to serve. They were able to channel their energies, which had in the past been confined to certain spheres such as serving in the choir and prayer sessions. The women were also involved in caring for the family members of those Christians languishing in prison, visiting prisoners, communicating secret messages among the leaders, leading prayer groups, teaching in Sunday schools, and witnessing to people, including government officials, with daring courage entailing enormous risks. Women met in larger numbers

than was normally allowed under the cover of *Maheber*, the traditional Orthodox Christian socio-religious gatherings held monthly under the auspices of commonly favored saints.<sup>223</sup> When female participants, gathering under the cover of *Maheber*, suspected that some one was shadowing their activities, they would put aside their Bible and switch over their program into a typical Ethiopian coffee-drinking ceremony.<sup>224</sup> Women gave considerable support to the church during the underground operation by forming chains of prayer groups, providing hospitality and counseling services to needy members of the Church.<sup>225</sup> The MKC experience demonstrates the general pattern that, by intent or default, the Ethiopian Revolution has raised the profile of women in the Ethiopian society with major societal and cultural implications.

The cell group expanded through a process of multiplication as new converts were added to the group. The issue of including new members into the underground structure was very sensitive. Special care and follow-up programs were devised to fully incorporate them into the structure. They were given a special “discipleship program” for an extended period and several screening systems were applied before they were baptized. At the same time new recruits received intensive instructions to establish them in the faith.

This was done with the intention of minimizing the possibilities of spies infiltrating the cell structure. In fact, according to informants, a shadow underground structure was created for the new converts to give them a kind of virtual experience in the underground church, before they were integrated into the real one. The rationale behind such an arrangement was, if for some reasons spies surreptitiously found their ways into this virtual structure and informed the local officials of its existence, the danger would be

slight and the real structure would be kept safe. Codes and metaphors were also used when necessary. For instance, if someone already in the circle was suspected and was found to be dangerous, leaders would use the term *Weran Dese*, the local name of a cattle disease, to refer to such a dubious person, in conversation. Sometimes leaders would use allegorical expressions such as *Ketebat*, literally, vaccination, to refer to the degree of grounding process and to the level of certitude of the new person's dependability as a true believer. For example, if some asked: "Has Mr. X received vaccination?" what it would have meant was: had Mr. X been well-grounded in the faith and proved himself worthy of trust or should he be quarantined?<sup>226</sup>

The nature of secrecy of the underground church demanded applying certain technical instructions. Individuals attending cell groups were given instructions on how to avoid detection. They had to follow certain rules on how they could proceed towards the various meeting places, how they would enter into the house, and how they would get back without drawing the attention of others. People took caution to enter the house in a spaced time, at regular intervals. As much as possible members of a given cell group should avoid exchanging typical traditional greeting style if they happened to meet along the way while coming to the meeting place. Though there were corporate singings, the typical activities of a cell group were sharing life experiences, challenges and problems as well as testimonies of answered prayers. Systematic Bible readings, interactive discussions and intensive prayers formed major components of the group meetings.<sup>227</sup>

By mid-March, only six weeks after the MKC church had been closed, the establishment of the underground church was virtually completed. The 2000 members of the MKC in Addis had been organized into scores of home cells. MKC churches in the

provinces followed the same patterns, albeit allowing minor flexibility depending on local dynamics and contexts. In this manner the MKC church entered into a new phase of its history, a process of rooting, consolidation and, ironically, phenomenal growth. Persecution and closure of churches had the unintended consequence of strengthening the faith of the believers energizing them for more action that promoted growth.

Persecution made the church very strong and aggressive. An MKC evangelist noted, “Once we had a pulpit for preaching, an office for appointments. Now our only way of working is going from home to home. We are much busier now. The present situation may be better. It is much more normal.”<sup>228</sup> A report by Kreider indicates that the closure of the church in Nazareth gave birth to another 40 churches. A church leader, whom Kreider spoke to, said, “In Jerusalem when the disciples were together, they liked each other but they had to split, scatter, and the church grew... the government does not understand the church. They think it is the place of meeting. The church is not closed, they can’t close the church, they can’t close our hearts.”<sup>229</sup> When the church in Addis Ababa was closed, it only had one congregation and by 1991, it rose to six. Membership size also rose from 5000 to a total of 114, 000.<sup>230</sup>

### ***The Case of Mulu Wengel Church:***

The Mulu Wengel Church was an independent Pentecostal Church in Ethiopia that experienced great suffering at the hands of the officials of the previous Haile Selassie regime. The persecution the Pentecostals sustained in the early 1970’s has been well recorded. No wonder that they greeted the change of government with great jubilee. The Pentecostals even asserted that the fall of the regime had been anticipated for as they

claim, it had already been prophesied by more than one of their prophets.<sup>231</sup> According to informants, when the Emperor curtly dismissed delegates of the Pentecostals during their last visit in 1971, a prophecy came immediately that Haile Sellassie's reign was doomed to collapse soon.<sup>232</sup> Whether this claim is to be believed or not is not the issue. What the story mirrors for us is the Pentecostal's anticipation of a change of government and their welcoming attitude to the revolution. In fact, some members of the Mulu Wengel church even wrote articles enthusiastically praising the change in the system of government.<sup>233</sup> There were even some gestures by some Pentecostal intellectuals to cooperate with the government by professionally identifying themselves with concerns of the revolution.<sup>234</sup> However, the leaders faced a serious dilemma of choosing to defend the faith while at the same time expressing support for the popular revolution.<sup>235</sup> Despite their small number, Pentecostals participated in the various ecumenical initiatives among evangelicals, seeking to play a greater role in the evangelical movement and in the reshaping of Ethiopian society which the revolution seemed to have allowed. Eventually, in many respects, the Pentecostals constituted one of the foremost intellectual task forces of the evangelical Christians during the period of the revolution. The young Pentecostals, who mainly come from the elite force of the Ethiopian society, had already made inroads and made their presence felt among various evangelical churches resulting from their persecution experience. Some of the young Pentecostals have already gained some influential leadership positions in the denominations they had joined. They drew on their former friendship, trust and networking skills, key ingredients of social capital, to share experiences and information needed in the collective effort of confronting the challenges of the Revolution. This observation is made to highlight the significance of the



Pentecostal Christians and the weight of their persecution experiential input and not to suggest role differentiations and hierarchy of contributions for evangelical Christians of all denominations swallowed the bitter pills of persecution and defended their faith at the cost of huge sacrifices.

Leaders of the Mulu Wengel Church (MWC) seized the moment to appeal to the new government to be given recognition that was denied by the previous regime. In January 1975, the Pentecostals opened a chapel near Menelik hospital, after securing permit from the police. They started their first official service, their church having been banned since 1972. The leaders soon relocated their chapel to Sedest Kilo, to a much larger compound close to the neighborhood of their former original site until they were evicted by the *Qebeles* in 1976.<sup>236</sup> Later, the new government granted a request for a plot of land to build a permanent site for their church. In 1976, the MWC, for the first time, managed to construct its own church, with the contributions of its members, in the Old Airport residential site. At the new building they held a major conference to celebrate their success and thank God.<sup>237</sup> Their enthusiasm and euphoric moment did not long last, however. Shortly after the church began its service, it became evident that it was already gathering a large crowd, a development that easily captured the attention of the government making the Pentecostal church its obvious target.

The new rulers feared the Pentecostals more than the other Christians because they knew that they were very bold and aggressive in communicating their faith, as their record in the past had shown. The Pentecostals were outspoken for their unflinching oppositions to Marxism and their leaders had combated the ideology long before the outbreak of revolution. Leaders of the Pentecostals had in the past counterbalanced

Marxism right from its inception in the 60's while they were university students. Not only that, Pentecostalism had been embraced by the rising elite in Addis and other urban centers, and demonstrated a high capacity to expand into other sectors of the society. This was a strain that the *Derg* and its intellectual backers could hardly accommodate. For that reason some of the leaders in the *Derg* and in the left wing opposition parties, both in the camp of the EPRP and MEISON, were very hostile to the Pentecostals. Bedru summarizes the problem citing a familiar Amharic proverb, *awekush naqush*, "familiarity breeds trouble."<sup>238</sup>

It is no wonder that the persecution against MWC and other Pentecostals began earlier than other evangelical groups. The new rulers could not use their anti-evangelical Christian rhetoric in connection with the MWC, for it was entirely an independent church with no foreign connections. The Pentecostals were the first Christian group to experience the hand of the new regime. The new rulers viewed them as members of a cult movement, an attitude that was inherited from the past, and hence were dismissed as mere spiritualists without relevance. The MWC, by and large, constituted a minority Christian group and they still bore the stigma of being an aberrant sectarian group. The absence of attachment to any foreign force within or without and the overall bias the society exhibited towards them made them very vulnerable targets of the government. *Qebele* cadres used to say "*Be pentewoch kerse meqabir la'ay abyotachinen engenebalene*", "We shall build our revolution on the death yard or graveyard of the Pentecostals."<sup>239</sup>

In September 1978, the *Qebele* guards stormed the church building, disbanded the Sunday service that was in progress, and sealed the building, all without prior notice.

Later *Qebele* officials, in their usual arbitrary manner, announced the confiscation of the new building and its property. The building, which cost thousands of dollars contributed by members, was lost before it was even fully completed. The government began to crack down on the Pentecostals after closing the Mulu Wengel church in Addis and elsewhere. Especially affected in the crackdown was the south, outside Addis, where Pentecostalism was gaining ground and gathering a large following among the youth. Widespread arrests and imprisonment of Pentecostals had been reported by several agencies dealing with persecution.<sup>240</sup>

Wherever they were, members of the Pentecostal churches faced harassment from local cadres and *Qebele* officials in their respective residential quarters. Being the early victims, of the heavy handed treatment of the *Derg*, the Pentecostals were the first to go underground as they had done in the past. During the initial stage of their responses, some opted to join other evangelical churches which were still operating openly. In so doing, they became instrumental in the spread of the Pentecostal experience in the new churches in which they chose to be a part. A more organized and rational response came with the reconstitution of the leadership of the church.

The leadership that was established with the reopening of the church began to review the unexpected challenge and decided to return to the model of the house church to which it had been accustomed for the several years after the commencement of its first major persecution in 1971. Most of the men who constituted the leadership, just like their MKC counterparts, were highly educated people with diverse skills and thus were able to lay out an effective underground structure. Since the Pentecostals had experienced persecution in the past, most of its members, especially its leadership, were familiar with

the stories of Christian persecution in other communist countries. For instance, *Tortured for Christ*, written by the Rumanian pastor Richard Wumbrand, was popular book which had been circulating amongst Pentecostals. They were also familiar with the experience of Dietrich Bonhoffer who suffered under the Nazis for his faith.<sup>241</sup> As Alem put it, "we knew the price of suffering and the blessing entailed both theoretically and experientially."<sup>242</sup>

Since the Mulu Wengel church had its members concentrated in the urban centers, mainly in the capital city, the structure the leaders had outlined, by and large, applied to urban situations. People like Melasachew, Tesfahum, Lemma, and the Girma Begashaw, and others made a thorough preparation to identify their members, their residential sites, socio-economic circumstances and their housing conditions.<sup>243</sup> Accordingly, the group, consisting of economists, engineers and planners, conducted a sound economical and social analysis of the 284 *Qebeles*. They identified members of their churches in every *Qebele* with a relatively safe neighborhood. Based on their studies, they developed a detailed cell structure for Addis Ababa patterned along the new political and administrative division of the city, i.e. the *Qebeles* and the *Kefetegnas*. They divided Addis Ababa into seven categories following the major streets like, *Shero Meda*, the *Meskel* Square, the *Bole* road, *Nefas Selk* road, Old Air Port road, *Mesfena Harar* road, *Megenagna* road, etc. The cell groups were established in every *Qebele*. A two-tiered leadership made up of a Board of Elders and a Coordinating Committee was set up. The Board of Elders oversaw the underground church. The Board was responsible for bigger issues dealing with planning, budgeting and taking expedient actions and making decisions as the situations required it. It represented the avant-garde, the executive

committee of the Church. The Coordinating Committee had several sub-committees serving as support groups. To cite few examples: Prayer group, Deacons group, Choir group, Teaching and Literature Production group, etc. The Coordinating Committee was responsible for overseeing the smooth functioning of the various activities of the underground church. (See appendix for the chart).

Below the two levels came subsidiary leadership categories namely, regional leaders, selected from two to four contiguous *Kefetegnas*, and unit leaders, composed of two men each. The unit leaders group made the last rung in the newly constituted leadership of the Mulu Wengel Church. The unit leaders were the facilitators of the various cell group activities. The rationale behind having two leaders for the cell group was to make sure that there was a replacement, if an unanticipated event happened to one of them, in the midst of the fluid political situation.<sup>244</sup>

The first priority of the leadership of the church was survival, that is to strategize on how to keep members safe and help them growing in their faith when faced with persecutions and pressures coming from the state and other Marxist organizations including EPRP whose members were very hostile towards the Pentecostals.<sup>245</sup> Instructions were laid out to ensure disciplined membership and hence various cautionary strategies were developed to regulate underground functions. Some of these steps include maintaining a small number of believers, not exceeding ten men, being on guard in coming to and in leaving meeting places, walking at intervals, and avoiding bunching up, conducting meetings either in the early morning or late at night, and shifting the venues of meeting sites.<sup>246</sup> Due care was also given to new converts. First, they had to be established in the teaching of the faith for an extended period of time. Second, people

watched over their behavior to determine whether they were cons or committed converts. Third, only over time were new recruits integrated into the cell structure. They were doing this to make certain that the underground works were not exposed to spies. Also, 24-hour prayer chains involving 160 men were organized in such a way that each prayer group would pray for 30 minutes by taking turns at designated times.<sup>247</sup>

Pentecostals adopted flexible and expedient strategies to survive. Among the strategies adopted were building houses by forming associations in new neighborhood sites based on the government's policy, which encouraged people in towns to build houses by forming corporate groups. There were areas where the Pentecostals lived in contiguous residential areas where they were not exercised in their worship unlike their fellow believers living in scattered locations. The houses of wealthy Pentecostals with wall-fences and larger rooms were used as meeting places for special occasions such as holiday celebrations, observance of Holy Communion and training leaders and evangelists or other activities involving large number of participants. Holy Communion was served in designated areas for a number of cell groups on the same day at the same time for all members. The observance duration, however, was very brief so as to minimize the possible risks. In the event of a reported danger in one location, the people who came to participate in the communion service, would be disbanded and moved to the next immediate place by transports arranged for such eventualities.

Fund raising was a very important function of the underground church. Since the task of maintaining the underground work was not easy, at least in financial terms, leaders developed an informal system of soliciting funds from members. A sub-committee set under the Coordinating Committee, persistently taught member's to

support church activities through tithing and other “love gifts.” The addition of new members, especially from the influential Gurage communities in Marcato, the capital’s largest market site, augmented the church’s income.<sup>248</sup> Mulu Wengel, as an independent church without connections with foreign missionaries, had in the past relied on its members’ financial contributions. As informants pointed out, the level of member’s willingness to give money through tithing and gifts increased substantially during its underground operation.<sup>249</sup>

The Pentecostals developed a network of informants by befriending security people to track the changing shifts in official opinion, to sense possible dangers, and to take proactive steps to protect their members when threats appeared on the horizon. There were regular contacts between the Board of Elders, members of the Coordinating Committee and regional and cell group leaders. They conducted meetings in safe and unnoticed places, such as big state-owned restaurants or NGO compounds.<sup>250</sup> At times leaders would venture out for picnics in rural areas, or some resort centers, such as Langano, driving vans. They discussed issues all along their journeys and carried out relaxed conversations on serious issues requiring decisions. According to those who participated and led such informal meetings, such venues were used to evaluate performances and draft annual plans.<sup>251</sup>

The Pentecostals increased in number as they aggressively brought new converts from every walk of life. Though there were no statistical records left to measure their growth, informants cite the proliferation of cell groups, which presented a challenge even to the leaders, as they had to stretch their resources, indicating a strong evidence of a growing and vibrant community.<sup>252</sup> Informants who had worked for the regime also

indicated that the government's fear of the Pentecostals had been raised by the early 1980's.<sup>253</sup> The coming of the youth into the Pentecostal movement in an increasing number alarmed the government officials. In 1982, Commander Lemma Gutema, then in charge of the city of Addis, declared an all out war against the Pentecostals. This was the time when the *Derg* gained the upper hand over opposition forces and was spading the ground for the formation of a political party. Apparently his plan was to cleanse the city of the influence of Pentecostals. The strategy he devised was to call a meeting of residents of Addis Ababa through their respective *Qebeles*, assign cadres for each meeting to manipulate the discussion process, ask residents to expose the Pentecostals, and solicit public denunciation and condemnation. The scheme was, once the Pentecostals were identified, to give them the choice of either being on the side of the revolution by renouncing their faith, or to face imprisonment. The news reached Pentecostal leaders, who, as a result, made the pre-emptive preparations to participate in the meetings and to defend themselves by offering convincing arguments for their case. That would leave a strong impression upon the attendants that the leaders were willing to accept the risk resulting from such a position. Lemma Gutema had to leave the country because of emergency reasons related to his health. But, the *Qebele* meeting took place as planned in one Sunday in all the *Qebeles* in Addis Ababa. As was planned, the cadres came and delivered speeches condemning the Pentecostals as agents of CIA, bought by American dollars, and appealed to the people to stand with them in uprooting the foreign religion and dealing with the "infiltrators of the revolution."<sup>254</sup>

Much to the chagrin of the cadres, participants in the *Qebele* meetings unexpectedly responded in favor of the Pentecostals by telling the cadres that this was not their concern



and need not even be the concern of the state. In fact, the gathering provided the occasion for *Qebele* residents to vent their grievances regarding housing, water services, the absence of basic goods and supplies, the shortage of foodstuffs in the *Qebele* shops, etc. Some henchman of the regime, who were planted in the meeting, tried to show support for the cadres' overture, but they were stopped by shouts from the participants. Some Pentecostals took the occasion to speak out boldly against the state's infringement of their freedom as citizens in a manner contrary to the constitution. Some emphatically pronounced that, as believers, they did not have a political agenda to pursue, they loved their country no less than other Ethiopians and had shown no reservation to express it. They added that they had not committed any crime against any one to deserve such a treatment and asserted the mere fact that they were *Pentes* should not make them objects of any kind of abuse. In some *Qebeles*, the Pentecostals boldly told the cadres that no power under the sun would make them renounce their faith and if need be they were willing to take it to the point of the grave.<sup>255</sup> In this manner, the Pentecostals succeeded in stacking *Qebele* meetings intended to bring their demise.

Unable to execute their agenda, the cadres retreated. Informants reported that the manner in which the meetings were conducted, and their disgraceful endings, were virtually the same throughout all the *Qebeles* in Addis.<sup>256</sup> This was one of the few moments in the period of the *Derg* where cadres were openly opposed and publicly ridiculed in *Qebele* meetings and were forced to swallow their agenda, facing widespread resistance. The Pentecostals were not popular in the society at large. This was essentially because of long held biases against them and due to their aloof and resigned life style, which often barred them from taking active participations in the daily lives of

their neighborhood community and common cultural expressions of most Ethiopians. Yet, the public held such a hatred against the state that they released their pent-up resentments, capitalizing on the occasion. Faith being such a sensitive issue for most of the residents, submitting to the pressures of the cadres in connection with the Pentecostals, would also mean opening up doors for further action against any form of religion. The response of the residents was premised on the old adage *neg bene*, "tomorrow it will also be my turn."<sup>257</sup>

In comparison with the urban centers, the *Derg* cadres dealt more severely with the Pentecostal in rural areas. Leaders of the Pentecostal churches became primary targets in the late 1970's. They were hunted down, branded as counter-revolutionary idealists, and thrown in jail for years without any charges.<sup>258</sup> Suspected Pentecostals were denounced publicly, in what was then known as, *ye magalat zemecha*, the campaign exposing individuals as enemies of the revolution and then publicly condemning them. In 1984, the government was planning a major clamp-down on the Pentecostals, but the intensification of the famine situation in the north distracted their attention and, as a result, the plan was never implemented.<sup>259</sup>

Though the Mulu Wengel church had been closed, its famous choirs continued to function. These choirs served in secretly-held revival meetings and in those churches which openly operated. Church leaders of the open churches of Qale Heywet and the Mekane Yesus Church invited the choir to sing during Sunday services, holidays and marriage ceremonies. The Mulu Wengel Choir was one of the venues by which some of the Pentecostal experiences spread into other mainstream denominations. A major event that reinforced the process of charismatization of other evangelical churches was the

establishment, in the heat of the revolution, of a para-church organization called the Holy Spirit Ministry, run by Pastor Daniel, a Pentecostal who had joined the Meserete Krestos Church. According to Pastor Daniel, he went to every evangelical church, open or closed, and gave teachings concerning the power of the Holy Spirit and the significant role the Holy Spirit plays to strengthen the church and the life of Christians.<sup>260</sup>

The Pentecostals countered the Marxist philosophy in the cracks and crevices of life. Since most of the Pentecostals, at least the ones in the urban centers, were well-informed, they represented an articulate elite vanguard that courageously combated Marxism, if not openly, at least subversively. There were many gifted apologists who had read widely and who could help people understand the claims of Marxism in juxtaposition with the Christian faith. The Pentecostals invested considerable time and resources to lay strong spiritual foundations for their members to help them hold on to their faith, expose the weak sides of Marxism, and aggressively expanded their spheres of influence by adding new converts even from those involved in government leadership.<sup>261</sup> They were known for courageously resisting chanting slogans for which they suffered the terrible consequence of long imprisonment. In most of their songs, they expressed their faithfulness and allegiance only to their God and not to any “system.” Some of their songs expressed tacit defiance of the regime. Sharing the same universe with the rest of the Ethiopians, who were subjected to a brutal regime, their collected resistance invariably expressed, subverted the *Derg*’s ideological discourse. In this sense, their story was one of the varied articulations of dissent expressed by Ethiopians, and hence, was part and parcel of the larger story of suffering, repression and resistance.

### *Issues of Growth and Contexts*

In general, records are not available relating to the levels of church growth or increases in the numbers of evangelical Christians. Although informants suggest that most of the growth occurred in urban areas, we do not have substantive data concerning the geographic and demographic locations of the growth.<sup>262</sup> For one thing, evangelical churches had not established a strong tradition of keeping records of their membership. Second, secrecy impairs the maintenance of keeping personal data of members. Most evangelical churches had a fairly reasonable estimate of their membership before the outbreak of the revolution and after the collapse of the regime, and these tentatively provide data for drawing some comparisons. There are a number of senior essays written on local church history that confirm growth in the various denominations within the evangelical churches.<sup>263</sup> The estimate of members of the Mulu Wengel church at the time of the revolution was in the neighborhood of 50, 000 and by the year 2000, the number had reached half a million. When the Mulu Wengel held its first service in Addis Ababa, after the collapse of the *Derg*, there were over 15,000 attendants. In 1999, *Religion Today*, reported the broader phenomenal growth of the evangelical church in Ethiopia. The report indicated that the number of evangelical Christians rose from 4 million in 1984 to 8 million in 1999.<sup>264</sup> There were also churches that were born during the revolution. A good example is *Mesgana* (Praise) church, which started as a house fellowship in a family and evolved into a large church.<sup>265</sup>

As to the question: what led to the church to experience such a remarkable growth, informants unanimously maintain that the growth can only be explained in non-material terms. "We were praying and fasting and witnessing and saving souls...it was our

business, to save people from fire. During the *Derg* period, we threw our net far and wide. We had to hasten the pace and double our efforts, for business was not as usual.”<sup>266</sup> According to informants, church growth, which in this case meant multiplication of cell groups and an overall increase in membership size, was across the board, but mostly taking place in the urban areas.<sup>267</sup>

It appears that the year 1985 was a landmark with respect to the history of the expansion of the evangelical movement in Ethiopia. According to informants the evangelical churches experienced growth mainly after the year 1985. The most likely explanations for that were the relative relaxation of the *Derg*, the coming of Christian NGO's to start relief and community development projects, and the maturity and enhanced position of the church through the accumulation of experience. The *Derg* temporarily loosened its noose around the church at this time because of the presence of foreign NGOs. The Christian NGO's mostly employed evangelical Christians, thus enhancing the evangelicals' image greatly. Many of the staffs working for various NGOs became active agents in disseminating their faith in remote areas that had been affected by droughts. Some of these areas had been unaffected by the evangelical faith in the past.<sup>268</sup>

It should also be noted that by the year 1985, the revolution had run out of steam and many of those who had been enthusiastic fans of the Ethiopian Revolution began to experience some second thoughts, which led to wholesale disappointment and apathy. The formation of the party the previous year and the lavish money spent on its celebration, offended the sensibilities of many Ethiopians with lingering hopes for the revolution. Above all, the escalating crisis of famine, the death of millions of Ethiopians

and the *Derg's* inability to handle the situation spoke against the rosy picture proclaimed by socialist Ethiopia. By the year 1985, it was clear that the revolution was not delivering what it had promised. A situation akin to the revolution of rising expectations was quietly building. By then, it became an open fact that the much-hailed dictatorship of the proletariat had ended up being the dictatorship of the military elite. This was also the time where a spirit of resignation and a sense of futility permeated many Ethiopians who had been involved in the various opposition movements, since forces opposing the regime had been silenced by the brutal suppression of the *Derg*. People had been wrenched from their political commitments and the causes that had been the driving forces in their lives. This created a vacuum of purpose, a big cavity of commitment that needed to be filled with something else. For some that "something else" was found in the embrace of the evangelical Christian faith.<sup>269</sup> For others, out-migration was the response. Whereas, there were others who, facing utter despair, cushioned their lives in the pubs, which served as the alternative space for gossip politics. A popular song that catches the mood of this group was *Men Tadergewaleh*, (What can you do about it?) The humdrum, cloistered and banal climate of life that characterized the *Derg's* period, the "end of the road" experience many Ethiopians felt, and the falsity of a moribund ideology that proved its irrelevance so quickly, were part of the overall context which pre-adapted some members of the Ethiopian society to incline toward religion. Like the situations of other countries, such as China, evangelical Christianity answered problems of meaning that Marxism had failed to answer. Religious faith grew as the crisis of ideology created a vacuum, pointing to the need for transcendence.<sup>270</sup>

The revolution affected every sector of the Ethiopian society. What the revolution entailed was a repeated process of uprooting social relations in countless ways, affecting millions of lives. Certainly, this micro-process, to use Donahm's expression, had myriad of repercussions. There was no class or any ethnic group that had not been negatively influenced. The youth in particular were the ones that had been gravely affected by the events of the revolution. Military conscription that targeted the youth, the threats of Red Terrors, the pressure that was put on them by various political parties vying for their souls, brought despair, gloom and stress that they could hardly endure at their tender age. The chance of facing the risk of losing one's life was relatively higher for the youth raised in a non-evangelical Christian family than not. One contributing reason was the strong teaching emphasis parents provided for their children to ward off any ideological entrapment. Their children had a relatively small risk of getting involved in the politics of the left, be it in the government side or on the opposition camp. Thus they ran a lesser risk of becoming victims of the Red and White terrors. This presented to the youth an indirect enticement to be drawn to the evangelical faith as a convenient shelter. According to former government officials, the exodus of the young from opposition parties, particularly that of EPRP, into the evangelical faith created such a concern that it was one of the reasons that they wanted to intensify their suppression against what they had categorized as *Mete Hayamnot*.<sup>271</sup> As informants witness, the apparent advantage of the evangelical faith as some kind of safe haven from a highly troubled and uncertain world drove some members of the youth towards it.<sup>272</sup>

For many evangelical Christians, their faith created for them a relatively stable sociological environment. Because of their disinterest in politics, many evangelical

Christians did not risk much becoming political casualties of the *Derg* and had a much more safe lives, compared to many others during the revolution. By default, evangelical Christians were not involved in any political wrangling, as a result of which, they could commit their time and resources towards configuring their own lives. In the midst of the political and social chaos, they continued to build houses, marry early and engage in settled and stable life. This had been one of the sociological factors identified by informants as a possible source of attraction for some to move towards the evangelical faith. Informants also point out that they had capitalized on this propensity and increased their evangelistic thrust through intensified witnessing wherever the opportunities availed themselves, be it amongst neighborhood communities, workplaces, or family social occasions. In the opinion of some informants, generally, individuals who resented the regime and loathed its politics, either left the country through the various porous borders or stayed, carrying the deadly weight of despair. There were others who chose to make new experiments in their lives by turning their attention towards the evangelical faith.<sup>273</sup>

Among those who made such decisions, were Orthodox Christians, or those who had lapsed from their evangelical faith because of the lure of politics. Converts from the Orthodox background mentioned that their discovery of Scriptural truth through disciplined, regular readings of the Bible, and the experience of personal salvation received by trusting Christ as their Savior gave them renewed hope, added vigor to their lives and radically changed their lives for the better.<sup>274</sup>

One needs to ask whether or not the *Derg* had a policy toward religion, especially as it pertains to the Evangelical Church. My answer is “yes,” the *Derg* had a policy. If policy meant written statement clearly, articulating guidelines for actions, then the



answer is “no.” A policy does not have to be written or stated as long as it is pursued consistently, and purposefully. The *Derg* was openly hostile to religion, and evangelicals in particular, and that hostility had been translated into practical terms coherently and systematically.

The question why the *Derg* turned against the church demands further explanation. A generalized answer would be hegemonic control keeps alternatives from the public’s arena and consciousness. In the opinion of Gemechu,

Ironically, evangelical Christians and ideological socialists idealized many of the same characteristics. Both were deeply committed to beliefs, which shaped the ways in which they lived their lives. Both were willing to risk their comfort for the sake of their convictions. It seemed that the cadres targeted Christians, because of their scorn for religion and their admiration for principled commitment. And yet the same principled commitment stiffened the resolve of many Christians not to accept the invitation of the cadres, creating further irritation and opposition.<sup>275</sup>

As a general explanation this point is well-taken, but it assumes that the *Derg* members were bonafide Marxists, a claim which is contradicted by many informants who had closer knowledge of members of the *Derg*. Many of the members of the *Derg* had not been informed Marxists, in the sense that they read its dogma and knew its grammar and philosophical nuances.<sup>276</sup> Their claim of embracing Marxism was politically-driven for the revolution needed both an ideology and a language. This does not, however, mean that their intellectual advisors were not Marxists.<sup>277</sup> There are even reports that some members of the *Derg*, including the former President, visited seers, wise men (*Awaki*) and acted on their advice in making certain political decisions.<sup>278</sup>

According to General Taye and Dr. Samson, persecution against Christians emanated more from Ethiopian patriotism than ideology. According to this view, most of

the *Derg* members and the party officials came from the Orthodox Christian faith, which in its essence, subsumed: religion, nationalism and the culture of the core. Government officials, despite their claim of being Marxists, displayed the same attitude of antipathy against the evangelicals. They held the same bias and stereotypes towards the evangelicals as most government officials had exhibited in the past. Evangelical Christianity had in the past been embraced primarily by people of the south and carried with it some taints. Eide maintains that there are enough reasons to believe that the government exploited the traditional prejudices against the evangelicals to weaken them.<sup>279</sup> This view attached hidden religious motives to the alacrity of the cadres and local state functionaries in persecuting Christians. This is also supported by informants working for the security forces during Mengistu's regime. According to Seifu, in 1978, a high level delegate consisting of members of the Orthodox clergy and professionals from different sectors of the society made a plea to Mengistu that the government should take serious action towards the *Pentes*, for they represented a dangerous threat to the nation and the revolution. A high level committee was set up to inquire about the *Pentes* and present a report. The committee, led by Fikre Sellassie, a *Derg* member and close ally of Mengistu, concluded that the *Pentes* had no economic and cultural significance to the nation. It stressed the fact that the *Pentes* were devoid of national patriotism, as they pursued religious beliefs inspired by foreigners. Their connection with the western world was an issue that was brought up by the report as something dangerous. In the end the committee recommended that ways had to be sought to eradicate the religion from Ethiopia. Accordingly, the *Derg* took the committee's report seriously and adopted a position of systematically rooting out the evangelical faith.<sup>280</sup> Repressive measures meted

out by the local officials against evangelicals also had deeply ingrained cultural roots. For instance, inducing respect for authority by means of fear may be a continuous cultural motive.

From the perspective of the state, we also need to view the issue of persecution not only from an ideological framework, but also from a cultural point of view. Most of the leaders of the military regime came from a dominant culture that had been considerably shaped by the Orthodox tradition, in spite of their claims to be communists. They filtered things through inherited cultural grids. It can therefore be said that their actions were influenced by traditions, old cultural idioms and historical narratives, which were openly hostile to new religious developments. This significantly diminishes the role of ideology as an exclusive real factor for persecuting the evangelical church during the *Derg*. Hence, the need to admit that most of the local cadres and *Qebele* officials who were directly involved in the repressive acts were not communists at all and, though they wore the garb, they were people who sought to promote their career advancements through party membership and loyal services to the state.

There were other subsidiary reasons as to why the *Derg* was committed towards eradicating the evangelical faith. As the religion of the periphery, the *Derg* always feared that it might be used by political groups, which had separatist agenda. Shiferaw, a former government official, intimated to me that there were intelligence reports that showed the existence of links between some liberation fronts and some evangelical church leaders. This was something that added more justification for the mistreatment of the evangelicals and the desire of the state to eliminate the faith.<sup>281</sup> According to many informants, the most important reason for the *Derg*'s anti-evangelical stance was ideological which, at its

root, was spiritual. Marxism was antithetical to religion, especially to those which appear to be radical, expansive and unwilling to yield easily to any pressure.<sup>282</sup> The core of the challenge of the evangelical faith came rather from its basic philosophical incompatibility with Marxism-Leninism as an authoritative truth. Gorbachev made the apposite remark that, “The full evidence is still lacking as to why the Soviet State is still so actively hostile to religion, indeed committed to diminishing it completely...One deep-seated reason is that religion provide the only legal alternative ideology to communism in the Soviet Union.”<sup>283</sup> What Gorbachev said about the Russian situation greatly speaks for the Ethiopian situation as well.

### ***Conscientious Objectors and Non-Violent Resistance***

Intentionally or not, the evangelical church represented a voice of dissent and resistance against a dictatorial regime. Religion by its nature constitutes an opposition to a state openly atheistic, for it offers alternative worldview. Evangelical Christianity challenged the organizational principles and the hegemonic beliefs of the Marxist regime. It is also obvious that secularization in socialist societies is a foundation on which social life is organized. The *Derg* enforced the process of secularization literally and unwisely. In seeking to evangelize society, the evangelical church in Ethiopia had to counter secularization as a force which creates a secular pattern of life in principle.

Resistance, in the political sense suggests actions or expressions of opposition, covert or overt, to intentionally counter, challenge and dismantle a system. Resistance of this sort had not characterized the evangelical churches in Ethiopia. Familiar notions of resistance usually involve indicators such as strikes, demonstrations, violence, etc. But,

there are varied expressions of resistance, which appear to be mute but active, demonstrating furtive rejection of authority and its prevailing legitimating principles.<sup>284</sup> Defiance of the Marxist ideology by insisting on the supremacy of faith and abstentions from shouting slogans which promoted the power of the rulers and their ideologies and the daring messages of preachers, composers, and singers of gospel songs against the philosophy of atheism constituted indirect forms of contestations. Evangelical Christians paid a huge price for not showing willingness to shout slogans considered to be blasphemous in their eyes. The slogan, which evangelicals found to be repugnant and most offensive was: “We shall liquidate the past and place nature under our control.” This was one of the slogans that came in the late 70’s, expressing the ethos of the time and the triumphant mood of the regime. There were many songs composed to uplift the sovereignty of God, apparently to challenge the assumptions behind such slogans. *Denke new lene geta* (He is awesome to me) by Tamirat Haile, *El Shaddie* (God is Almighty) by Derege, and *Keber Yegebahal* (Glory be unto you), author unknown, *Semay Zufanu new* (The Heaven is his Throne), Geja choir, can be cited as few examples.<sup>285</sup>

Tesfaye’s songs, which used biblical narratives and allusion, highlighting refusal to submit before a man-made object conveyed the message of triumphing through trials, even if it meant passing through fires, are good examples of defiance.<sup>286</sup> Tamirat Haile’s songs that defended the eternal value of Biblical truth contained powerful messages which warned people not to be beguiled by the fads of the day. *Dinq qal*, Amazing Word, was composed and sang in response to the attacks against the Bible.<sup>287</sup> Tamirat Welba’s song *Bewengel alafrem*, “I am not ashamed of the gospel,” was also sung to reassure Christians that the Bible contained the power of God. The Gospel songs produced in the

times of the *Derg* stressed steadfastness, courage and firmness in the faith. The song *Getachen new kehulum belay*, “Our Lord is above all things,” was written in 1978 in response to the slogan “the revolution is above everything.” And the song, *Egziabher yemesgen kemilut honenal*, (“We are amongst those praising Thee”), was sung to counter the new style of socialist greeting that was being gradually promoted. To provide one poignant examples: For the question, “how are you”? The new response was: “ we shall win,” or simply, “*Dehena*” instead of the traditional *Egziabeher Yemesgen*, praise be to God. In a somewhat oblique fashion, evangelical Christians demonstrated, in spite of their number, a unique steadfastness in not submitting glibly to the pressure of the day by paying extraordinary sacrifice. In this respect the church not only undergirded civil life but it also interrogated a dominant ideology by providing a counterweight that discursively subverted the political system. Gospel music provided an alternative social cultural space where the dramatization of the political and moral crisis prevalent in the society was possible. Through their songs, evangelicals invoked transcendental realities by which the state can be called to judgment.

According to informants, such songs may not have been composed with meticulous intentionality but emerge as internalized reactions to a generalized bombardment coming not only from slogans but media barrages and demagogic speeches of cadres and the like. Evangelical Christians were known for being unyielding when pressures were put on them to denounce their faith.<sup>288</sup> Hence, the need to recognize their contribution in preventing the regime from totalizing the cultural space and exercising control over the realm of consciousness.

The evangelical church did not allow itself to be a docile instrument of the *Derg*. Firmly committed to its own position, by its disassociation from the state, the evangelical church was able to control its own sphere of production of knowledge and blocked Marxist ideology from negatively affecting its members. The church successfully resisted the *Derg*'s attempt to introduce a psychosocial shift towards a totalitarian regime by deliberately choosing not to be included. The church became one of the biggest roadblocks to the creation of "socialist man" and a "socialist culture" which sought to eradicate faith from the Ethiopian society. In this respect, the stress evangelical Christianity places on the new birth experience was a challenge to the socialist metaphor of a new man.

Overall, the resistance of evangelical Christians can be described as a non-violent, based on the logic of absolute faith in Biblical truth which runs counter to the logic of dialectical materialism, though as church leaders admit, this position has not been expressed in solid theological statements. Evidently, the resistance was at the ideological and world-view level, and how far had this been translated in the political realm is difficult to say. The firm stand taken by the evangelical Christians not to yield to the state-sponsored ideology and their tenacity with which they held biblical truth to be the supreme guideline of their lives, and their fearless determination to share their faith to others, was a form of resistance, indirectly contributing to the attrition and the bankruptcy of the state and its ideology in the long term.

Going underground was in itself a form of social strike, an expression of institutional defiance. It was the most appropriate course of action in conditions where confrontation with the status quo could only be an unequal battle between the spear and

the Marxist gun, and where political detachment was a condition, which allowed survival. Evangelical Christians knew that they could not overturn a structure so powerful and violent in behavior, so they decided to emigrate from the structure first by arming their members with spiritual weapons against the atheist ideology and then engaging aggressively to expand their sphere by recruiting more members using every possible means and arena through determined missionary service often at a high cost.

In constituting the underground churches, the church in Ethiopia chose the road of self-preservation and fought for its integrity and independence by creating an autonomous space. Evangelical Christians maintained a sphere of existence beyond the authority of a state that placed exclusive demands upon millions of Ethiopians.<sup>289</sup> By keeping distance, they maintained a degree of coherence and social sanity in a period marred with civil strife and political discord that eroded relational capital among citizens of the Ethiopian society. Their withdrawal should not be confused with the position of the Jehovah's Witness who refused to participate in the *Derg's* mobilization programs for war against the Somalis or other secessionist forces. Most evangelical Christians showed positive signs of cooperation with the state by taking active part in material contributions or by offering themselves for military service either as militias or member of the regular forces in the army. This was especially true for most evangelical Christians in the south.

Unlike the German Protestant Church, which adopted critical support, "critical solidarity,"<sup>290</sup> when it was under the Communist rule, or the Chinese Three Self Patriotic Movement, or the case of the Chilean Christians who gave support to General Salvador Allende, and that of evangelical Christians in Nicaragua supporting the Sandinistas, the



path chosen by the Ethiopian evangelical church, was distance, disengagement, battling from within or inside out.<sup>291</sup>

There are various explanations offered concerning the turning of people to the Christian faith. Various theories have been advanced that seek to explain conversions from psychological, political, economic and sociological dimensions. Whatever the truth the theories seek to propound, the Ethiopian situation requires a careful consideration. At the start, it has to be stated that by and large, materialism as a pull factor does not seem to provide a sufficient explanation in the Ethiopian situation. In the first place, to be a *Pente* or a member of a *Mete haymanot* was demeaning and exclusionary to the evangelical Christians. It carried with it the stigma of being a renegade, in all its senses, political, cultural and social, both prior to the revolution and after. They were looked upon as cultural outsiders by adherents of the Orthodox Church, who saw the Orthodox faith as the classical and original form of Christianity. Since it is considered to be the first and foremost by its adherents, any new faith claiming the same name is, at best a cult and phony at worst.

Theories which suggest that crisis and deprivation are instrumental in leading people to experience conversion or religious renewals may have some basis considering those Ethiopians who embraced the evangelical faith in prisons centers and refugees camps, and in general during the high level of stress the traumatized society experienced during the revolution. But, there were quite a considerable number of people who had been exposed to the same situation (other things being equal) who had not responded in the same manner and chose other avenues of coping with their grievous conditions. Experiencing troubles, facing difficult situations, and encountering reversals are

circumstantial contexts which might pre-adapt people to investigate new religious experience. In general, the crisis-solace model assumes religion as a dead-end and as false solution to a genuine problem. It grossly ignores the practical significance of religion to people who deliberately chose to embrace it. But this pre-adapted position does not in itself lead to any predictable pattern of religious experience. What Peter Berger refers to as “plausibility structure” which posits the view that change or one’s response to new ideas is based as well as shaped by the pre-existing ideational inventories, is more relevant in this context, provided that, the role of the change agent, the communicant, and the messages put across, are taken into account.<sup>292</sup>

When trying to understand religious movements, some scholars apply the familiar technique of social science, and see changes as a function of familiar categories such as modernization, race, and class, but, such an approach always runs the risk of missing the core matter. People might join the church because consciously or not they see the institution as a way of expressing their social aspirations, but other elements also enter into the equation. According to Samson, religious change provided the basis for constructing new forms of control, order and coherence, not a world of illusion, as many might assume. People join or convert because they acquire beliefs about the supernatural realm and its relationship to the visible world. Religious conversions have generative power that many do fail to appreciate--they bring changes, observable transformations and those changes echo through/across every aspect of the convert’s life, such as ethics of work, filial relations, moral and philosophical persuasion, re-channeling of commitment.<sup>293</sup>

## ***Factors Promoting Growth***

### ***Contextual: The External /Push factors:***

1. The fall of the Monarch: The de-centering of an age-old monarchical system and particularly of the deposal of Emperor Haile Sellassie provides a major background for the growth. The emperor was the custodian of Christianity, at least institutionally, and a father-figure for the whole nation, whatever the modality he had used to establish that image.<sup>294</sup> His removal from power created a loss of center, an aura of unity, which could not have been replaced or substituted for by any political arrangement. The process of fragmentation and the overall identity crisis that Ethiopian society by and large, had experienced accompanying his departure was a major historical context that should be considered along side the expansion of the evangelical faith.

The vacuum created by the vanishing of a towering figure, with all he had represented, created an imperceptible psychic disorientation that led to a soul-searching experience in the process of which faith became a critical element. This, according to observations made by some informants, led to an overall disquieting which created propitious conditions for the transmission of the evangelical faith.<sup>295</sup>

2. State and church separation: one major contextual factors which facilitated the growth of the evangelical church in Ethiopian was the Disestablishment of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The Draft Constitution of August 17, 1974 declared separation of state and church and equality of religion according to one's conscience. This was a step that radically affected the fate of the established Church that had strong relations with the state on which it depended for a source of income and other necessities. In so doing, the revolution not only weakened the church, but attacked the root of its

power.<sup>296</sup> Relations between church and state were irreparably disrupted by the overthrow of Haile Sellassie on September 12, 1974, and henceforth, the Orthodox Church experienced economic and political marginalization unprecedented in its history. The land proclamation acts (rural March 4, 1975; urban, July 26, 1975), destroyed the economic base of the Church. At least, in legal and political terms, the power of the Church to act as a bulwark and defender of the Christian faith was considerably undermined. The effects of the marginalization of the church resulting from de-linkage with the state and the loss of its economic base also had damaging psychological consequences. The longstanding mystical power it held over the Ethiopian masses radically diminished.<sup>297</sup> A major factor constraining the growth of the evangelical faith in Ethiopia had definitely been the established church, for it had always considered itself as champions of the classical faith and resisted new claims. Any claim of Christianity, other than the classical one, judged by its standard, was heretical. This was one of the paradoxical conditions that paved the way for the growth of the evangelical faith during the revolution.

3. Overall gloom and climate of despair: the generalized disquiet the revolution has created should also be viewed as part of the overall historical contexts of the expansion of the evangelical Christian faith. The speedy measures the Derg took to disestablish the old order, measures such as the nationalization of rural and urban lands, the confiscation of private industries, dislocations caused by programs such as villagization, the materialist philosophy to which people were being subjected forcefully, caused dramatic shocks in the various sections of the Ethiopian society, which in general increased the level of vulnerability of people and hence their quest for a supernatural

experience and a vital faith commitment. The revolution created an overall disturbance, a psycho-historical dislocation, in familiar ways, familiar thinking, familiar relations, whereby people were forced to seek new ways of rescuing truth, new accents of self expression including faith.<sup>298</sup> The revolution and the ideology that propelled it stood against existential wisdom. It placed an injunction on the ethos of Ethiopian tradition founded on such core values like *chewanet* (gentility) and *feriha Egziabeher* (fear of God). It suddenly appeared to be the case that the ideas that informed and justified their existence in the past were either defunct, defective or else misguided. This was one of the conditions that made people look for newer idioms and models of expression of existence.

4. Existing Political terror: the *Derg*, no doubt, was a terrorist state, which through its Red Terror campaigns of 1977-1978, wiped out tens of thousands of people, and shocked many Ethiopians. During the Red Terror several tragic things happened. Corpses were left by the roadside. Relatives were to claim bodies of the loved ones, if they could. There were even reported cases of fees levied on claiming the bodies, apparently to defray the cost of bullets.<sup>299</sup> The fate of imprisoned men could not be determined for there was no disclosure. Relatives would only learn the disappearance of their beloved when guards told them to cease bringing meals. Some men would have been arrested for several years without any news of their whereabouts and no way of telling whether they were still alive or not. The Ethiopian youth, those living in the urban areas in particular, by and large, lived under the “shadow of death.” Enmeshed in the skeins of violence, conflict and terror many sought a place to escape. The mass disenchantment the revolution created compelled some to migrate, while it forced others to look for an

inward-oriented solution. If not to all, at least to some, the evangelical church provided some kind of safety net. In this respect, religion had functional values as providing some kind of social platform. Functional, in the sense that for many, who suffered psychological and emotional trauma by going through a “near death experience,” the church setting served as a succor, a place of refuge, where the pressure of the world could collapse and relief was obtained.

I do not suggest that these crisis situations precipitated by the socio-political and economic context of the times led people to become religious, for this would assign religious experiences to unconscious factors. Nor should one assume that people were making up a substitution of reality by going through a psychological shape-shifting process. Whatever the conditions that might predispose people to a new religious experience, the worth of the new context to which men and women had drawn their attention, must be critically considered as a factor in the process of decision-making, either to join the group temporarily or permanently. The new birth experience, the new relational space created within the fellowships of believers, the stabilizing power of a new found religious experience with its claims to offer hope and assurance of salvation are not just doctrinal issues, but empowering ideas having tremendous existential values.

The countless personal tragedies, the wide spread suspicions and the deterioration of human relations resulting from a misguided interpretation of class struggle, compelled people to a search for a new fellowship, or associational space, predisposing many to be eager to experience the power of transcendence.<sup>300</sup> For people who had been out in the world trying to survive in such terrible times, religion demonstrated its power to be an important resource to help them survive great calamities and to continue to offer living

symbols of worth and purpose in one of the most unpredictable times of our history.<sup>301</sup> Here is where the agentic factor takes a greater emphasis. Evangelical Christians aggressively spread their teachings with an assurance that there was a way out from entrapment, there is a place where people could establish meaning and order to their bruised lives. A great number of informants who became committed believers during the revolution attest to this phenomenon.<sup>302</sup>

The one caveat that has to be made here is that the person deciding to be a committed Christian should not be viewed as a helpless neophyte who succumbed to the machination of a passionate evangelist or appealing testimonies. Informants pointed out that they applied various social strategies that would help them deposit enough emotion and build rapport to win the confidence of potential converts before breaking any conversation that might lead to their eventual decision to become a Christian.<sup>303</sup> Setting up the moment required days of prayers and sacrificing much time. Informants also admit that they did not always succeed in leading people to the point of making decisions. All things being equal, decision was a matter of the will and depended on the level of receptivity, spiritual journey, emotional need and the readiness of the person approached. Hence there were several things involved in the process, at the macro and micro social contextual levels. Thus, the problem of limiting the change in religious experience to any single model (functional, mobilizing, social anomie, deprivation, etc.) risks the danger of being reductionist.<sup>304</sup> Instead of accounting religious changes to mechanistic and materialistic image, the emphasis should be placed on active agents who try to influence people with their values and active hearers or recipients who actively engage in seeking new ways to develop their personhood and livelihood along new religious lines. The

background factors at the macro level are refrains, given variable, and a common stage to all. But each person is also a key player in his response to the common script. In this sense conversion, spiritual as it is, also assumes a much broader dimensions of life.<sup>305</sup> It becomes a social process in which a person takes an active part in symbolically transposing the context of his social reality. In the end, as several informants pointed out, survival did not turn out to be the only result. The new converts/believers were nurtured and strengthened so powerfully that countless number of them were irresistibly drawn to the dynamic fellowship and remained as its permanent members.<sup>306</sup>

5. Exhaustion and fatigue: Informants observe that most of the people who came to the evangelical faith were from the Orthodox Church. An attitude of indifference characterized most of the adherents of the Orthodox Church during the period of the revolution while the evangelical Christians not only took a non-compliant position but became very aggressive in witnessing and winning converts. The Orthodox Church coming from a hegemonic structural background, suffered from a relative complacency while the evangelical church operating in its marginal position applied its creative strain of survival. There was a limit to indifference with one's faith when there are conditions that constantly try to stamp out faith in several ways and along several channels. Faith had to be refashioned and put in a new cast or re-channeled without going through a crisis situation. The Ethiopian revolution created the situation for the existence of a huge gap between faith and action in all religious communities. Evangelical Christians broke along the fault lines and the fissures between faith and doubt or faith and materialism, in short, in the crisis of values generated by the revolution. The revolution had introduced degenerative social practices that were an anathema to the culture of civility, *chewanet*, a



characteristic feature of Ethiopians and by which they had been known. Civility, *chewanet* is a constitutive norm, which embodies trust, decorum, reserve and deference that inform sound human relations. The revolution placed a heavy stress on the religiously inspired constitutive norms of Ethiopians, as result it led to inward resentment and resistance amongst the people towards Marxism and increased their resolve for a thorough religious experience to restore civility and sanity to their lives. For some religion became a principal avenue of achieving that purpose.

***Specific: Internal /Pull Factors***

1) The establishment of house churches. The house churches to which the evangelicals resorted during the revolution became a venue for bringing new air into the suffocating political climate of the *Derg*. The operative word is connection. At the house church, ordinary lives regularly interacted and intersected in an unbounded manner. Through the house church, evangelical Christians created the arena to reorder their own conversations. The sociology of cohesion characterized by solidarity, warmth, sharing, neutrality, the absence of factional strife, singing, all became a powerful magnet for people who felt some kind of homelessness in the drab and alienating atmosphere of life during the *Derg*. The home church gave the ironic free space, a place to feel at home, in contrast to the state or para-statal political organizations, which demanded outward conformity. The house church offered freedom and acceptance that could hardly be found elsewhere in those days. The social, spiritual and psychological support system the groups provided to each other in the small house churches, the new network ties created,

and above all, the emotional account deposited were great sources of attraction for new recruits and significant factors to enhance relations among those already in the network.

Religion, in this sense, did not serve as the opiate of the people, but it became the heart of those who had been disheartened by a heartless world. In fact, it proved to be a pragmatic and attractive alternative to a destructive philosophy that sent people into the pit of death. Among the men who joined the church were those who had experienced political fatigue and as a result were searching for an alternative style of life whose vocabularies transcended narrow confines of ideology, class and other expressions of identity. Teaching from the Bible provided a new narrative to the meta-narrative of Marxism that had been promoted coercively. The new community created a neutral space, an “oasis” for those who experienced state displeasure or any kind of exclusionary politics so prevalent in the days of the *Derg*<sup>307</sup>

Recent studies made on house churches point out that they are the spiritual backbone for the expansion of the evangelical faith. Small groups have the built-in potential for biotic growth by their tendency to grow from addition to multiplication. House churches were simple and agile enough to respond quickly to any threat and pressure. The house church, besides being an efficient self-multiplier, was exceptionally difficult to destroy by the state. It was able to preserve its identification to local life while vast organizations would be weakened at the center. Michael Green observed that the house churches provides the arena where the comparatively small number of participants can experience interchange of views and informed discussions as there is no artificial isolation of a preacher from his audience. The sheer informality and burden-sharing character and openness of the house church made this form of evangelism successful.<sup>308</sup>

According to Shiferaw, Marxism had strengthened the church as the church was forced to discover New Testament principles of congregational life.<sup>309</sup> The house churches resonated not only with the Biblical but also to the traditional model of *maheber*, a society of friends with strong supportive systems that nurtured positive group ties. People developed a system of accountability and established mentoring relationship with each other. New converts were not lost in the crowd, they were included and given a space to participate, thus allowing initiative for service. This was very important, especially for those who came from the political background, whose energy and vitality were rekindled and their gifts retooled. According to informants, converts from political background became so committed in their faith that they even proved to be great assets to the evangelical movements.<sup>310</sup>

The house churches made Christianity more real, approachable and believable, for people were not just fed the teaching of the Bible they grappled with it as they discussed Biblical texts and applied them to their life situations. People shared life experiences in those lights. Therefore, in attempting to explain the secret behind the growth of house churches in Ethiopia, there are three factors that we need to consider: the push factor, the pull factor, and the dynamics of house churches.

Furthermore, the house church not only strengthened pre-existing evangelical churches but also became avenues for the birth of new ones. A good example is that of *Mesgana* church. The church, which initially began in 1983 as a house fellowship consisting of mainly of middle class women, eventually evolved into an independent church. The name *Mesgana*, which means praise, was given to the church because its leaders founded the church upon their release from imprisonment due to their faith.<sup>311</sup>

2. The rise of committed indigenous missionaries: Commitment is not a faith fanaticism. Rather it is the devotion which claims the entire man whose role in the society or in the groups to which he is tied exhausts the limit of his personality and his talent. It is a psycho-social state that stems from either a conversion experience, involving identity altering and bridge burning experiences, or reacting full swing when one's identity is endangered. Such conditions enhance primacy of concern for one's faith, increase participation in the religious organism, expand one's capacity for risk-taking ventures and heightens motivation for recruiting new members.<sup>312</sup> For many evangelicals in Ethiopia the challenges the revolution presented deepened their fervency, their commitment to their faith and their resolve to advance it further. To cite the words of *Qes Gudina*, a Christian should know his faith, and "commitment to faith should be there when faced with the demand not to confess Christ as Lord and when deprived of the right to live."<sup>313</sup> In the annual gatherings of leaders of the CECE, which met under the theme the "sacrifice of faithfulness," Gudina spoke to the leaders that commitment demands trusting the Master unflinchingly even it means death. There were many evangelical Christians who demonstrated the kind of commitment which Gudina spoke about with amazing consistency, paying a high price. A good example is Tesfaye Gabisso who chose to bear seven years of torture in prison instead of denying his faith.

Tesfaye became so influential in the prison center at Yergalem that he had to be placed in solitary confinement to prevent him from meeting and influencing prison inmates and people visiting him. Though he was chained to the bed, he continued singing and witnessing to the guards. He had to be relocated to a remote prison center in the desert together with other friends at Negele prison center to prevent visitors from seeing

him. At Negele, he was subjected to intense torture, which apart from the usual floggings, included being shoved down into a cactus patch and many similar brutal actions.<sup>314</sup> His willingness to suffer for his faith was demonstrated in the prayer item he submitted upon request which only stated to be faithful to the Master and not given into the intimidation and enticement of the cadres.<sup>315</sup>

There are also several other stories of people who had been thrown into the prison but turned the prison centers into churches. One good example is the case of Negussie who was sent to the Central Security Department in Addis Ababa for three months of intense questioning. From there he was sent to the infamous prison center called *Alem Beqagne*, literally, the end of the world, where he met four Christians imprisoned for their faith. The Christians set out to evangelize prisoners and won more than 70 converts in a short period which led to the opening of an underground church. They smuggled in a Bible, which they had to divide to seventy parts. Each Thursday the believers would take turns going to the toilet and exchanging their portion for the one they had not yet read.<sup>316</sup> Most of those who were converted in the prison center were political prisoners mainly from the underground Marxist party opposing the regime.

The revolution gave rise to a new breed of missionaries who fearlessly worked by traveling from one corner of Ethiopia to another. The readiness of many evangelical Christians to be used as missionaries, often at heavy cost, needs to be historically appreciated in connection with the issue of agency. They formed part of the invisible network of indigenous missionaries, who significantly promoted the spread of the evangelical faith mainly through witnessing, preaching, and planting wherever the opportunity allowed.<sup>317</sup>

Mulugeta, a graduate of HSIU, was a young man who in 1982 committed his life to be an evangelist and a missionary, at the height of the Revolution. According to Mulugeta, evangelical Christians like himself wanted to fight back against Marxism by striking hard at its core philosophy, teaching people that there was a loving, eternally present, and all- powerful God, using every available opportunity and creating conditions when they were not there.<sup>318</sup> Before resigning his job as a government employee, he used all his spare time, weekends, holidays and days off, to travel around the country to help local Christians plant underground structures, teach, baptize new converts and train leaders. After volunteering to become an evangelist, he dedicated twenty one days in a month solely for evangelistic ventures.<sup>319</sup> Mulugeta pointed out that he and his colleagues capitalized on the “subjective situation” the revolution created for them, namely the readiness of the people’s hearts towards vital religious experience, “all we had to do was scratch it and fill the vacuum.” As a result, lives of thousands who could have perished in the crossfire of madly conducted politics which cherished terror as its weapon were spared.” Mulugeta further observed, “The revolution set us apart, marked our identity, put us in an iron mold both to be shaped and strengthened like iron.”<sup>320</sup> His view was that the entire focus of the church was evangelization, and every member of the church should stretch his/her resources towards that goal. Perhaps, if evangelical Christians had not chosen to adopt that approach, they would have melted into the crowd.

There are many other people whose stories could not be presented at length who constituted part of the unseen agencies who spread of the evangelical faith, often running great risks. To mention but few, Tekle Medhin, who left the army and became an evangelist in the eastern part of Ethiopia, particularly in the regions of Harar, Diredawa

and the Jijiga. Tekle Medhin daringly witnessed and distributed tracts to army officers, including generals, and succeeded in converting, at least some of them.<sup>321</sup> Evangelist Itefa also left his university education and went to the same region where he played a vital role in organizing the underground church in Hararghe province. Gebru, a charismatic figure, who after completing his studies in the University as a Geologist, became an itinerant evangelist, traveling around the nation. Ashenafi Zemat became an evangelist in 1976 and traveled to many parts of Ethiopia as a young missionary. Men, like Solomon Lulu, who was jailed for the simple reason that he declined to accept a government offer of a ministerial position, not only preached and converted many inside prison houses but was able to produce a Bible concordance while in prison.<sup>322</sup> Taddese Negew, Merid Lemma, Mengistu, Mekuria, to mention but few, dedicated their lives to spread the evangelical faith by serving as local missionaries in the southwestern part of Ethiopia, experiencing repeated imprisonment and torture. The revolution also produced female evangelists and preachers such as Meaza, Tsehai, Workiye, Centayehu and a host of others who were helped by the changed situation to break the shackles of a male dominated culture and worked alongside their counterparts as part of these vast unseen networks of indigenous missionaries. Women missionaries traveled in different parts of Ethiopia and served their call, as they deemed it so, enduring enormous hardships and suffering like their male counterparts.<sup>323</sup> They provided invaluable services in those days when clandestine works were being performed, because security men paid less attention to women than men.

Patrick Johnson summarized this development succinctly when he noted, “A big commitment to missions by various evangelical denominations was cut back in 1976 due

to persecution. Out of this suffering emerged a national vision and a united strategy for evangelizing Ethiopia. The 20 years integrated strategy included prayer and people mobilization, survey, training and sending out missionary evangelists to every province and people with few evangelicals and then to other lands.”<sup>324</sup>

Among the list should be included the overflow from the Marxist camps who served the church with greater zeal and commitment once they had embraced the evangelical faith.<sup>325</sup> Most of these individuals came not only from political backgrounds but were also wealthy merchants and professionals who became great assets for the church as they applied their expertise, time and financial resources to the expansion of the evangelical faith.<sup>326</sup> According to informants, apart from verbal proclamations one of the most successful strategies the evangelical church insisted on was “walking the talk” or living life matching with Scriptural truth. Evangelical Christians serving as government employees were expected to be efficient in discharging their civic duties so that cadres or other functionaries of the state could not fault them. Those who faithfully pursued this approach in life were accommodated by the state and their civic services were recognized.<sup>327</sup>

3. The role of gospel songs: Ethiopia has a rich tradition of religious songs that dates back to the 6<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>328</sup> The missionaries used music as part of their church worship services, but they never tried to use the already existing repertoire. An indigenous hymnology was developed in southern Ethiopia during the Italian occupation in the absence of the missionaries. The hymns were used to communicate the teaching of the Bible, retaining a corps of oral doctrines and welding unity among the believers. The



songs did not, however, develop to the level where their influences could be felt at the regional or national level.

Western missionaries at first had to translate hymns into local languages and help converts sing without changing the lyric and melodies. They realized the shortcomings and made modifications by adapting the hymns to be sung in local melodies. The Lutherans encouraged the composition of hymns in vernacular languages but with western melodies and tunes hardly compatible to the Ethiopian music tune.<sup>329</sup> All things considered, Ethiopians are passionate about music. The dour psalms of early Lutheran songs had little appeal to Ethiopians.

In the 1950's, there were some attempts by Ethiopians in the Mekane Yesus Church and the Meserete Krestos Church to compose new hymns with local tunes, but they still carried with them vestiges of western missionary influence. In the 1960's, new musical creativity was gripping Ethiopia with the rise of the Pentecostal movement. The Pentecostals, as independent groups, introduced a torrent of hymns invested with marvelous ingenuity. They quickly mastered the modern musical instruments that were being introduced in Ethiopia, such as guitars and accordions and later synthesizers and adapted their use to the needs of the time and the tune and temperament of Ethiopians. They were also very innovative in the area of integrating cultural forms of expressions of celebrations such as clapping, bodily movements and *ellelta* ( *ululate*) onto the worship service. Instead of translations they composed their own songs and melodies, which became very popular and widely accepted and listened to. Since the translated Lutheran songs mainly served liturgical purposes, they could hardly be sung by ordinary Ethiopians in ordinary situations. The music the Pentecostals introduced, though

primarily biblical, spoke to the daily challenges ordinary men were facing. In other words, religious songs were socialized and became part of popular culture. Music took evangelical Christianity into the public arena, as it forayed into the public space through untraceable channels like readily available cassettes.<sup>330</sup>

Thousands of indigenous songs have emanated from the deep wellspring of spirituality, shaped by the experience of persecution. There were several young innovators of new gospel music, amongst them, Adisu Werku, Dr. Legesse Watero (now a university professor) and Dr. Atalai ( Director of Emmanuel Hospital and faculty member of Addis Ababa University) can be cited as examples. The hymns written by these men, were of high quality in terms of content and musical combinations and art of singing. According to Atalai, the emphasis of the songs in the 60' and early 70's were mainly evangelistic, seeking to woo people towards God by turning away from their old sinful life. There were a sizable number of songs that focused on themes such as righteousness, holiness, and service. Still there were a few songs which had elements of eschatology. Contributing to the popularization of the song was their being aired in the Radio Voice of the Gospel, which had a wide audience in the country.<sup>331</sup>

The legacy of the Pentecostals was maintained during the revolution, but new twists were added to the gospel songs that tuned up with the new challenges. Singers proliferated with songs of cries, agony and assurance of victory. The closure of churches and the disbanding of their choirs paved the way for the proliferation of soloists.<sup>332</sup> As one prominent church elder commented, "the mouth opened more when it was stifled more, the more the voice was muted, the more the spirit shouted."<sup>333</sup> Hymns produced during the revolution by composers and singers, either in band or in solo form, stressed

themes such as firmness, faithfulness, hope, courage and the like. To cite some of the titles of the songs: *I Will Stay Firm*, *I will not deny God*, *Fight the good fight*, *Don't falter*, *Stay the course*, *Fear not*, *Victory is ours/Death to the enemy*, *Defend the faith*, the *Word is eternal*, *God is wonderful/he is timeless*, *God triumphs over the enemy*, *Endure hardship through praise*, *Suffer for the faith*, *Tomorrow is ours*. There were also gospel songs that spoke clearly against materialism, against those discarding the faith and those leaving the country to escape suffering.<sup>334</sup> The songs may not have an intentionality to sound political, but according to Dunway, "...music may be said to be political when its lyrics or melody evoke or reflect a political judgment by the listener."<sup>335</sup> Most of the songs composed during the days of the revolution were generated by the political climate of the time they spoke about politics and evoke political judgments. The choice of themes and the ability of the composers to identify and apply biblical verses to defend their faith and obliquely critique the Marxist ideology clearly testifies the level of sophistication and the intellectual dimension of their protest. Hence, gospel songs formed potent expressions of a vocal variant of struggle against a hegemonic ideology, short of violence. Such forms of subtle and more civilized forms of ideological engagements have been overlooked because of the predilection in valuing the brute forces of violence.

Overall, apart from comfort and daring faith the songs helped believers develop a consciousness of victory in a climate of terror and powerlessness. The songs also had catechetical values that provided solace, instructions and directions to daily lives much needed in those confusing times. In particular, Tesfaye Gabiso, song composer, theologian, and soloist, greatly contributed to the expansion of gospel songs, both before his imprisonment and afterwards. He could be referred to as the successor generation that

came after Adisu in the Pentecostal gospel tradition. His songs were one of the major components in the spiritual dynamics, which sustained Christians during the years of the revolution. They were vehicles of hope and strength for Christians of all denominations. Gospel songs also played a special role in bringing ecumenism among evangelical churches as they provided the common theology and vocabulary for Christians facing the common fate of marginalization. More significantly, however, gospel songs played a vital role in the production of an emerging evangelical culture and in the shaping of a new identity of evangelical Christianity.

Gospel songs formed the backbone of the faith of evangelical Christians in the entire period of the revolution. The songs have the capability to convey messages often more effectively than preaching. They were easier to commit into memory, were repeatable, and went along with the mental temperament of Ethiopians. As one sang, either along with an audio-tape or from memory, there was no barriers, the messages became sermons. The experience of deep anguish and greater commitment to faith led many to compose classical songs. The following are few of the popular songs that were sung by many Christians across all denominations in the period of the revolution. *Egziabeher sireda kesamait werdo*, When God's help reaches breaking from heaven (Tesfaye Gabiso), *Mesheshegia washa*, God is our fortress/refuge (composer unknown), *Abetu gulbete hoy*, Oh Lord my strength (Tamirat Haile), *Eske ergina*, God's faithfulness through the ages (Dr. Atalay Alemayehu), *Zingero aydelehum*, I am not an ape (Derege Kebede), *Endet denq amlak new*, how Great Thou are (Derge). Derge's songs, in most cases, were sung to counter the materialist philosophy and reflect deep grievances of the persecution experience.<sup>336</sup>

One of the main reasons why gospel songs became so important was their compatibility with Ethiopian culture of orality. Religious expressions of this nature clearly show the common cultural and political space people subjected to a common tyranny occupy. We are all part of the same story, though expressions of reactions vary. Others have expressed their sense of disappointment concerning the times of the revolution in non-religious terms through folk songs, jokes and other expressive media. Clearly, there is multi-formity and integrity of human expressive culture. The revolution actually made singing an integral cultural component of evangelical Christianity in Ethiopia. In the Orthodox tradition, church music was mainly textual and served liturgical purposes. There were only few occasions for church music, within the Orthodox Church, to be sung outside liturgical services, excepting perhaps during holiday celebrations. Evangelical songs were sung based on repeated singings and listening to tapes and they were sung at any time by any one. Evangelical Christians employed products of modern technology, especially tape recorders, for the production and distribution of gospel songs. The role of tape recorders in the dissemination of the evangelical faith, especially in the urban areas, was enormous. In sum, songs of the period tended to focus on the following themes : *Tiri* (evangelistic), *Mesekerenet*( declaring the word), *Tsenat* (staying the course) faithfulness (*Tamagnet*).<sup>337</sup>

4. Suffering and its place in church growth: Persecution had constituted part of the spiritual repertoire of evangelicals in Ethiopia, though this time it came with a more concentrated intensity. According to Teshome, “suffering for Christians has so much that is fine, joyous and unforgettable about it, something you might never experience in a free humdrum world. Suffering also provides an opportunity of witnessing Christ to the

world.”<sup>338</sup> The persecution Christians encountered during the revolution created the space and a totally new scale of cohesion and collective experience. A young man who volunteered to be an evangelist during the revolution said, “...the revolution forced us to blend faith with the practical daily living, faith became the only *Re'es*, the only “heading/theme” the object and subject of our life.”<sup>339</sup> Opposition lends value to struggle, fuels self-confidence, increases the capacity to risk, and intensifies the fervor for aggressive quest for multiplying. The operative word for evangelicals that is associated with their quest for evangelization was *Memesker*. *Meskerenet*, from which the word *Memesker* comes, meaning to see/taste with ones own eyes as well as to provide tangible proof of your experience, became the duty of every convert. This is where the missionary impulse lies in the context of church growth in Ethiopia. Taking part in this process are tens and thousands of agents and agencies that elude the attention of the historian.

What really explains the expansion of Christianity during the *Derg* period was aggressive testimonies of fresh converts who, out of excitement, told their stories to friends and relatives and brought new converts. Important in the growth processes was the aggressive, face-to-face recruitment by committed Christians who boldly and persuasively witnessed to others, capitalizing both on the relative openness the crisis situation has generated and the life threatening political climate of the *Derg*.

I do not want to grow rhapsodic about the purity of the persecuted church, but it is imperative to stress its contribution to the expansion of the evangelical faith. Experiencing suffering or persecution helped the evangelicals to focus, cohere and redirect their energy to spring out and catch more space from the world or the “enemy side,” as they would often say. When weak, vulnerable and frail, in the face of oppressive

powers, persecuted people show hidden resources to act concertedly since all resources, which could have been used for infighting were directed to fighting the enemy

The charge often put against evangelical Christians that they took an escapist position during the *Derg*, misses the point. Evangelical Christians became very aggressive through their verbal testimonies, and through their music distribution in capturing the attention of those who were not in their circle, using every available arena, including prison houses, to recruit new members and undermine the ideological base of the state, which they considered was an enemy of their faith. The propaganda bombardment gave them the material upon which to build and expand their identity.

5. Mission agencies and their logistical support: There was not a studied preparation made on the part of foreign missionaries regarding their departure, or making transitional arrangements with the local churches. Though most missionaries left Ethiopia either for safety reasons or because they were forced by local circumstances, there were some groups who managed to stay in Ethiopia by turning their mission endeavors into development projects, engaging in translation work, or working in international organizations. Missionaries who remained in Ethiopia for different reasons, tried to keep contacts with the evangelicals by maintaining a low profile position so that they would not endanger themselves and the local people. However, they provided key services, mainly in the area of logistics, such as providing gathering places for prominent leaders, training for evangelists and pastors, transport services to carry resource material into the rural areas, providing technical assistance like literature production and duplicating materials. The missionaries were also engaged in secretly training leaders and evangelists in small numbers at selected sites. The Bishoftu Retreat Center of the SIM, located in the

vicinity of the town of Debre Zeit, served as rendezvous for various church leaders and provided a safe place to conduct in secret various consultative workshops.<sup>340</sup>

One key area where missionaries made a significant contribution was in the sphere of translation. The SIM, which had a small printing press in Addis, developed a scheme called the “Key Scripture Project.” The project, which was the brainchild of Elvin Brant, was launched in 1975. By 1977, it was able to translate selected portions of the Bible into seven local languages, ironically, using the opportunity of the *Derg*’s new language policy, which sought to promote minority languages.<sup>341</sup> The military officials wanted to get the support of all minority groups to stand behind the revolution. As a result, they encouraged the development of their cultures and languages. Second, the rulers also wanted the minority groups to use their languages in written forms and consequently, they encouraged massive literacy programs. Their principal motive, however, was political. They wanted to indoctrinate the people with Marxist propaganda with locally produced materials. The SIM missionaries quickly took note of this favorable situation and began translating key Scriptures in some of the languages spoken by the people of the south to reach many people as quickly as possible, given the uncertain nature of the regime. Massive translations were made expediently in the opening years of the revolution and distributed without publicity.<sup>342</sup>

6. The 1984 famine and the role of Non -Governmental Organizations : A temporary relaxation on church assault occurred during the massive famine of 1984/5 that brought a myriad of international relief agencies to Ethiopia. For publicity reasons the *Derg* officials seemed to have reduced the scale of persecution in most parts of Ethiopia. This was also the time when evangelical Christianity found a chance to expand in some



of the areas designated as “closed” in the past. There were Christian organizations, which started relief works in the Wello area, where through the influences of their Ethiopian employees they began to promote the evangelical faith. A good example of this is World Vision International of Ethiopia, which started a huge relief program in Antsokia, gradually evolving into area development program of enduring significance. With the advent of World Vision and its evangelical staff, there arose a small community of believers, which eventually grew into a large number of evangelical Christian communities, in the midst of overwhelmingly Orthodox and Muslim inhabitants.<sup>343</sup> Hundreds of expatriates who came to Ethiopia for various relief projects acquired information concerning the situation of Christians in Ethiopia, which they used to put pressure on the government. The famine situation also created a favorable opportunity for most missionaries to re-invent themselves and their programs into development agencies with which they provided some kind of backing for various evangelical churches to which they had been affiliated in the past.<sup>344</sup>

The *Derg* recognized the effects of the involvement of humanitarian organizations and even discussed it as a serious issue at the Politburo level meetings. Politburo members lamented the fact that voluntary agencies were undermining their ideology by promoting religion surreptitiously with the obvious consequence of a dramatic decline in “militancy of the masses,” Members of the Politburo concluded that, “ theirs’ was not a relief operation, it is in fact, an ideological one because they steer the minds of the masses away from ideology.”<sup>345</sup>

### ***Facilitating Factors:***

Ironically, the military regime severely undermined the basis and influences of traditional religions, which were the major adversaries of the evangelical faith in rural areas. Local officials undertook elaborate campaigns and direct actions to root out traditional religions, for they were considered to be inimical to the creation of a progressive socialist culture. At least, in the rural areas, this was one of the most important conditions that enhanced the expansion of evangelical Christianity during the revolution. In rural areas, local traditional leaders, healers, diviners, witches, etc., played vital roles, even if there were churches, Orthodox or evangelical. They had been powerful elements against the spread of Christianity.<sup>346</sup> They held so much sway over the local population that it was difficult for many to become Christians even if they chose so. The *Derg* officials first used the *Zemacha* program and later employed local cadres and government officials to wantonly eradicate the pillars of traditional religions with much gusto for they were considered to be the loci of localized exploitative systems and promoters of backward religious practices detrimental to the cause of the revolution.<sup>347</sup> As has been pointed out by informants from the rural areas, this was a blessing in disguise for the evangelical Christians. The demolition of the power of the so called *Qalichas*, was a windfall bounty. The *Qalichas* were very powerful figures among the rural population, and as they formed sub-states within the state, they served as earthly judges to arbitrate disputes, and acted as the sole mediators between men and local gods. In places like Kaffa, and the surrounding areas, the *Qalichas* were venerated virtually as the local god, *Yer*. They held tremendous sway upon the society, no less than a local king did.<sup>348</sup> They received first fruit of crop harvests, including, first born children, their land

was farmed by free labor, they were much feared and their words were taken as final. They were believed to bring curses or blessings on any one. Many farmers, who assumed local diviners to have been endowed with supernatural power, lost faith as they saw them openly humiliated by young students and cadres. The acts proved to them that they had been falsely ingratiating themselves with an aura of power that had been propped by generations of local traditions. Local evangelists who saw the demolition of the “local strongholds ” and the weakness created within the traditional religious system, increased their attacks in their own ways and began to use the opportunity to win converts from their circles. There were many *Qalichas* who turned to the evangelical faith during the period of the revolution, having been dramatically shorn of their former power, influence and lucrative careers.<sup>349</sup> When the local *Qalichas* came to embrace the evangelical faith, they did not come alone, as some of their entourages and erstwhile fans also followed their path.<sup>350</sup> Informants are unanimous about the decline of local traditional religions and how some of their leaders reshaped their lives by embracing the evangelical faith. But, they are not so sure as to whether they did this out of a religious need or due to the practical necessity of finding new spaces to cushion their makeup. It should be noted that in some provincial sites, where traditional religion bore strong influence upon the rural population, the *Qalichas* were forerunners in opposing the revolution and in obstructing its progress. Though the *Derg* officials took some harsh measures to deal with the forces representing traditional religions, they have not succeeded in eradicating them. According to informants, most of the *Qalichas* kept low profile of themselves by changing locations or functioning low key unnoticed by local government officials, or they simply lurked behind the scene by demonstrating apparent resignation.<sup>351</sup>

### ***Evangelical Christianity and the Legacy of the Revolution***

During the revolution, evangelical Christianity experienced not only growth but also a shift. What was largely a rural phenomenon became urban, as an increasing number of intellectuals and the youth embraced the evangelical faith. A process of “southernization” that had characterized evangelical Christianity in the past began to give way to a process of nationalization as the evangelical faith spread in other parts of Ethiopia outside its traditional mission base. Parallel with this, evangelical Christianity also underwent a process of “charizmatization” as many denominations came increasingly under the influence of Pentecostalism. Significantly, the revolution created the opportunity for evangelical Christianity to go through the process of indigenization, as national leaders emerged in most of the former mission churches and as worship and liturgical services also assumed distinctly national dimensions. The nature of Gospel songs, style of preaching and methods of evangelization and the hermeneutical modalities have been adapted owing to the challenges of the revolution and the autonomy that the absence of missionaries allowed. For most evangelicals, the revolution drove Christianity into the heart of the people where faith was not observed by going to the church but existentially lived and manifested. Gospel songs that came from the pit of suffering not only provided solace and comfort of God, but became the chief avenues by which the evangelical church assumed its indigenous identity.<sup>352</sup>

The process of collective grappling into which the revolution forced the church gave evangelical churches defining moments that helped to shape their identity considerably. A noted leader of the church during the revolution commented, “Persecution winnowed the church like a threshing machine, separating us from the

world and emerge like the New Testament church model. It gave us a new sense of who we are. If there was ever a time when the Evangelical faith got a much firmer base and ground among its believers, it was during the time of the revolution. Thank God for the revolution. It has tossed Ethiopian Christians into the air so that the chaff has been lost to us and we are left with the true grains.”<sup>353</sup>

The other important outcome of the time was the emergence of lay leadership. Some of the known leaders of the various churches left the country for neighboring countries like Kenya, and the western world, mainly the USA, Canada and Europe. Leadership by the laity, mostly unknown before, very democratic, militant and energetic, emerged. The new leaderships that stepped in to fill the gap were fruits of the period of the Revolution. They were mainly young men and women, professional, with skills and a measure of education expediently utilized by the church to withstand its new challenges.<sup>354</sup> Some of the new blood came from former dedicated Marxists who had gone through end-of-the-road type of experience and worked earnestly for what they believed was the ultimate truth in light of their failed history and dashed expectations. They proved to be strong assets of the church for they could definitely counter the teachings of Marxism, from their practical experience, and draw people to the evangelical faith through the testimonies of their lives and exposure of the state’s sham ideology of Marxism.<sup>355</sup> Resulting from the same development, university students and graduates, engaged in various Christian fellowships, rose to the challenge and volunteered to teach, preach, train and became involved in various leadership capacities.<sup>356</sup> The underground church, formed in response to the prevalence of an undemocratic environment, created a democratic space and structure where people had a chance to exercise their talents at the

lower levels, and as a result many new leaders, pastors, teachers, solo singers, and evangelists emerged.

The term *Pente*, which was popularized during the revolution, became a descriptive label to Christians of all denominations. Evangelical Christianity has many roots in Ethiopia. The attempt to create a national church of evangelicals led by men like *Qes Bademe*, Emanuel and others failed to materialize. The Pentecostals tried to bring unity within the various churches by breaking denominational barriers through the spread of Pentecostal experience and their earnest commitment to have a national evangelistic agenda. Yet, it was the revolution that created the conditions for the expansion of the inter-penetration zones between denominations and the creation of a strong ecumenical ties between them. It is in this context that the importance of the term *Pente* is to be judged. *Pente* became a collective tag for all evangelicals, and by default, provided the needed vocabulary by which evangelicals could identify themselves. What was originally intended to designate the anthropological other gradually mutated into a means of self-identification.

The evangelical church established common grounds and religious norms. The Pentecostals gained strong ground through their songs, prophetic messages, and charismatic teachings that stressed healing and exorcism. Such practices could easily slide in the context of house churches characterized, by the absence of a strong doctrinal emphasis and a hierarchical institution. Contributing to the new ecumenical ties was the emergence of new leadership across the board who had not grown steeped in mission tradition, and who were free from the constrictions of denominational creeds. There was

a high level of interpersonal communications among the known coordinators of the churches to discuss strategies and fellowship together.<sup>357</sup>

In sum, at the sociological level, disengagement became the church's principal focus where survival was the central issue. Resulting from this position, the church pursued a one way track, where social and political agendas were put on the backburner. This position also limited the church's capacity to develop a broader theology of social concerns and economic development, a handicap, which continues to hamper the church's contribution to Ethiopian society at large. At the ecclesiastical level, the absence of a centered and solid structure helped to lessen denominational emphasis and drove the various evangelical churches to assume a Biblical New Testament character. At the theological level the church, in confronting Marxism, chose the path of suffering, the catacomb road, or even better, the turtle model, mostly speaking in the Jeremiad cries of the gospel songs. This is something that deprived the evangelical church of the opportunity of making deep theological reflections of itself and its wider role in the socio-economic and political environment of the Ethiopian society, an issue which contemporary evangelical Christians are grappling with as their major national homework.

### ***Free at Last***

Though the formation of the a Marxist political party in 1984, seemed to strengthen the position of the *Derg* and led to the heightening of the persecution of Christians, it also signaled a rapid decline of popular trust against the government. For one thing, the government did not have a good handling of the serious famine that affected millions of

Ethiopians and this very much damaged the already tarnished image of the state. Second, the formation of a party that was celebrated with so much pomp and extravagant financial commitment, did not usher in any kind of amelioration, despite repeated the rhetoric of social transformation. Overall, a real sense of fatigue permeated among the vast sectors of the Ethiopians population, and as a result, many lost hope in Marxism. The Ethiopian people saw no redemptive significance in the formation of a so much hailed political party. Instead, what they saw was corruption in its most hideous manifestations. Hence, many were shifting away from Marxism and turning into religions. By 1987, it was becoming evident that Marxism and Leninism had become a defunct ideology. Mounting international pressure against persecution forced the *Derg* to relax its die-hard positions over the evangelical church. It also became clear to the *Derg* that religious faith could not be stamped out through coercion. In particular, the tenacity with which evangelical Christians held onto their faith and the expansion of the faith, despite the suppression it was subjected to, proved to the *Derg* the futility of bullying. It also signaled for the military cum Marxist leaders the loss of credibility of the Marxist ideology in Ethiopian society at large. According to *Christianity Today*, the year 1989 was a landmark for human rights and religious freedom in Ethiopia. The failed military coup of May 16, 1989 significantly eroded the position of the *Derg*. By 1989, the regime unofficially adopted a position of de facto tolerance, if not acceptance, of the evangelical Church. Some church leaders noticed the lax position of the regime and started reopening their churches. *Hebret Amba* church was one of the first evangelical churches that tested the government's position when its leaders decided to reopen its services without the asking the permission of the *Qebele* officials or any concerned authority. Encountering no



protest, the leaders launched their regular weekly services. According to Gebre Meskal, one of the leaders of the church, tents and makeshift shelters had to be constructed to accommodate the overflow of attendants. In similar vein, others also followed suit.<sup>358</sup> Towards the last days of the regime, the home churches spontaneously began to gather openly in large numbers. By 1990 the denunciation of Marxism Leninism came from the President, Mengistu Haile Mariam, as the regime reached its death throes. In a speech on the 5<sup>th</sup> March 1990, to the 11<sup>th</sup> Regular Plenum of the Central Committee of the WPE, Mengistu admitted the transition to socialism has proved difficult and unattainable because of mistaken policies and changing international situations.<sup>359</sup> Though fatigue and the overwhelming sense of failure was a critical issue for the *Derg's* lenient stance, at the global level, the decline of communism was also a crucial factor.<sup>360</sup> The wind that was blowing from USSR, especially the reform program of Gorbachev, must be noted, Gorbachev acknowledged the place of religion when he admitted in 1989, “the moral values religion embodies can serve as the cause of renewal.”<sup>361</sup>

In short, the story of the evangelical Christians during the *Derg* period is the story of human saga in a new way, the old story of man’s spirit refusing to be defeated by man’s cruelty. The revolution created the conditions, the sociological moment, for conversion quest. Certain historical moments generated by crisis situation seem to be very propitious for waves of new religious expressions and faith movements with evangelistic thrust. Similarly, the same condition paved the way for the evangelical churches to experience revival and large-scale conversions. The evangelical church in Ethiopia had experienced this, first during the period of the Italian occupation, second, during the times of the Marxist revolution and in our times because of the radical

measures taken by the state to reshape the Ethiopian society along ethnic lines, which let loose a deluge of new discourse of identity with a disorientating influence.

### ***Conclusion***

This section has focused on the nature of state and church encounters during the period of the military cum Marxist regime, 1974-1991. The Ethiopian Revolution and the accompanying events came too unexpectedly for the evangelical church in Ethiopia. The initial response of the church leaders was one of accommodating the revolution, where attempts were made to negotiate the relatively open space generated by the fall of the previous system and the limbo state existing in the early phase of the military rule. The attempt of *Qes* Gudina and other church leaders to establish a common front of all faith related institutions, as a countervailing force to the *Derg* did not succeed. The Ogaden war of 1977, which created the moment for elevating the *Derg's* profile and its public image constituted a watershed in the encounter between the state and the church. Having gained respite from the war and having brutally crushing local opposition forces, the military leaders embarked on a systematic attack of first undermining and then eliminating the evangelical faith. The church reconfigured its space and went underground to create invisible structures and network systems. Migrating from the sphere of politics, the institution was able to concentrate on first protecting its own members and then aggressively expanding its base by raising indigenous missionaries. Missionizing became the task of virtually all converts, old and new.

The endless crisis that marred the Ethiopian Revolution has engendered a condition akin to social anomie which pre-adapted people to quest for a supernatural experience on

which evangelical Christians adeptly capitalized. Among the key factors contributing to the ironic growth of membership, the transformation of evangelical churches into home cell groups has been one of the most crucial developments. The fact that the evangelical churches have had the benefit of embracing the intellectual force, even if small in number, is a crucial factor that has to be taken into account in providing an explanation as to the question of how a young institution like that of the evangelical church that had its traditional base among the populace of the rural areas was able to survive the onslaught of the military power and thrive.

This section not only documents the persecution experience, survival strategies and ironical growth of the church, but seeks to register the fact that the evangelical church has countered and eventually contributed to the decline of the influence of communism, and in the long run, the fall of a Marxist state by providing a counter argument and a counter culture that subverted the legislating norms of a hegemonic ideology. Speaking from the margin, evangelical Christians used mainly their gospel songs as a voice to speak out their dissent. Hence, the need to place the defiance, struggle, and suffering of the evangelical Christians within the larger discourse of resistance of the Ethiopian people against a totalitarian regime, though the modalities of their resistance have assumed a non-violent nature.

A major legacy of the revolution is the emergence of the evangelical church as distinctively Ethiopian institution. This essentially resulted from the moratorium the revolution imposed on foreign missionaries and the ensuing autonomy that provided the occasion for the emergence of lay-oriented leadership and the indigenization of its worship practices. The revolution itself created a defining context by which the churches'

distinctive identity was reinforced. The evangelical churches distanced themselves from the “crowd”, and created a somewhat pietistic sub-culture that stressed holiness and discipline as a counter paradigm to prevailing lax mode of life influenced by the ethos of the new ideology. The persecution experience also constrained evangelical churches of all persuasions to work in unison, a situation that contributed to the weakening sense of denominationalism in Ethiopia. Though a blessing in disguise for shaping the identity of the church, the withdrawn stance of the church left it bereft of a vital experience in terms of its dealings with socio-political issues, a situation, which the church is currently struggling to rectify.

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<sup>1</sup> Harold Marcus, “1960, the Year the Sky Began Falling on Haile Sellassie”, *Journal of NorthEast African Studies*, 6, 3(1999), p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> For further see, Berhanou Dinke. *I am Not Alone*. U.S.A, 1979.

<sup>3</sup> Historians have not tackled this issue extensively and critically. Questions such as: Who coined the slogan, when and why, need contextual analysis and a thorough investigation by moving beyond the generic explanation that they were the slogans of the progressives in defense of the masses, albeit without denying that element. Could it be the case, that the slogan was strategically coined by students who had hidden agenda, and if that is the case, what was the hidden transcript? Was the slogan meant to accomplish a larger purpose more than what the eyes could meet? Recently, a noted engineer, and a man who belonged to the student generation of the time, observed, that the slogan “Land to the Tiller” has brought tremendous chaos to Ethiopia and suggested that the slogan “Water for the Tiller” would have been more pragmatic and served a more beneficial purpose for the Ethiopian farmer than the ideologically motivated and highly loaded slogan of “land to the tiller.” Tadesse H/Selasie, “Engineers Proposal on how to ERADICATE HUNGER from Ethiopia,” Sept./2002, pp. 6 –7.

<sup>4</sup> Alemayehu Gebre Mariam, “The House Built on Granite: Atse Haile Sellassie and Modern Ethiopia,” *Ethiopian Review Magazine*, 2, 7 (2000), p. 20.

<sup>5</sup> This was the statement of Donald E. Paradis, one of the Emperor’s American advisers. Paradis also communicated to the Monarch as early as 1961 that there was an imminent crisis “unless Ethiopia changes fundamentally, the educational class inevitably would turn to revolution against which has created and frustrations at every turn, which has inhibited and prevented progress” Quoted in Alemayehu Mekonen, “Effects of Change on Leadership in Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia,” Ph. D. Dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1995.p. 96. Ruth, an American evangelist also personally told him that God gave her a message that he was bound to lose his prestige and the country would experience

great suffering unless he made swift changes. To which the Emperor responded by saying, every time you receive such kind of revelations, do not hesitate to come and tell us. Ruth Helfin, *Harvest Glory : I Ask for the Nations*(Mc Dougal Publishing , 1999), p. 179; Bekele W/ Kidan. *Revival Itiopia*, p. 139.

<sup>6</sup> Colburn provides an interesting insight that connects the rise of the Ethiopian Revolution of 1974 with the emerging leftist culture of the Ethiopian elite. For further see, Forrest Colburn, *The Vogue of Revolution in Poor Countries*( New Jersey: Princeton University Publication, 1994), pp. 20-35.

<sup>7</sup> Teshome G. Wagaw, *The Development of Higher Education And Social Change An Ethiopian Experience* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1990), p. xi

<sup>8</sup> Informants: Amare, Ayalew, Wubshet, Mamo, Temesgen Gobena and others. According to Amare, who was a contemporary of a small radical circle called, the Crocodiles, it was members of this group who intentionally subverted the evolution of the experiment of a brewing liberal arts tradition and pushed the students towards a linear direction of Marxism through sophisticated machiavellian strategies. Amare is also of the opinion that the African who came to the University gave the impression to the students that the colonial experiment was much better than monarchical regime in Ethiopia.

<sup>9</sup> According to Teshome Wagaw, during the 1958 Accra Conference, the Emperor promised to provide scholarship to 200 African students. The students who were recruited mostly from English speaking African countries shared their experiences about the struggle for freedom and equality which the Ethiopians drew analogies to local conditions. Teshome Wagaw, p.209.

<sup>10</sup> Informant: Ayalew, Wubshet, Seyum and others.

<sup>11</sup> Sandra Rickard, "The Ethiopian Student and Ethiopia's Transition into the Twentieth Century," A paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the Student Project for Amity among Nations (SPAN), University of Minnesota, May1, 1966, p. 49.

<sup>12</sup> According to Flynn, as early as 1952 " the Soviet Propaganda Center in Addis Ababa was much frequented by students who were truly indoctrinated by the ideology of Marxism, we could see hearts and minds being undermined and subverted by the films and lectures." John A. Flynn, *Can The Ethiopian Change?* (Newlownabbey: The Sheba Trust, 1997), p.154.

<sup>13</sup> According to informants, the students actively taking part in the Crocodiles group were: Abay Abrha, Dawit, Tilahun, Gebru Mersha, Admasu, etc. Informants: Wubshet, Ayalew, Solomon, Derese, and Amare.

<sup>14</sup> Randi R. Balsvik, "Haile Sellassie's Students," Ph. D. dissertation, Michigan State University, 1983, p.222.

<sup>15</sup> Sandra Richard, p. 19.

<sup>16</sup> Informants: Wubshet, Solomon, Shiferaw, and Ayalew. Teshome Wagaw who wrote extensively on issues of social changes and the university system, only make a passing reference on a foot note, " since 1972, there had been a student underground political party known as 'the Crocodiles.' Whether there was a direct link between this and EPRP cannot be ascertained." Detailed studies of those who were members and leaders of this group including psycho-social biographical data, their agenda and to what extent they shaped, guided or misguided the student movement, is a subject that requires a very critical investigation.

<sup>17</sup> Amare laments how religion, which had constituted a very important resource for strength and guidance for many Ethiopians, had been relegated by the generation of the 60's. The institution of the Orthodox Church not only appeared to be backward, but also oppressive because of its links with the regime. As Amare put it, there was an unspoken socio-religious strike against the national church and for all it stood for. The various issues of *News and Views* (HSIU students' publications)of the 60's also echo the concern of the youth ignoring religion, the great divorce between the youth and their and the lack of interiorized convictions.

<sup>18</sup> Gerd Decke, "The Role of Gudina Tumsa in a Critical Dialogue between Marxism and/ Socialism and Christianity," *The Life and Ministry of Rev. Gudina Tumsa* (Addis Ababa: MYC, 2001), p.110.

<sup>19</sup> Dawit Wolde Girogis. *Red Tears: War, Famine and Revolution in Ethiopia* (Trenton: Red Sea Inc.1989), pp. 9-11.

<sup>20</sup> Haile Sellassie read the situation but did not seem to come up with strategic solutions. The Emperor admitted the lack of a strong value component in the educational system and the impact of secularization upon the youth in Ethiopia. He told to Herbert Hanson, that his endeavor to expand education was not accomplishing all he had dreamed it would. He noted that the youth were not taking counsel from the elders and teachers and there was a growing disinterest in spiritual matters. He confessed that education without God did not provide the answer to the problem of today. Herbert Hansen, *For God and the Emperor* ( Mount view: Pacific Press, 1958), p. 174.

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<sup>21</sup> Informant: Professor Asmerom Leggesse, Mekonen Bishaw and Asrat Gabre. A missionary who mainly worked with university students while in charge of the youth center also noted that HSI's education brought change, which, in turn, brought the need for more change but change was not proceeding fast enough hence, a spirit of restlessness was visible among the educated youth. Informant: Manzke.

<sup>22</sup> Informant: Mekonnen Bishaw. Mekonen added that Marxism appealed to the generation because unlike religion, "you can openly discuss about it and it looked scientific and good for a secularized mind." In the absence of a uniting theme that tied all the disparate groups, Marxism provided a common platform. Mekonnen intimated to me that he recalled an occasion when one of the student leaders in the early 60's who was even dabbled as the black Bolshevik, said that the Orthodox Church situated inside the campus should be turned into a museum.

<sup>23</sup> Informant : Berhannu Abebe.

<sup>24</sup> Informant: Professor Getachew Haile. Professor Getachew thinks that the Marxists and the Pentecostals came from the same angle and were in agreement as far as rejecting past tradition is concerned. According to Getachew, both rejected past traditions but for different reasons based on different perspectives too. Dr. Negussay, one of the pioneers of the Pentecostal movements agrees with Professor Getachew but he makes note of the fact that there was a tendency among the youth to embrace things which were new for accepting something foreign symbolized learnedness, going with the time, *Zemenawinet*, modernity. Dr. Negussay also observed that Marxism in Ethiopia slid un- encountered and un-engaged for there was not any strong voice or critique which would have exposed its danger so that the youth could remove its blinders and see it clearly.

<sup>25</sup> According to Peter Berger, Marxism appeals to many people in the Third World, particularly the students and the intellectuals, for it combines the claims of being a science with claims of bringing about changes, in which some of the traditional values are vindicated. Peter Berger, *The Pyramid of Sacrifice: Political Ethics and Social Change*, (New York: Basic Book, Inc., 1974, pp. 25-29. .

<sup>26</sup> For a much nuanced and sound interpretation of how Marxism obtained the status of being part of the intellectual furniture of the emerging elite and how it affected their perception of change, including revolution see, Forrest D. Colburn, *The Vogue of Revolution in Poor Countries* ( New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 20-35.

<sup>27</sup> Informant: Shmelis Mazengia.

<sup>28</sup> Early in his life the Emperor received his modern education from the Catholic Priests. In fact Aba Samuel a Catholic priest died while trying to rescue from a boating accident. His choice of Canada could also be politically motivated as this was the time when Haile Sellassie was distancing himself from Britain and the US was still in the horizon.

<sup>29</sup> Getachew Belete, *Elohe ena Hale Luya* (Addis Ababa: The Ethiopian Kale Heywet Church Literature Department, 2000), pp.48-55. According to Colosen, a former missionary professor at HSIU, the Jesuit priests, particularly the French Canadian Dean of students, were openly supportive of the Catholics and Evangelical Christians. A former student leader and a prominent official of the *Derg* also expressed the same opinion. He used the analogy of piles of balls and balloons. Piles of unanswered questions accumulated, grudges after grudges stored, one ball after another, precipitated the sudden and final collapse. The balloon kept on expanding until it exploded. This was the comment of a man who competed for the presidency of USUAA(HSIU university union) in 1973 and who later became the chief exponent of the revolution and one of the most outspoken advisors of Mengistu Haile Marian on matters of Marxist ideology. Informant: Shemelis Mazengia, Wubshet, Aaylew, Amare, and others.

<sup>30</sup> Andargachew Tiruneh, *The Ethiopian Revolution 1974-1987* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.305.

<sup>31</sup> Informant: Shiferaw Bekele. Shiferaw says that the Emperor did not provide a new vision for Ethiopians after the abortive coup. The student movement can be seen as a new accent and vocabulary of Ethiopian nationalism that had not been distilled into a concrete expression, which was later truncated into liberation fronts. According to Wubshet, the young generation of the 60's did not receive a vision of a grand idea to engage them along that line from the preceding generation, hence they invented their own, based on exotic ideas from the East. Informant: Wubshet Dilnesaw.

<sup>32</sup> Haile Woldemikael, "Education and Technology: The Ethiopian Experience," A paper presented to the 1<sup>st</sup> OSSERA Congress, June 14-17, 1983, p. 45.

<sup>33</sup> Educational Policy of the Sudan Interior Mission. Field Report July 1951.

<sup>34</sup> Informants: Daniel, Amare, Negussay, and Tilahun.

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<sup>35</sup> Addis Zemen, 03-12-73.

<sup>36</sup> Informants: Ayalew, Wibeshet, Daniel and others.

<sup>37</sup> Informants: Taye Tilhaun, Shimeles and Wubshet. See also Dawit Wolde Giorgis, *Red Tears* (Trenton, Red Sea Press, Inc. 1989), pp. 9-16

<sup>38</sup> For various views concerning the Ethiopian Revolution see, Andargachew Tiruneh, *The Ethiopian Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Christopher Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia* (Cambridge: University Press, 1988); F. Halliday, *The Ethiopian Revolution* (London: NLB, 1981); M & D Ottway, *Ethiopia: Empire in Revolution* (New York: Africana, 1978).

<sup>39</sup> The *Derg* is the generic name given to military force who ruled Ethiopia from 1974-1991, and by default to the state. In its traditional Amharic usage, the term signifies the concept of committee. It was adopted by the new rulers sometimes in June 1974 after forming a new body, called the Coordinating Committee of the Armed Forces, the Police and the Territorial Army, to form a core leadership to direct their movement.

<sup>40</sup> Martha Gebre Tsadiq, *A Refugee Story* (London: Triangle, 1983), p.14.

<sup>41</sup> Donald L. Donham, *Marxist Modern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 23.

<sup>42</sup> Informant: Wubshet.

<sup>43</sup> The government equated *Itiopia Tikdem* with *Hebretesebawinet* and the latter was described to be an embodiment of self reliance, equality, dignity of labor, the supremacy of the common good and the indivisibility of the Ethiopian unity. Quoted in, Seppo Sakari, "The Challenge of Marxism to Evangelical Christianity with Special Reference to Ethiopia," Ph. D. Thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1981. p. 181.

<sup>44</sup> The campaign was later sarcastically dubbed as *ebdet behebet*, literally madness in unity (collective madness) because of its disastrous social consequences both on the youth and the part of the peasants though it cannot be said that it devoid of any positive accomplishment.

<sup>45</sup> Dawit Wolde Giorgis. *Red Tears*, p. 17. The program has latter been dubbed as *ebedet bahebet*, collective madness.

<sup>46</sup> Ottaway, *Ethiopia Empire in Revolution*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>47</sup> Donham draws the conclusion that, "...what had been the tortured concern of only a handful of intellectuals eventually became the ideology of the revolutionary state." Donham, p127.

<sup>48</sup> Haile Sellassie created several military institutions and the arm, particularly the officers, came from different training establishments. There have been rivalries between those officers who graduated from the elite Harar Academy, and those who went to Holeta, which specialized in training junior officers. This rivalry was clearly played out in the course of the revolution. Mengistu and the junior army officers who backed him eventually formed the core group of the ruling army by gradually eliminating those from the Harar military academy.

<sup>49</sup> Andargachew, *The Ethiopian Revolution*, pp. 192-193. The invading Somali armies, which had occupied the Ogaden and the surrounding areas for several months, were routed and by March 23 1977, the war was over and lost territories were completely regained.

<sup>50</sup> Eric Rempel to Ray Brubacher, Secretary for Africa Mennonite Central Committee, 22-05-77 .F.N 146-3, Ethiopia, Mennonite Archives, Goshen Indiana( MN-G/I). For more on Ethio-US relations during this period see, Terrence Lyons, "Reactions to Revolution: United States-Ethiopian Relations 1974-1977," Ph. D. thesis, John Hopkins University, 1991, pp.210-260.

<sup>51</sup> The campaigns of the Red Terror, which claimed the lives of tens and thousands of innocent Ethiopians, marked one of the ugliest chapters of the modern history of Ethiopia.

<sup>52</sup> John W. Harbeson, *The Ethiopian Transformation* (London: Western Press. 1988), pp. 180-189.

<sup>53</sup> Informants: Wubshet, Solomon Lulu, and Bedru.

<sup>54</sup> Haile Mariam Larebo, "The Ethiopian Orthodox Church," *Eastern Christianity and Politics in Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University, 1988), p. 398. This is also confirmed by informants. Informants: General Taye, Shimelis Mazengia, and Simon Galore.

<sup>55</sup> It was later revised as "Revised Constitution of the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopian" in January 1987. It reaffirmed the legal separation of the church and the state, but at the same time, it declared that Ethiopians were guaranteed freedom of conscience and religion *but freedom of religion was not to be exercised in a manner contrary to the interests of the state and revolution, public morality or freedom of other citizens*(Article 47, emphasis mine). It was this last phrase that gave leeway for the state to undertake

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repression on evangelicals for they were ipso facto considered enemies of the revolution because of their allegiance to a supernatural power and suspected connections with imperialism.

<sup>56</sup> The Bishop refused to endorse the execution of the sixty former officials. According to Dawit, he was detained in February 1976 and was summarily executed on July 28, 1979 by direct order from Mengistu. Dawit, pp.50-51.

<sup>57</sup> A very good proponent of this was *Qesis* Solomon, a Russian educated theologian of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

<sup>58</sup> The document, purported to have been released in 1983, has been investigated by Giulia Bonacci, for a master's thesis. Though there is no evidence to authenticate the document's being an authoritative one, she draws the conclusion that given the nature of the *Derg*, its attitude toward religion and the way it interfered with church affairs, it provides a more or less accurate mirroring of the regime's position. The document that bore neither date, nor signature, first appeared in English in *Horn of Africa* and *The Month* in 1982. For further, see Giulia Bonacci. *The Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the State 1974-1991: Analysis of an ambiguous Religious Policy*. London: Center of Ethiopian Studies, 2000.

<sup>59</sup> Bonacci, pp. 41-45.

<sup>60</sup> Informants: Mesfin and Taye. We also lack scholarly studies on how Islam fared during the Revolution. What we know for sure is that, the *Derg* instituted a number of Muslim holidays that had not been in the national calendar and the religion received reasonable treatment unlike any time in the past. Some informants observe that the revolution provided a golden opportunity for a sizeable numbers mosques to be constructed.

<sup>61</sup> Getachew Belete, *Elohe Ena Hale Luia*, p.64

<sup>62</sup> Brant noted, "...most church leaders supported the revolution. It was not until many promises had been broken and anti-religious slogans were being heralded that church leaders began to read the writing in the wall. This created a problem for those of us outsiders who were watching the church being drawn ever more deeply into the web." Howard Brant, "Church and Mission Under Fire In Ethiopia, 1974-1977," 1984, p. 23. (Manuscript in possession of SIM Resource Center), SIM Archives, Charlotte. Overall, this situation disabled both the church and missionaries to take a proactive steps. Missionaries left Ethiopia in a haphazard manner and the church in south went through painful processes before fully adjusting to the challenges of the Revolution.

<sup>63</sup> Informants reported to me that some evangelical enthusiasts even compared Haile Sellassie with some kings mentioned in the Bible who were known for the harsh treatment of the Israelites. Some Pentecostal preachers even preached that the revolution was foreordained by God and hence saw it with blessings. Informants: Getu, Ashenafi, Negussie, and others.

<sup>64</sup> The song was composed by members of the *Derg* from the Ethiopian Air Force. Under the title of : *Tenesa Teramed*, Rise up and March, the song goes like this. "*Yale menem dem enkenua yewdem, beqena menfese Itypia tiqdem*," a rendering of which would be, "Let her taints/blemishes disappear with out any blood and let Ethiopia advance in good spirit." The *Derg* used religious rhetoric in the initial phase of the revolution to garner support and mobilize the people along familiar religious lines and they did seem to capture the attention of the people and raise their expectation about the revolution.

<sup>65</sup> See the Ethiopian Herald 25-05-75.

<sup>66</sup> *Addis Zemen*, December 15, 1975; *Addis Zemen*, 01-03-75.

<sup>67</sup> *The Ethiopian Herald*. 25-05-75.

<sup>68</sup> To which his brother, Gudina Tumsa, who then was the Secretary of the church responded, "It must be understood that there can be no reconciliation and no compromise between the church believers and materialism. Marxism and the church can never be friends." Oyvind M Eide, *Revolution and Religion in Ethiopia, 1974-1985*( Oxford: James Currey), 2000. p.127.

<sup>69</sup> Getachew, p. 84.

<sup>70</sup> According to some church related reports, evangelical leaders participated in the government initiated project knowing that it was purely a political machination as a gesture of their concern for the nation but did not seem to take interest to pursue it any further. Annual report of the Council of Evangelical Christians in Ethiopia prepared by Tesfa Tsion Delele, 1980, p. 3.

<sup>71</sup> Eide. 206.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*. p.165.

<sup>73</sup> *Qesis* Solomon, according to Haile Mariam Larebo, "attempted to make the church a vehicle of the regime's Marxist ideology, and as a symbolic gesture of his conviction, he gave his cross to the socialist



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motherland.” Haile Mariam Larebo, “The Ethiopian Orthodox Church,” p. 396. According to informants, Qesis Solomon also preached the same in the radio program in which he tried to convince the Ethiopians that socialism was something embedded in their culture as was evidenced in social practices such as *Debo*, *Senbete*, *Maheber*. Informants: Tilahun, Wubshet, and others. The Patriarch who did not share his view was reported to have said that the priest (Qesis Solomon) was only a priest in his head and cloth/ turbine but a devil in his heart

<sup>74</sup> The impact of the revolution of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church has been aptly summarized by a leading scholar, Getachew Haile, as, “From my own experience in Ethiopia..... I can say that ‘revolutionary language is the opium of the people.’ It even makes priests preach scientific socialism.” Getachew Haile, “Ethiopia,” *A Case Study in Christian Mission Under Authoritarian Governments. Documents of Working Conference* (Ventor: N.J: Oversees Ministries Center, May 1977), p.58.

<sup>75</sup> Getachew Belete, *Ilohe*, p. 149.

<sup>76</sup> It appears that the *Derg* did not need to rely on the cooperation of such interfaith platforms since there was no follow up programs. It was mainly needed to mobilize the support of the Muslims and the adherents of the Orthodox Church whose blessing was needed when the rulers were waging wars on many fronts.

<sup>77</sup> Informants: Tilhaun, Wubshet, and Hiruy

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> This should not give the impression that there were no localized actions against the evangelical Christians. However, haphazard local officials had been branding them as stooges of foreign powers followed by some harassment.

<sup>80</sup> In his speech, Mengistu stressed the fact that unless the Ethiopian people made successful campaigns at the cultural front to defeat backward cultural practices the triumph of socialism can hardly be realized. For his full speech see, *Addis Zemen*, 16-09-78. The ides of the Cultural Revolution modeled on China was more a result of the influence of wide spread literature than an outcome of direct ideological push from Peking.

<sup>81</sup> As early as 1975 the term *Mete* was beginning to gain currency at least in the media to refer to the evangelicals. An article published in *Ye Zareitu Ityopia*, on January 19, mentions the word *mete* as products of foreign religion brainchild of imperialism preaching other- worldly -ness and slovenly attitude detrimental to the progress of the country. It accused the *mete* religion of not only being counter productive but sapping the ardor of the youth to combat social injustice. *Ye Zareitu Ityopia*, 19-01-75.

<sup>82</sup> *Addis Zemen*, 21-05-78. In fact, the newspaper was very pointed in mentioning the southern provinces and the Qale Heywet church of SIM background.

<sup>83</sup> Dawit, *Red Tears*, p. 121.

<sup>84</sup> Ethiopian Herald, 08-12-74.

<sup>85</sup> Peter Costea, “Church and State Relations in the Marxist –Leninist Regimes of the Third World,” *Journal of Church and State*, 32, 2 (1990), p. 302.

<sup>86</sup> Teshome G. Wagaw, *The Development of Higher Education and Social Change* (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 1990) ,p. 241. Those of us who were either students or teachers in colleges and universities have witnessed this development.

<sup>87</sup> For the formation of the party in 1984 and the preparation of the feast to celebrate its inauguration about 45 million dollars were spent. This was at the time when severe drought brought untold havoc to millions of Ethiopians. *Africa Reporter*, 30, 2 ( 1985), p. 54.

<sup>88</sup> *Christianity Today* reported that just a week after the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Revolution, which coincided with the formation of the Workers Party of Ethiopia, not less 700 churches were closed in one province alone. *Christianity Today*, October 4, 1985, p.70.

<sup>89</sup> *The Ethiopian Herald*, 24-07-84

<sup>90</sup> The *Qebele* associations were set up by a government proclamation. For further see, *Negarit Gazeta*, Proclamation 104, 1976.

<sup>91</sup> Informants: Simon, Petros, Hussien, and Tilahun.

<sup>92</sup> Informants: Sehen, Mekere, Sisay, Aseged, Tesfa Lidet and others.

<sup>93</sup> Informants: Tilahun, Tesfaye, Mathewos

<sup>94</sup> Informants: Seifu, Tesfaye, and others.

<sup>95</sup> Through out the period of the *Derg*, every time the rulers held annual anniversary of the revolution, they would have the Patriarch of the Orthodox Church and the Imam of the Muslims sit on the right and left side of Mengistu H/ Mariam. This had the double message of saying to both religious communities that we

respect your religion and for the international world the drama conveyed the message that the regime tolerated and respected religion. It was definitely publicity show devoid of honesty. But in the same Revolutionary Square where the anniversary was conducted, the pictures of Marx, Engels and Lenin, the new trinity of the *Derg*, were posted high. Christopher Clapham. *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia*, p. 79.

<sup>96</sup> Deniel Fite, "The Challenge of Denominational Conflict in the Context of the Ethiopian Evangelical Churches," Senior essay MYS, Addis Ababa, 2001, p. 19.

<sup>97</sup> Gudina Tumsa Foundation, "The Initial Response to the Revolution: Documents of the Rev. Gudina Tumsa and the Mekane Yesus Church from the first Phase of the Revolution 1974-1975, Vol. III, p.12.

<sup>98</sup> Perhaps, if this line had been pursued the likely outcome would have been something that would be akin to the Three Self Patriotic Movement of China. Informants: Wubshet, Hiruie Tsige Abebe Mesfin, and others. Wubshet is of the opinion that there were many evangelical Christians who joined the revolution innocently as an opportunity to show solidarity and do something to the poor and lost their ways in the maze. Examples cited were: Temesgen Madebo, Ergete Madebo, Tsion Dessie, Petros Wandano and Semon Galero.

<sup>99</sup> According to Gudina, the word ecumenical describes the common strategy of the churches in working together for furtherance of the causes of common interest. It also describes two or more churches of the same confessional faith family or various denominations with different confessional backgrounds. Gudina set up CCCE under the principle outlined in the Gospel of John chapter 17:21-22, which stressed unity. Debela Birri, "Rev Gudina Tumsa and the Ecumenical Movement of the 1970's", *The Life and Ministry of Rev. Gudina Tumsa*. Addis Ababa: 2001, p 130. In essence, Gudina was raising the mantle of the evangelical pioneers who struggled for the formation of the evangelical alliance, which could not materialize for lack of a clear theological framework of ecumenism and due to the unwillingness of the missionaries to see the fruition of the project.

<sup>100</sup> Informants: Hiruye, Berhanu, Debela, and others.

<sup>101</sup> For further see, Eidie, *Religion and Revolution*.

<sup>102</sup> Informants: Hiruy, Berhanu, and Debela.

<sup>103</sup> The lack of a tradition of autonomy and political experience explains the hesitation of the National Church in going forward with the ecumenical religious forum. Overall according to Jeff Haynes, passivity and resignation characterizes the stance of the Church during the Revolution. Jeff Haynes, *Religion and Politics in Africa* (London: Zed Book, 1996), p. 90

<sup>104</sup> Qes Gudina had been the principal figure behind the formation of CCCE. It has to be noted that the arrest of Gudina, was a significant factor in weakening the position of CCCE. The association staggered for a while and as of 1980, it ceased to operate under that name. The remaining group joined an already existing forum that had been created for the same purpose but comprising only evangelical Christians.

<sup>105</sup> Prior to that, the SIM had also organized a conference for church leaders at Lango a few months before the Conference held in Nazareth. The Lango conference was a kind of pace setter and precursor of the Pastors Conference. Until it was terminated due to government pressure the fellowship organized annually helped a lot to demonstrate mutual solidarity expressed in financial support by raising fund to families of imprisoned Christians regardless of denominations.

<sup>106</sup> Informant: Alem is not sure whether he said this in the 1976 or 1977 conference.

<sup>107</sup> Informants: Hiruie, Tesfa Tsion Ashenafi, and others

<sup>108</sup> Bulletins of Annual conferences in the hands of Pastor Hiruie Tsege of Harvest Church.

<sup>109</sup> Informants: Tesfa Lidet, Hiruie, and Yohannes.

<sup>110</sup> The reason why the evangelical Churches had not produced theologians was mainly due to the policy of the various missionaries whose emphasis was on mass evangelism and lower level institutions without emphasis on high level theological seminaries.

<sup>111</sup> The term religious persecution requires careful definition. In general persecution stands for any kind of infraction upon religious liberty. The World Council of Church in its Delhi Convocation in 1961 stated that condition of persecution exists if one of the following is undermined a) every person has the right to determine his own faith and creed; b) every person has the right to express his beliefs in worship and teaching; c) the right to associate with others based in commonly accepted creeds. The fact that people suffer is not in and of itself a sign of religious persecution for people can suffer because of a myriad of

factors such as war or famine. Nor is the fact that believers' suffering in itself considered a situation of persecution for they can be persecuted along side and in the same manner with others who do not share their faith. A situation of religious persecution exists when a group of people are targeted and experience harassment or torture because of their particular belief/faith. Religious men experiencing suffering because of certain political convictions, rather than their religious identity, if that conviction stems from their religion, it could not be regarded as religious persecution. By believer (or committed believer), I mean some one for whom his religious faith is a central aspect of his life and who is accepted constraints as much as possible to live out his faith in communion with others.

<sup>112</sup> For further on this see, Edie, *Religion and Revolution*.

<sup>113</sup> The leitmotif for the series of conferences was to provide a proper perspective of the new developments in Ethiopia and find proper ways on how the church can make a share in the process of building the new Ethiopian society under socialism. The conferences were conducted in February, April, November 1975 and October 1976. Each seminar lasted four days. Churches represented were the Ethiopian Orthodox Mission, the Roman Catholic Church and a number of evangelical churches. For further see, Gerd Decke, "The role of Gudina Tumsa in a Critical Dialogue between Marxism/Socialism and Christianity," *The Life and Ministry of Rev. Gudina Tumsa*. Addis Ababa: Gudina Tumsa Foundation, 2001, pp. 101-128.

<sup>114</sup> Eide, pp. 116-117; Informants: Wubshet, Hiruye, Debela, etc.

<sup>115</sup> According to Anderson, "Participants chided their own church for not having spoken out prophetically during the old regime." Kud T. Anderson, *A Brief history of the Mekane Yesus Church*(Addis Ababa: Mekane Yesus Church, 1979, p.63. The prevailing consensus was that the church shall neither withdraw into a ghetto loosing its commitment for the poor nor identify completely with any political system. Involvement without loosing its message was the motto adopted.

<sup>116</sup> The seminars provided theological and biblical equipment for participants to enable them meet the challenges of a secularized socialist thought, Decke, p.109.

<sup>117</sup>For the full content of the letter see, H.E Emmanuel Abraham &Rev. Gudina Tumsa, "Pastoral Letter: The Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus in the Ethiopian Revolution," *Witness and Discipleship* (Addis Ababa: Gudina Tumsa Foundation, 2003), pp. 77-80. Gudina later refined his thought when he developed his indigenous theology of "holistic ministry," where he challenged the Ethiopian churches to rise to the challenge of addressing the whole man, spiritual and physical. He even went further to say that "apolitical life is not worthy of existence...and African theology should develop a political theology relevant to the African people." However, it stressed that such a theology should never take the place of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which "can never be replaced by any of the ideologies invented by men through out the centuries." Gudina Tumsa, Memorandum. August 1975, quoted in Eide, p.119.

<sup>118</sup> Informants; Eshetu, Tekeste, Tiruwork, and others.

<sup>119</sup> Informant: Miss Mildred Young, Tekeste Tiruwork and Alem. Informants told me that except one or two cases, most of the *Zemecha* students returned after finishing their assignment with their faith intact because of the strong backstopping of the works of Young and the graduate fellowship; EEMYC, Annual Report May 16, 1975( Mekane Yesus Seminary)

<sup>120</sup> Informants: Tiru work, Alem, Eshetu, and Tekeste.

<sup>121</sup> Informants: Alem, Melesachew, Tiruwork, and others.

<sup>122</sup> List of men leading the Graduate Fellowship include: Solomon Lulu (Addis Abba), Tekeste Teklu (Dr. USA), Tilahun Adera (Dr. USA), Kebebew Daka(Addis Ababa) and Abraha Araya (Germany). Most of the leaders of the Graduate Fellowships have become very successful in their educational career and are still in the frontline serving the church. The ones residing outside Ethiopia had been pioneers in promoting the evangelical faith amongst the Ethiopian Diaspora communities.

<sup>123</sup> Informant: Alem

<sup>124</sup> Informants: Alem, Melesachew, and others.

<sup>125</sup> Informants: Alem, Melesachew, Tiruwork, and Tekeste.

<sup>126</sup> The Ethiopian Revolution Magazine issued by PMAC, September 12, 1977, quoted in Cumbers, *Living with Red Terror*, p. 120.

<sup>127</sup> Edie, p. 130.

<sup>128</sup> According to Eide, in February 1978, the number of missionaries was 77% fewer than in 1973. Eide, p.132.

<sup>129</sup> Informants: Mesfin Lesanu, Taye, Shibeshi, Tesfaye.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid. The fear of the government in Wellega was that the OLF was using religion as a cover, whereas in other parts of Ethiopia it was the EPRP. According to Tilahun, *libelu yefeleguten amora gegra bilew yeterutal*, a rough rendering would read, if one wishes to eat a vulture, he will call it a guinea fowl. Persecution in Wellega was very intense. While it forced many Christians of the Lutheran background to join the revolution many joined the Pentecostals who were very strong in their faith and were well adjusted to the new situations. For further see, Jeto Hordofa, "Troubled But Not Destroyed: The Effects of the Persecution of 1978-1991( 1975-1983 E C) on the Configuration of the Western Wellega Bethel Synod," Senior essay, MYY Seminary, 1999. Jeto points out that there were many prophetic utterances that were being made by Pentecostal prophets on injustices during the period. Apart from songs, the Pentecostals expressed their deep grievances against an oppressive system through prophetic utterances.

<sup>131</sup> Mekuria Bulcha, "Historical, political and social causes of mass flight from Ethiopia," in *Refugees and Development in Africa*. ed. Peter Nobel. Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1987. p. 28.

<sup>132</sup> According to Tesfaye Dinagde, who was the General Secretary of the Western Synod at the time of his arrest in March 1979, he started building small congregation from small converts in the prison. Together with other evangelicals who joined him, among whom was Rev. Itefa (Currently the President of EECMY), they developed secret codes of networking and exchanged information, and worship systems in an orderly manner in the respective jail rooms. For instance, Holy Communion was served by all Christians at an appointed day, and time. A particular verse from the Bible was informally shared to all of them. The believers would meditate on the verse privately and take bread and tea (to represent the bread and the wine)during breakfast time simultaneously. Among the 300 converts, 140 of them were political prisoners from different opposition groups with Marxist leanings. Informant: Tesfaye, Mathewos, Abebe, etc.

<sup>133</sup> Informants: Shiferaw, Mennassie, Tesfaye and others.

<sup>134</sup> Shiferaw. This is also confirmed by Tesfaye, Menassie, etc.

<sup>135</sup> Annual Reports of CECE indicates that in 1979 there were over 400 converts in Addis Ababa prison centers and that preparations were underway to launch prison ministry.

<sup>136</sup> Informants: Hiruy, Alem, and Solomon Lulu.

<sup>137</sup> Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer*. New York: Harper and Row, 1965.

<sup>138</sup> Informant: Taye Tilahun.

<sup>139</sup> Quoted in World Lutheran Information, 08-07-79, p. 15.

<sup>140</sup> Quoted in Seppo Vaisanen. *The Challenge of Marxism to Evangelical Christianity*, p.188.

<sup>141</sup> Baro is reported to have gone to the eastern parts of Ethiopia to open up a new front among the Oromo of the Hararghe provinces where he lost his life in a skirmish with a contending Islamic group fighting for the same cause. For more see, Eide, pp. 101-103. Baro was a prominent activist in the student movement and was the President of student union of Addis Ababa University College in 1965 at the critical time when the slogan "Land to the Tiller" was raised by the students for the first time.

<sup>142</sup> Informants: Abebe, Tesfaye, Debela, and others.

<sup>143</sup> Qes Gudina Tumsa was an Oromo. His sympathy towards his ethnic kinsmen was obvious both from the point of view of the issue of justice and as a man who identified with people whose conditions needed redress. His evangelical convictions and his enlightened social consciousness had the combined impact of producing in him a theological consciousness with social and political ingredients. The state was closely following Qes Gudina. Apart from his association with his own church, he was emerging as a national figure among evangelical Christians. Through his interfaith initiatives, he was trying build a forum that would serve as common voice for Christians. The bold objections he expressed on various occasions concerning the pretentious claim of freedom of religion was considerable annoyance to the military officials. What however drew the attention of the military was, according to some informants, his relations with his brother Baro Tumsa, a Politburo member and a leader of the political organization that represented people of peripheral areas. He kept on meeting secretly with Baro and his political friends perhaps to have a dialogue on issues of socialism and Christianity. Informants: General Taye, Abebe, Wubshet.

<sup>144</sup> Informants: Abebe, Tesfaye, Taye.

<sup>145</sup> In general, there have been four types of responses of the church in its encounter with the Marxist state, namely, withdrawal, conformity, opposition and critical engagement. It seemed that Gudina was developing the last approach but that did not materialize as he died before his thoughts took full shape. The other evangelicals in Ethiopia seem to vaguely embrace his position but by and large they adopted the withdrawal approach, perhaps by default or by lack of other options.

<sup>146</sup> Ba'alu Girma was also a famous novelist and literary figure well reputed among African scholars who also "disappeared under similar mysterious circumstances after writing the book entitled, *Oromai*, which heavily criticized the corrupt life of the *Derg* officials in a satirical manner of Gorge Orwell's *Animal Farm*.

<sup>147</sup> Later following the collapse of the *Derg*, it was found out that he was killed the same night he was caught. Eide, p.178.

<sup>148</sup> Gudina was not a typical Ethiopian preacher who spoke only about salvation of the soul, in most of his preaching, he stressed messages with social and political tones, which could have been interpreted otherwise by security agents and spies attending the church incognito. He had been warned of the dangers of his bold position and was asked to tone down by prominent leaders of his *church*, such as Emanuel Abraham. Some members of his own church, harbored doubts and suspicions for some of his radical opinions. For some people, it was even hard to dismiss political motives from Gudina's ministry. Informants Taye, Abebe, Tesfaye Deneged.

<sup>149</sup> A former prominent official and confidant of Mengistu once told him that the western world was complaining about Gudina and Mengistu's response was, " they are crying for one man, why were they silent when Haile Sellassie was killing many." Informant: General Taye

<sup>150</sup> Oyvind M. Eide, "Gudina Tumsa: The Voice of an Ethiopian Prophet," *Swedish Missiological Themes*. 2001, p. 291.

<sup>151</sup> Eide, p. 188.

<sup>152</sup> Informants: Tesfaye, Berhanu, and Mathewos Gichle

<sup>153</sup> Informants: Abebe, Tekeste, and Taye.

<sup>154</sup> Peter Cotterell, "The Case of Ethiopia," in W.R. Shenk( ed.), *Exploring Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 1983, p. 18.

<sup>155</sup> Donham, p. 153.

<sup>156</sup> Informants: Getu, Shagna, Milkias, and others. Dr. Steve Strauss who served as an SIM missionary suggests not only Biblical values, but the teachings of the missionaries and their democratic /western way of life might also have some impact in the formation of new political consciousness concerning human dignity, equality before the law, and the rule of the law. The evangelical Christians of the south assumed that the revolution would bring some kind of restorative justice to their situations, and hence, their relative open reception. Informant: Steve Strauss.

<sup>157</sup> Donham, p.163.

<sup>158</sup> This was a sub title of Chapter Six of Donham's book: Marxist Modernism at the Ethiopian Center, p.122.

<sup>159</sup> Donham, p. 146. His view is also shared by Eide and Cotterell, 1988,"the case of Ethiopia", p. 18.

<sup>160</sup> Examples abound, especially in the south. Many parents in the south were amazed at how their own children became hostile to the religion that they fondly believed. It has to be appreciated that the young people who became cadres and local government functionaries were not overnight turncoats. They were evangelicals, vanguards of the revolution, but in the process became communio-evangelists, a few of them carried away by the revolutionary fervor, openly becoming atheists. Lack of experience and guidance and the manipulative power of the local party officials and opportunistic motives, could be cited as factors. As evangelical Christianity appealed to the peripheral people so did socialist revolution. On the other hand, one has to recognize that some of the government officials in the south from the evangelical background, also mitigated harassment and helped their community.

<sup>161</sup> Informants: Simon, Samson, and Petros.

<sup>162</sup> The verse that was taken from the Bible to inform the position was found in Romans 13:1-2. Informants: Shiferaw, Tilahum, and Taye. There were many Christians who were known for their prominent professional services holding highly responsible positions without belonging to political parties. One good example is General Taye, who in fact, was the Defense Minister at one time under the *Derg's* regime. Another good example is Ato Shiferaw W/ Michael, who served as an advisor to the Council of Ministers with a port folio of a Vice Minister. Colonel Tessema Aba Derash, one of the best known managers of Ethiopian Electric Light and Power Authority ( EELPA), could also be cited as a case in point.

<sup>163</sup> Such rhetoric, which associates the works of mission with foreign interests, accompanied by direct attacks were already in the media especially, in government sponsored magazines as early as 1976. See for instance, *Tsedeye*, no. 6, 1976.

<sup>164</sup> According to informants, working in former security offices, a committee was set up in late 1970's under the instigation of an elite group from the Orthodox Church, to study the "*Pentes*" to curb out any possible connections with foreign powers. The investigation concluded that the *Pentes*, 1) did not contribute to the economic progress of the nation, 2) they had a highly diluted spirit of nationalism, 3) they propagate alien religious practices that are not compatible with Ethiopian culture, 4) and their foreign connections are liabilities to the revolution. Informants: Seifu and Tadesse.

<sup>165</sup> Cumbers, pp.210-211.

<sup>166</sup> Eide, pp. 207-208; 196.

<sup>167</sup> *Addis Zemen*, 04-04-79.

<sup>168</sup> See, *Addis Zemen*, 25-02-79; 04-03-79.

<sup>169</sup> For the full content of the document, see Getachew Belete, pp. 172-173.

<sup>170</sup> Dawit, *Red Tears*, p.305.

<sup>171</sup> To cite one good example, Reb'ya Sato, "Christianizing ,Through Villagization: Experiences of Social Change Among the Majangir," Proceedings of the 13<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, 1996, pp. 565-576.

<sup>172</sup> This is the observation of Tadesse Beriso, an Anthropologist who comes from one of the southern provinces. Apart from the disconnect from the customary ritual centers, the new experience of living outside familiar comfort zones also brought some social stress that created some kind of openness for a new religious experience. For further see, Tadesse Beriso, "Socio-Cultural and Environmental Impacts of Mengistu's Villagization Program on Guji Oromo of Southern Ethiopia," Proceeding of the 13<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, pp. 299-312.

<sup>173</sup> The term *Mete*, in this case, changes its tone. What underpins this concept is more of Ethiopian nationalism. Ethiopian nationalism derives its mainstay from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Evangelicals had all along been accused of being less nationalistic and unpatriotic. The tendency of evangelical Christians not to participate in the war mongering shouts of slogans, and to a certain extent, the restraints they have shown to engage in the civil war and fratricidal battles, seemed to strengthen the conviction of the *Derg* officials. Their attack on the evangelicals on the basis of the label *Mete* drives mainly from nationalism. Informants: Simon, Petros, Demessie, and others.

<sup>174</sup> Getachew Belete, p.193. Informants: Bruce Adams and Milkia's.

<sup>175</sup> Informants: Petros, Demessie, Tadele Asalef, and Simon.

<sup>176</sup> Informants: Gezahegne, Getu, Teshome, Thomas Tolcha, and others.

<sup>177</sup> Informant: Teshome.

<sup>178</sup> Amnesty International Reports, 1984, pp. 46-47; 1986, p.45. The 1984 Amnesty International Report contains the types of tortures to which the believers had been subjected such as, beating on the feet, crawling on the stone and thorns, apart from the usual flogging. p. 47.

<sup>179</sup> Informants: Tesfaye, Getu, Gezahegne, and Teshome.

<sup>180</sup> Teshome pointed out that the guards tested their limits to the last. He opined that the *Derg* officials were making experiments concerning the will and strength of the believers. After their release from prison, Tesfaye and his friends found out that their files contained no charges except the written statement: *Yene Teshome Fayle* (The file of Teshome and others). When they were arrested and thrown in prisons, the local officials accused them of conspiring against the revolution under the cover of religion.

<sup>181</sup> Informants: Tesfaye Gabisso, Teshome, Getu, and others. Songs in the prison melodies based on Psalm 102: 18-20

<sup>182</sup> Cumbers, p.184.

<sup>183</sup> Mesfin Bekele, "Prison Conditions in Ethiopia, June 1979," p. 7. The document which details account of prison conditions in Ethiopia in the time period specified, is found at Goshen Mennonite Archives, FN IX-12-7, Ethiopia .1975-1979, G/I

<sup>184</sup> Informants: Getu, Teshome, Tsadiku, and Ashenafi; Eide, p. 196.

<sup>185</sup> Informants: Pastor Tsadiku and Mehari who had both experienced the brutal hands of the notorious Ali Musa. This view is also expressed in a Report of Robert Hoffman addressed to Ray Brubacher, Secretary for Mennonite Central Committee, 1979, F.N: IX-6-3, MN Archives, G/I

<sup>186</sup> Bascom, p.123. Informants: Teshome, Kasa, Tibebe, and others.

<sup>187</sup> Getachew, p.189; 195.

<sup>188</sup> Tesfaye put it very succinctly: In the past the battle or the fight was between one form of faith with another. Under the new regime the fight was between faith and its denial/ unbelief. The latter had to be fought more aggressively.

<sup>189</sup> Informants: Hiruie, Bedru, Teshome, and others.

<sup>190</sup> *The Ethiopian Herald*. 25-10-78.

<sup>191</sup> Lutheran World Federation, *News Analysis* October 17, 1983. Quoted in Chambers, p. 252.

<sup>192</sup> Most of the leaders of the Peasant and Urban Dwellers Associations came from evangelical Christian background. They were elected by the people with the manipulation of local government and party representatives to serve. Over the years, as the revolution progressed, they were swallowed up. In the process, some of them were converted into ardent revolutionaries. Some of them were forced to do what they did but most of them were motivated by opportunistic reasons, such as to get favors and promotions. According to informants, instances of this kind abound during the period of the *Derg*. Such leaders proved to be thorns in the flesh of the Christians. After the change of government, the same men have reverted to their old faith. The relation between faith and politics in the south is an interesting issue that needs a serious inquiry.

<sup>193</sup> For further see, *Pentecostal Advocate*, 15-05-85.

<sup>194</sup> For a detailed reports of the levels of religious persecution against the Qale Heywet Church see, John Cumbers/ *Living with The Red Terror* (Keamey: Morris Publisher, 1996).

<sup>195</sup> The Christians were marched carrying the Bible and forced to say, "I will not do it again." The Captain ordered all evangelical Christians (the *Pentes* as they were called) above 16 years to be arrested and imprisoned as an all out campaign to stamp out the faith in Jimma. Yohanes Shareb, "The Growth of Kaffa Bethel Presbyterian and the Opposing Forces," BA thesis, MYS Addis Ababa, 1993, pp. 20-22.

<sup>196</sup> In March 1978, the Grace Bible Institute was found to be plastered with slogans such as, "SIM is the brother of the CIA", "Close the GBI for ever," "the imperialist should leave our country." The Institute was brusquely closed by a military officer who forced to leave the SIM missionaries in 24 hours. Balisky, "The Last Week In Kaffa", personal note. 1978. p.3; Cumbers, pp.167-168. Informants: Balisky and Clarence Elij

<sup>197</sup> Getachew, *Elohe*, pp. 253-260.

<sup>198</sup> For more see, Getachew Belete, *Eleho ena Hale Luya*, pp. 181-188.

<sup>199</sup> Kay Bascom, *Hidden Triumph* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2001), p. 53.

<sup>200</sup> The teaching of the couples to church leaders were based on the Gospel of John 19, which tells about John who happened to be the only apostle to stay closely with Jesus during the Crucifixion. The other message was based on Isaiah 41 which stressed the fact that God defends and honors those who defend him and puts to shame those who denied him. Kay Bascom. *Hidden Triumph in Ethiopia*, pp. 51-54.

<sup>201</sup> Informants: Bedru, Solomon Kebede, and Tesfa Tsion.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Hege, p. 167; Tilahun, 110; The documents were prepared by Bedru Hussien, Solomon Kebede and others, who were graduates of Haile Sellassie I University and who were key actors in the Pentecostal movement of the 1960's. Informants: Solomon Kebede, Bedru Hussien, and Balcha Deneged

<sup>205</sup> The *Derg* officials soon discovered that the materials were in circulation and banned them. Who ever was found in possession of any of the materials was immediately arrested. Informants: Tilahun, Millions, Sehen, Berhanu and others.

<sup>206</sup> Informants: Tesfa Tsion, Solomon, and Bedru Hussien.

<sup>207</sup> Members of the delegation were: Solomon Kebede, Bedru Hussien, Tesfa Tsion Dellela, Asrat Gebre, Tsega Gebre Mariam and Yohannes Germamo. Informants: Bedru, Solomon, Tesfa Tsion and Asrat Informants indicated that their visit was official in the sense that the government knew that they were going to those countries. The leaders, however, had a different agenda, which was to meet church leaders operating officially and underground and draw lessons from their experience that would be usefully appropriated to the Ethiopian situation

<sup>208</sup> Upon closing a church in Addis Ababa, the local security guard who confiscated the documents belonging to the church found a file containing the name with the initial letters CIA, standing for an organization called, Church Investment Association, which was immediately taken as a proof of the church's connection with the CIA. Nathan B. Hege, *Beyond Our Prayers*, p.24.

<sup>209</sup> Eric Rempel, "Ethiopia Trip Report", p.3. 22-02-76. F. N IX-12 -7 M/N Archives, I/G.

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<sup>210</sup> According to informants, there were even political cadres, who had “received miraculous healing” from severe bullet wounds, who as a result, became committed believers in the faith. Some high ranking members of the government were also said to have visited the church incognito. Informants: Seyoum, Shibeshi, Bedru, Tilahun, and others. The activities of the *Tsion* choir, the revival and healing services of Pastor Daniel was something that increased the visibility of the Pentecostals, which as a result, popularized the term *Pente* during the period of the revolution.

<sup>211</sup> Informants: Girma, Debebe, and Fikre.

<sup>212</sup> See below. The choir had produced famous solo singers like Tamrat Haile, Tamirat Welba, and Derege Mekonnen.

<sup>213</sup> Informants: Girma Tsige, Fikru, Debebe, and others.

<sup>214</sup> An observer from the Mennonite Mission who visited the church on July 3, saw in the second service, dozens of people worshipping outside the church in the rain for there was no remaining space inside. H. Leaman to Executive Ministries. 18-07-77. F.N 1463, Ethiopia, MN Archives, G/I.

<sup>215</sup> Janet Kreider “A vision Fulfilled,” editorial, Mennonite Mission, 24-09-81, quoted in Hege, p. 171.

<sup>216</sup> Informants: former security experts.

<sup>217</sup> Not only were church buildings taken away, the government froze all bank accounts belonging to MKC and later drained them.

<sup>218</sup> This is a document of great significance because it was a clear evidence that the state was giving instruction for local officials to take actions against churches. Most high level instructions were communicated to local officials verbally, over meetings or telephone conversations, to avoid risk of being found out. Through out the period of the revolution, the *Derg* officials rejected direct state intervention on the affairs of the church. For a complete content of the paper see the appendix section. Girma, 146-147.

<sup>219</sup> The six top leaders of the MKC who were thrown into the most infamous prison center, the Central Investigation Department, were: Shemshedin Abdo, Kiron Bihon, Negash Kebede, Tilahun Beyene, Abebe Gorfu, and Kalifa Alie, who died shortly after his release because of ailments associated with the tortures and hardships he received while in prison. Hege, pp184-185.

<sup>220</sup> Informants: Balcha, Mekonnen, and Mulugeta.

<sup>221</sup> Tilahun, p. 142. Later in 1987, it was transformed into an Executive Committee.

<sup>222</sup> Informants: Mulugeta, Bedru, Girma, Sehn, and Mulu.

<sup>223</sup> According to Gemechu, “during the communist regime, the church had eighty five persons serving as designed ministers within the cell groups. Out of these eighty-five, fifty were women and thirty- five were men.” Gemechu, “History of the Meseret Kristos Church, at Wonji Gefersa...”, p.77.

<sup>224</sup> Hege, p. 203.

<sup>225</sup> Overall, the times of the *Derg* were blessings in disguise for Ethiopian women. As was the case in the area of politics where many had risen to prominent positions so was the situation in the church. The underground structure, relatively free from the strictures of hierarchical organizations, allowed space for women to be more involved in the activities of the church. As a result, there were women preachers and evangelists breaking new grounds in the religious traditions of Ethiopia.

<sup>226</sup> Informants: Mulugeta, Girma Tsige, and Solomon.

<sup>227</sup> Informants: Girma, Mulugeta, and Bedru.

<sup>228</sup> Quoted in, Robert S. Kreider, “Reflections on the Meserete Kristos Church,” April 11-May 2 1982, p.3. FN EX 20, Ethiopia, MN Archives, G/I

<sup>229</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

<sup>230</sup> Tilahun, *Yemeseret Krestos*, p. 170.

<sup>231</sup> Informants: Asseged, Berhanu, Ashenafi and others.

<sup>232</sup> Informants: Tirunesh, Zewde, Ahenafi, and others.

<sup>233</sup> The articles could not be found but the writers were identified and confirmed it to me. Interview, Negussie Tefera, and Ashenafi.

<sup>234</sup> Some of the leaders who chose that approach were derided by the Pentecostals themselves and were blamed of conflating *Marcos with Marcs*, (mixing up Marx with the Biblical Apostle Mark).

<sup>235</sup> Informants: Million Belete, Solomon, and Bekele.

<sup>236</sup> The temporary persecution again led to dispersal. The event, once again, forced Pentecostals to tentatively join other denominations, thus spreading their practices as well. Taye, “The Pentecostal Development, ...” p. 36.



<sup>237</sup> Yoseph Kidane Mariam, "The History of the Pentecostal Movement in Addis Ababa, 1963-1976," BA thesis, History Department, AAU, 1976, p.33.

<sup>238</sup> Informant: Bedru.

<sup>239</sup> Informants: Bete, Tessema, Zeleqe, and others. A word of caution is needed here. It might be possible that the term *Pente* by this time may have been used in reference to all evangelicals.

<sup>240</sup> *Keston College Report*, 1985, p. 22.

<sup>241</sup> Alem Bazezew, Melesachew, Tekeste, Berhanu, and others. Other books that young evangelicals were reading include: Richard Wurmbar's *Tortured for Christ* (Glendene Dian Books 1969) and Mel Tari's, *Like a Mighty Wind* (Green Forest: New Leaf Press, 1977)

<sup>242</sup> Informant: Alem.

<sup>243</sup> Most of the old Pentecostal leaders, at least the prominent ones, had left the country by this time. The new leadership that emerged was very young, committed and professionals. Most of them had the opportunity to leave the country legally or along the porous borders. But they decided to stay committed to pulling the church through these difficult days. Informants: Debebe, Melesachew, Girma, Kuri, and Mengiste. According to Melesachew, the Pentecostals did not strictly follow the *Qebele* division. The leaders structured the cell organizations as they saw it fit. It was plastic enough to react conveniently to varying situations.

<sup>244</sup> Informants: Girma, Melesachew, and Lemma.

<sup>245</sup> Many Pentecostals note that the harassment they received from EPRP members was not less than the political cadres. Informants: Girma Tessema, Million, Tsadiku, and others.

<sup>246</sup> Informants: Mekre, Lemma, Kasahun, Girma, and others.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup> This is a very intriguing development that needs careful investigation. Informants who themselves were converts from the Guraghe ethnic community admit that during the revolution, there were quite a sizable number of Guraghe who embraced the evangelical faith. According to informants, the emerging rich merchants from the Mercato, the commercial hub of Addis, set up their own fellowships and were vigorously involved in the dissemination of the evangelical faith and in the planting of churches in their respective village sites from where they had originally come. Informants: Kassa, Melaku, and others.

<sup>249</sup> Informants: Yoseph, Tamirat, Lemma, Negussie, and others.

<sup>250</sup> There were some indigenous orphanage centers and other NGO's which were doing relief or community development programs that provided meeting places and other logistic supports for the leaders. Informants: Tibebe, Girma, Bekele, and others.

<sup>251</sup> Informants: Lemma, Melesachew, and Girma.

<sup>252</sup> Melesachew, Lemma, Mekre, and Girma Begashaw.

<sup>253</sup> Informants: Seifu and Tesfaye.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid. Lemma, Mekre, Girma Begashaw.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

<sup>256</sup> Informants: Lemma, Negussie Tefera, and Tesfahun.

<sup>257</sup> Informant: Lemma.

<sup>258</sup> Informants: Tesfaye Deneged (in Wellegea) had been in prison for well over five years. There were many who had been in prison any where between one year to five years. Informants: Tesfaye, Mathewos, and Centayehu. Apart from being imprisoned, men were tortured. Tortures include: the shedding of hair, making people to lie on sands and force them roll over them, and beatings.

<sup>259</sup> Informants: Girma Tessema, Wubshet, and Seifiti. Pentecostals were well informed about what was going on. They had people in government circles who kept their faith in low profile and informed leaders concerning new measures the government was contemplating on Pentecostals. According to Girma, the government by now had virtually silenced opposition forces, yet it feared that oppositions forces were joining the Pentecostals hence, they deemed it necessary to launch a purging process in every *Qebele*.

<sup>260</sup> Informant: Daniel Mekonnen.

<sup>261</sup> Informants: Lemma, Girma and Tesfahun.

<sup>262</sup> Informants: Lemma, Girma, and Mulugeta.

<sup>263</sup> To cite but few, Social Beyene, "Attitude of people towards the Expansion of The Protestant Church and its Followers in Gabre Guracha Town," Senior Essay, Addis Ababa University, Department of Sociology, 1997; Gossaye Alemu, "Kara Kore Geunet Church History," Senior Essay, ETC, 1995; Negeo Boser, "Persecution and Church Expansion," BA Thesis, Osejek, Croatia, 1994; Thomas Debela, "The

Effects of the Charismatic Renewal upon Church Growth: The Central Synod," Addis Ababa, Senior essay, MYS, 1999; A. Tefera, "A Short Biography of Qes Tefera Jarso", Senior essay, MYS, Addis Ababa, 1999.

<sup>264</sup> *Religion Today*, "Persecution Causes Amazing Growth in Ethiopian Church," *Religion Today*, 02,17-99.

<sup>265</sup> The church, which began with a small number of people in 1983, had over 100, 000 by 2000. For further, see, Abdissa Bentileye, "The Origin and Growth of the Ethiopian Mesgana Evangelical Church, 1983-2000," MA thesis, EGST, Addis Ababa, 2000.

<sup>266</sup> Informants: Lemma, Bekele, Kasahun, and others.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid. Abdela, Mulugeta, Girma, and Mulu.

<sup>269</sup> Informants: Menassie, Shiferaw, Tesfaye, and others.

<sup>270</sup> On the Chinese situation see, Alan Hunter, *Protestantism in Contemporary China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

<sup>271</sup> Informants: Abebaw, Shemelis, Semon, and others. Local officials of the *Derg* feared that members of the EPRP were using religion as a cover to subvert the revolution.

<sup>272</sup> Informants: Bedru, Melesachew, and Alem.

<sup>273</sup> Informants: Girma Tessema, Mengistu, Shibeshi and others.

<sup>274</sup> Informants: Menassie, Shiferaw, Abere and others.

<sup>275</sup> Gemechu G/ Telila, "History of the Meserete Kiristos Church at Wonji Gefersa, Ethiopia during the *Derg*, 1974-1991: "God Works for Good," MA Thesis, Eastern Mennonite Seminary, 2002.p, 44-45

<sup>276</sup> Informants: Samson, Seifu, and Shimeles.

<sup>277</sup> Informants: Samson, Shemelis, Yohannes and others.

<sup>278</sup> Informant: Abrha Admassu.

<sup>279</sup> Eide, *Revolution and Religion in Ethiopia*, p. 174. This view is also shared by Donham, though he looks at the new leaders persecuting the church as mere turncoats who work within the mental framework of Orthodox Christians. See, Donham, *Marxist Modern*, p.146.

<sup>280</sup> Informants; Seifu and Tadesse. Seifu is a professional lawyer and analyst of socio-political issues for the security and one of the close advisors of the Security Minister, Tesfaye. Former officials of the *Derg*, whom I had a chance to interview could not corroborate this for me.

<sup>281</sup> Informant: Shiferaw. This was confirmed by Seifu, a former security officer.

<sup>282</sup> Informants: Shiferaw, Taye, Negussie, Shimelis, and others.

<sup>283</sup> Quoted in Michael Bordeaux. *Religious Minorities in the USSR* (London: Minorities and Religious Group, 1984), p. 279.

<sup>284</sup> Though in the broader African context, Jon Abbink revisits the notion of resistance by lending it an enlarged meaning to include innuendo, imaginations, politics of memory and a host of non-compliant indirect ways of defiance and protest expressions. For further see, Jon Abbink, "Rethinking Resistance in African History an Introduction," in Jon Abbink, Mirjam De Brunijn & Klass Van Walraven, ed. (London: Brill, 2003), pp. 1-40

<sup>285</sup> Taken from recorded cassette songs and personal interviews.

<sup>286</sup> Lila W. Balisky, "Theology in Song: Ethiopia's Tesfaye Gabbiso," *Missiology: An International Review*, vol., 4, October, 1997, pp. 452-453.

<sup>287</sup> Personal collection of Tamrat's songs.

<sup>288</sup> Informants: Atalay, Tesfaye, and Tamrat.

<sup>289</sup> The party document spells it out clearly when it said it's purpose is to construct a new society weaned away from any spiritual or cultural influence but modeled on pure materialism.

<sup>290</sup> John P. Burghes, "Church and State Relations in East Germany: The Church as a "Religious" and "Political" Force," *Journal of Church and State*, vol. 32, 1990, p. 20. Paul Wee suggests that Gudina Tumsa's approach in the initial years of the revolution was one "critical solidarity." We do not find Gudina himself using that term, as such, but that must have been, at least, his interpretive scheme and informing theme. Paul Wee, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Gudina Tumsa: Shaping the Church's Response to the Challenge of our Day," *Missiological Seminar*, Addis Ababa : 2003, p. pp. 12-13.

<sup>291</sup> For more on the relations between evangelicals and revolutionary regimes including lefts guerrilla organizations see, Karl- Wilhelm Weistmeir, *Protestant Pentecostalism in Latin America* ( London : Associated University Press, 1999).

<sup>292</sup> There are many processes involved in the notion of conversion, especially in the context of Ethiopia. Faith and its promises being given, there were other vital issues such as ideological fatigue, freedom from the danger of commitment to party politics, aversion to anything political, the very threat of death, which had become commonplace during the times of revolution, are issues that need to be placed in the equation. This reminds us to be scrupulous about attempts at macro-explanations of conversion or mono-causal descriptions of renewal movements, which have the danger of reductionism.

<sup>293</sup> Informants: Samson, Petros, Demisse, and others.

<sup>294</sup> Informants: Ruth Kreamer, Mehari Choram, and Tuja. Ruth Kreamer witnessed this as a missionary for the SIM closely involved in the Key Scripture Project. She notes, however, that some of the *Qalichas* might have decided to become Christians just to turn their coats.

<sup>295</sup> Informants: Shiferaw, Getu, Wubshet, and others. One cannot establish a co-relation between the deposition of the Monarch and the expansion of the evangelical faith. This issue can also be appreciated only considering the broader historical context of Ethiopia, the role of the Emperor, the mystic power he was assumed to have held, the death of a myth, and the sense of vulnerability that his humiliating death caused on the part of many Ethiopians.

<sup>296</sup> Shenk. "Church and State in Ethiopia: From Monarchy to Marxism," *Mission Studies*, XI, 22(1994), pp. 208-209.

<sup>297</sup> Peter Enaharo, "Ethiopia Tikdem," *Africa*, No. 44(April 1975), p. 12.

<sup>298</sup> The validity of this point is to be seen with regard to how established church had been treated by the new regime. The Orthodox Church was associated with the ancient oppressive structure, which was a big psychological blow.

<sup>299</sup> Informants: Shiferaw, Lema, and Wubshet.

<sup>300</sup> It has to be noted that people chose a variety of responses. Some rededicated their commitment to their Orthodox faith or Islam. Traditional religion had no chance for it was considered extremely backward and the government dealt with it harshly. Many people, especially from the Orthodox Church, turned to the evangelical faith because of its apolitical nature, the attractions of the teachings at the house fellowship, and the in-built solidarity networks forged. The laity within the Orthodox Church did not consider it as its role where as evangelicals did. Not only that evangelical Christianity offered a highly flexible and successful organizational form. In the house fellowship setting, a few people can meet and preach or teach one another. People not only study the Bible but discuss daily challenges and chat them out. The messages taught were practical and help tackle the existential needs of men in their moments of despair. Key to the evangelical faith is its evangelistic nature. Believers or converts dedicate their energies, time and resources actively seeking to win new adherents and multiply.

<sup>301</sup> Informants: Shiferaw, Taye, Bedru, and others. Most informants insist that the heart of the matter is that Christianity can provide the answer to life's quest, a spiritual experience, which enable people to develop strong faith convictions with a sense of certitude. Belief in Christ and the Christian God is susceptible to analysis in sociological terms, but in all fairness, it also demands an understanding as a religious phenomenon.

<sup>302</sup> Informants: Menassie, Shiferaw, Tesfaye, Getachew, and others.

<sup>303</sup> Informants: Lemma, Ashenafi, and Mulugeta.

<sup>304</sup> When it comes to religious change experience (conversion), I am well aware of the dangers of reductionism. For instance, the social determinists see socio-economic factors as all consuming and determining and treat religious phenomenon as epi-phenomenal, and those promoting the deprivation theory argue that lack of access to a socially anticipated and valued goal may force a person to seek out religious experience to compensate for life's shortcoming. Deprivation may have a predisposing effect but is not a necessary condition for conversion. My research in Ethiopia and Kenya, which involved interviewing hundreds of people, forces me to be extremely, leery of simple paradigms, however neat, which tend to collapse complex experience into a single category. Issues such as doctrine, choice, temperament, agency and the vital impacts of religious experiences are important subjects to be critically considered.

<sup>305</sup> For a wider and more nuanced analysis of conversion see, Andrew Buckser (ed), *The Anthropology of Religious Conversion* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2003)

<sup>306</sup> Bascom, p.55.

<sup>307</sup> Informants: Samson, Shiferaw, Menassie, and others.

<sup>308</sup> Michael Green, *Evangelism in Early Church* (London : Hodder and Stoughton, 1976), pp. 207-208. Kraemer also notes that a greater act of evangelism is done in small house churches than many evangelistic

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campaigns for they provide the space to create “communities of mutual up-building, of witness and service.” Hendrick Kraemer, *The Theology of the Laity* (London: Lutterworth, 1958), p. 22.

<sup>309</sup> Informant: Shiferaw.

<sup>310</sup> Informants: Ashenafi and Shiferaw. There were reported problems but, by and large, they showed unswerving dedications, some had even risen to leadership position and become great teachers and coordinators. Reflecting on this dynamics, Comisky remarks, “cell ministry grows pew sitters into pastors...New believers are converted into leaders who continue the process.” Joel Comisky, *Reap the Harvest* (Houston: Touch Publications, 1999), p. 71.

<sup>311</sup> The Mesgana church started as fellowship of relatively affluent women ((Meseret, Hanam Asfash, etc)during the Revolution, gradually evolving into a church through a process of *Messasab*. ( pulling /drawing one another). I have not been able to find an English equivalent to this term, but it is the operative word that explains the expansion of Christianity in Ethiopia. Some people would like to call it the “testimonial model.” One person sharing his faith journey to a near friend or relative or co-worker using the relational space the Ethiopian culture allows to sharing ideas or material things. There were also similar fellowships formed clandestinely along professional lines even in the army. A case in point is the Soviet Christian Fellowship which was composed of officers from the evangelical faith. Informant: Colonel Tessema Aba Derash Colonel Tessema who was the General Manager of EELPA during the *Derg* told me that he himself was instrumental in the formation of many several underground workers fellowships. He did this while maintaining a high public as well state profile. He introduced major renovations and created one of the best management systems for EELPA. In this manner, he was able to serve his faith by also being a good servant to the state and the public without, however, compromising his evangelical convictions. Mengistu called him five times to his office desiring to know whether his faith contradicted with his service and he told him that his faith would in no way deflect his commitment to give public serve nor put him in the anti-revolutionary camp as assumed by others.

<sup>312</sup> As most informants confessed this was very much true of converts who had in the past denied faith because of political convictions and those who had experienced prison experience.

<sup>313</sup> Itefa Gobena, “Leading a Church in Times of Trouble: EECMY in the Ethiopian Marxist Revolution (1974-1979),” A paper presented at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Missiological Seminar on Church and Society, Addis Ababa: 2003, pp. 14-15.

<sup>314</sup> John Cumbers, *Count it All joy: Testimonies From A Persecuted Church* (Kearney: MP Publishers, 1995) , pp. 61-67.

<sup>315</sup> Kestson College. *The Prisoner's Lantern*, 1985, p.22.

<sup>316</sup> Cumbers, *Count it*, p. 206. I had the opportunity of interviewing some of the men who became Christians serving prison terms for political reasons and became converts in those prison houses. Informants: Shiferaw, Melaku, Menassie, and others. Today, a similar process is taking place as officials of the former regime are increasingly embracing the evangelical faith in their prison centers.

<sup>317</sup> During the revolution, every new convert virtually became a missionary for every one was involved in witnessing which carried the simple message, “ I was once lost now I am found,” a simple message that spoke powerfully to a world that was in a mess. As Evangelist Fasil said, “ it was difficult to be young and a Christian in those days, we faced public ridicules and subjected to arbitrary acts of imprisonment. At times, we would be asked to which organizations we belonged and our answer was, we belong to the house of God and we would often be beaten for that. We were promised that we would be released on condition that we never joined that house, but we kept on communicating our faith with the intention that people would know the reason for our hope.” Fasil was only 16 when he was thrown many times in the prison.

<sup>318</sup> There were many young men like Mulugeta who decided to give their full time to be evangelists during the revolution. There were also many self-initiated movements for the same. Mekuria, who later became a radio gospel preacher from Kenya (the radio ministry in Amharic and other languages began in Kenya after the RVOG had been confiscated), Shenbeshi, Ashenafi, Alemahehu, Bedru, and a host of others.

<sup>319</sup> Mulugeta told me that there was a time when he baptized over 130 people in one town at home churches. Baptism was conducted at home which had bathtubs or at a river or lake side in pitch darkness. He noted that he could not explain what happened in those days in human terms and concluded, “God himself was the missionary,” not us. In those days there was no division of labor, the evangelist preached, planted churches, pastured, and did a lot of other things.

<sup>320</sup> Informant: Mulugeta Zewde. Mulugeta was a leader of the Haimanote Abew, later of *Ye Semaye Berhan* group, and evangelist of the MKC during the Revolution.

<sup>321</sup> Informant: Tekle W/ Medhin. T/ Medhin's life slogan was "save and die." His strategy was go to the homes of the army officers and high government officials and speak to them privately about his faith and was received cordially. Among the top ranking army officers who were converted were: General Wolde Ab, General Getachew Adamu, Colonel Asefa, and Colonel Ayana. According to his observation, most of the leaders were only communists publicly but frustrated inside and were open to hear his testimony. Another informant who was serving a famous *Qalicha* near Nazareth also told me that most of the *Derg* officials including Mengistu and his wife used to visit or ask the man to come to their homes for private service. Informant: Abraha.

<sup>322</sup> Informants: Solomon, Ashenafi, Tekle Medhin, Mulugeta, and others.

<sup>323</sup> Informants: Sentayehu, Kassa, Tibebe, and others.

<sup>324</sup> Patrick Johnson. *Operation World*, (Colorado Spring, Global Mapping, 2002), p.89.

<sup>325</sup> Shiferaw Gule and Tefaye Shiferaw, Melaku, and Alemayehu can be cited as few examples.

<sup>326</sup> Evangelist Shibeshi, who spent most of his time as an itinerant preacher traveling around many parts of Ethiopia, is caution of magnifying the role of human agency. He argues that at the end of the day, "the history of the growth of the church is the history of Jesus. It is the work of the Holy Spirit. If one attempts to write the history of church growth without the latter elements it is tantamount to writing the history of egg without its jelly."

<sup>327</sup> Fikre Sellassie, a prominent *Derg* member once responded to a Christian who wrote him a resignation letter, "you guys are more honest than those who raise their left hand to show solidarity with us and stab us from behind with their right hands. Informant: Solomon Lulu

<sup>328</sup> According to Wubshet, David Stocks tried to develop an indigenous hymnology, known as, *Shumiye* based on the lyrical tradition of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the 50's but did not attract wide audition.

<sup>329</sup> The first collections of these songs appeared in 1957 in a hymn book called *Sibhat Leamlak*, meaning "Praise to God." The hymns were translated either from Sweden or English. According to Addisu, one of the Pentecostal pioneers of the gospel songs, such musical tunes like, "This world is not my home," could hardly fit the high bit tradition of songs in Ethiopia. Hence, a native song had to be developed. He and a few of his friends, including the now scientist Legesse Watero, blazed a new Ethiopian Hymnology with diversified themes that became popular throughout Ethiopia among all Christians.

<sup>330</sup> In those days the production of music was a simple process. The composer usually was the singer. He would simply record the song in a tape recorder and distributed it, and who ever wanted to get the music for his own, he could record it for himself. There were no recording fee and charge for distribution. That fastened the distribution process among ordinary people, at least, in the town. Now- a- days, gospel music has assumed a commercial dimension about which the old times gospel singers lament.

<sup>331</sup> Informants: Leggese, Atalai, Gezahegne, Addisu and others.

<sup>332</sup> Alemayehu H/ Gabriel and Atalai Alem, "Yemezmur Agelglotena Yewengel Serchit," (Manuscript), 1997, p.6.

<sup>333</sup> Informant: Shiferaw.

<sup>334</sup> Collected from various gospel songs.

<sup>335</sup> Quoted in Reuben Makayiko Chriambo, "Mzimu wa Soldier": Contemporary Popular Music and Politics in Malawi", *A Demography of Chameleons* (ed.) Harri Englund, (Blantyre: Christian Literature Association, 2002), p. 118.

<sup>336</sup> Collected from various gospel songs composed and sung during the military regime.

<sup>337</sup> Tamirat Yergu's summary. Informant: Tamirat Yirgu.

<sup>338</sup> Informant: Teshome. This was also a view shared by Tesfaye who with Teshome spent long years of imprisonment.

<sup>339</sup> Informant: Evangelist Shibeshi.

<sup>340</sup> Kay Bascom, *Hidden Triumph in Ethiopia* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2001), pp. 49-50.

<sup>341</sup> Aleme Eshete, *The Cultural Situation in Socialist Ethiopia*. UNESCO, 1982, p.40-41.

<sup>342</sup> Informants: Ruth Kreamer, Elvin Thompson, Pastor Bark, Pastor Girma and evangelist Mahari. Ironically the Bible society capitalized on the opportunity opened and translated the Bible into other languages apart from the one already in printed in Amharic, Oromogna and Tigrigna. Bill G. "the Ethiopian church: an observer report," *Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius*, iii, 2 (1981), p. 223.

<sup>343</sup> For further, see, Tibebe Eshete, *The Silent Revolution* (Morovia: World Vision International, 2002).

<sup>344</sup> For issues of relations between mission development agencies and the local church initiatives see, Getachew, pp. 283-296.

<sup>345</sup> This was the speech of Shimeles Mazengia, the chief ideologue, and a view shared by the Politburo members particularly, Fasika Sidelel and the notorious Legesse Asfaw. Dawit, *Red Tears*, p.337. Dawit believes that persecution against evangelical churches intensified after this. According to informants, this was not long lasting because of international outcries and the increased intensity of the famine situation that distracted the state's focus and the increasing resentment of the Ethiopian people against the state. Not only that, the *Derg* officials also understood the power of faith and the readiness of many to die for their faith rather than abandon it, which puzzled many of them. As a result, they were restrained from risking a further deterioration of their images, which were already been in bad shape. Informants: Seifu, Tesfaye, Tessema, Tekle, and others.

<sup>346</sup> For more on the conflict between the traditional religious forces and the evangelicals in the South see Donham *Marxist Modernity*, pp. 48-58.

<sup>347</sup> There are some studies, which indicate the considerable decline of the power of the *Qalichas* in many part of Ethiopia especially the south. See for instance, Abeui Hailu, " Survey of the Religious History of Gamo," Senior Essay , AAU, Department of History, 2000, pp. 23-29.

<sup>348</sup> For further see, Bekele W/ Mariam Adelo, *Ye Kaffa Hizboch ena Mengist Achir Tarik* ( Addis Ababa: 2004).

<sup>349</sup> The *Qalichas* are local religious leaders operating in many parts of Ethiopia. Though they mainly represent traditional religions, their religious duties cross many social lines. In some instances, they perform independently, while in other situations, they exhibit syncretism, combining elements of traditional religion, Islam and Orthodox Christianity. Apart from religion, they carry out multiple functions, such as mediating conflicts. Concerning the decline of the influence of the *Qalichas* in the region see, Yohanes Sharab, "The Growth of Kaffa Bethel...."pp. 2-7. Some of the *Qalichas* were converted by the evangelical Christians while in prison. Hailu recalls that there were many *Qalichas* in the prison centers who felt that the gods they served for many years had betrayed them for they did not deliver them from the hands of the village cadres. Informant: Hailu Cherenet.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid.

<sup>351</sup> Melaku, Tairikwa ,and Gezahegne. It is interesting to note that most of the former *Qalichas* are coming back and becoming influential religious and political figures in post -*Derg* Ethiopia because of the liberal policy of the government currently in power. On the tension between local officials and leaders of local traditional religions see, Donham, *Marxist Modern*, pp. 151-175.

<sup>352</sup> A typical case of the spread of the Pentecostalism in a main line evangelical church is the case of the EEMYC. The influence of the Pentecostal movement began to be felt in the EEMYC in the early 70's and spread through other parish churches both in Addis and Ababa. For further see, Teka Obsfgi, " The Charismatic Movement in the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus," MA thesis, EGST, 2000. For the general expansion of Pentecostalism in other denominations see, Taye Abdisa, "The Pentecostal Movement Development and the rise of the Charismatic Movement in Ethiopia." Senior essay, MYS 1977.

<sup>353</sup> Informants: Bekele, Yenagu, Shiferaw, and others.

<sup>354</sup> Examples include: Bedru, Melesachew, Alem, Solomon, etc.

<sup>355</sup> Informants: Ashenafi, Shiferaw, and Kassay.

<sup>356</sup> Examples, at leadership level were men like Melesachew and Girma Begashaw. Gebru, the charismatic preacher, could also be cited as a representative of the pioneering evangelists who rose to the challenge by forsaking lucrative careers.

<sup>357</sup> These developments were not without their downsides. One major negative impact of the Revolution was that the church could not produce organic intellectuals and theological exponents for conditions in Ethiopia did not allow institutional developments.

<sup>358</sup> Informant: Gebre Meskel. Gebre Meskel reported to me that the a year after its opening service, the church was full and was overflowing with new believers.

<sup>359</sup> Baker, p. 17.

<sup>360</sup> *Christianity Today*. vol. 34. April 9, 1990. pp. 47-48. The Magazine's report was based on the State Department Report for the year 1989.

<sup>361</sup> *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 41, 48 (1987), p.7.

## **Chapter VI**

### **Conclusion**

Religious studies as a field of study and scholarly enquiry does not seem to have attracted many scholars in Ethiopia. This is notwithstanding the fact that religion has always been and is still a key factor in the socio-cultural and economic life of the Ethiopian society. In this dissertation, I have outlined the historical evolution and development of the evangelical Christian movement in Ethiopia by exploring the various locales of its origin and growth areas, capturing the central elements of its dynamics and identifying key actors that have significantly promoted its expansion. As much as possible, I have tried to situate the movement's historical development in light of the socio- cultural and political contexts of Ethiopia. I have attempted to tell the story that balances the macro historical conditions with the micro contexts that incorporate grassroots dynamics and articulations with the view that movements usually occur along fault lines pointing to deficiencies and weakness of a socio-cultural and political system. By spelling out the historical antecedents of the evangelical movement and the extensive role of the indigenous actors in the expansion of the faith, I have placed a corrective emphasis on the popular notion that it is a foreign religion which considers those who have willingly and sacrificially promoted the faith as recipients and mere transmitters of an imported faith.

As the title of my dissertation clearly indicates, what marks the rise and development of the evangelical movement in Ethiopia is its history of persecution and the persistent opposition it faced from established institutions including state functionaries that viewed it as foreign, unfamiliar and heretic. The movement showed its resiliency by

refusing to go away and ultimately becoming a vital spiritual and cultural expression of millions of Ethiopians, who for numerous reasons, sought to embrace alternative forms of Christian faith while remaining Ethiopian.

It rose and developed in a society that has not experienced Enlightenment, rationalism, and religious renewals that would have fostered values that celebrated tolerance, the primacy of choice and pluralism. This was chiefly due to the fact that there has been an established Church that had a dominant influence in the Ethiopian society, which was also closely tied with the state and has historically been disinclined to change or allow any kind of outside influence. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church has been more than a religious institution. It is one of the most important institutions in the nation with vast structures and influences. It has established much of the master narrative of the Ethiopian society by setting the cultural delimiters, legislating norms, and defining national identity, and as such, has prevented other forces (at least, until the Marxist Revolution) from competing successfully in these roles and capacities.

Evangelical Christianity has lived and grown in constant tension and conflict with an established church and a religio-social norm that it has nurtured. The intriguing question that the work has tried to address in this dissertation is: how did it succeed as a movement amidst such challenges and oppositions?

I have studied the evangelical movement by tracing its history since the evolution of distinct Christian communities bearing the name in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and their further development in the succeeding decades, although my main focus has been the last five decades, where the growth has been momentous. My study has shown that until the rise of an independent Pentecostal movement of a national strain in the 1960's, the rate of



growth of the evangelical movement had been very slow with the exception of the people's movement of the South during the brief Italian interlude. Though statistics are hard to come by in the Ethiopian situation, estimates from available records show that up until 1962, the total number of evangelical Christians in Ethiopia, did not exceed the mark of 250, 000 (less than one percent) from a total population of roughly 26 million. This figure jumps quickly in the early 1970's, when the number of evangelical Christians dramatically rose close to a million and through the period of the Revolution when the number imperceptibly yet steadily increased to reach 4 –5 million by 1991.<sup>1</sup> What these figures suggest is that the notable growth in the evangelical movement occurred within the last 40 years. The main thrust of this dissertation has been to map out the main contours of the development of the evangelical Christian movement in Ethiopia by highlighting the historical, social, political, global factors that shaped the pattern of its expansion, identifying the principal agencies that have decisively contributed to the growth process and spelling out the wider socio-religious contexts in which it took a distinctively Ethiopian character.

It has been possible to identify that the earliest evangelical missionaries made attempts to work with the established Church with the hope of inspiring revival through literature distribution that would facilitate the teachings of the Bible. They envisaged that their committed presence as insiders and the dissemination of Christian literatures would spur rigorous studies of the Bible and hence allow a fresh revelation of the doctrine of salvation in the understanding of the Orthodox Church and rejuvenate its evangelistic zeal. As seen in the history of the Mekane Yesus Church, a product of such missionary initiatives involving indigenous and expatriate missionaries, the venture has not

succeeded. Principally it was the advent of the SIM missionaries and their insistence on the formation of separate faith communities that led to a real departure. Others Protestant missionaries who came from conservative theological background, which came following the restoration of independence, mainly followed the path set by SIM. The Ethiopian Pentecostals, mostly coming from the Orthodox Christian background and visibly present in the cities, gave it a much more renewed emphasis.

I have identified the following contextual factors as key to the dynamics of the expansion of the evangelical movement in Ethiopia:

1. The existence of a national church, namely the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, that has gone a great length to expand Christianity in various parts of Ethiopia for centuries. The church has spread the essential elements of Christianity among the people of the north, the south and the southwestern parts of Ethiopia. This fund of experience was a spiritual capital upon which Protestant missionaries from the West based their missionary enterprise and succeeded in evangelizing the people of the south and southern Ethiopia. The missionaries did not have to “invent the wheel,” they had to work on a resource base that has existed, albeit unevenly, for centuries. This situation is true even in areas where the presence of the national church was weak before and during the advent of the missionaries. The long historical presence of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the Ethiopian society, its weakening influence on traditional religions, and the existence of spiritual equivalents in the cultural archives of the various Ethiopian societies, are some of

the local conditions that facilitated the expansion of the evangelical movement in Ethiopia.

2. Emperor Haile Sellassie's relatively open attitude towards Western Protestant missionaries and the evangelical faith they have introduced. Haile Sellassie, as a pragmatic ruler, incorporated the missionary enterprise in Ethiopia from the point of view of his modernizing ideals. He clearly saw the benefit of the infrastructural projects the missionaries brought with them such as schools, hospitals, and other community based development programs, to his pursuit of building a modern nation. He was also keen to observe the weakness of the national Church in going forward with his vision and the advantage of allowing the missions to teach the truth and principles of the Christian faith where the national church was weak and use the missionary project as a countervailing and inspirational force. Though Ethiopian monarchs have invariably sought assistance from the West and were ready to use Western missionaries for that purpose, Haile Sellassie was the first monarch who allowed the extensive operation of foreign missionaries and used their presence as countervailing force to the conservative national church.
3. The translation of the Bible into vernacular languages significantly so in Amharic. The translation of the Bible into the Oromo language was completed at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and as a result tremendously impacted the transmission of the Gospel in Southwestern part of Ethiopia. The translation of Bible into numerous vernacular languages in the southern parts of Ethiopia also similar effects. Most importantly, the translation of the Bible in its complete form in Amharic, the official language of Ethiopia, in 1961 is a landmark. Again this is a tribute to

Emperor Haile Sellassie I, who personally encouraged and supervised the work from inception to finish despite resistance from the clergy.

The translation the Bible into various local languages, most of all in the national language, is a milestone in the religious history of Ethiopia. The wide circulations and use of the Bible among the populous is one of the most critical factors that seminally contributed to the promotion of the Christian faith and the evangelical movement in Ethiopia. The availability of Bibles in large numbers, especially for the new generation of Ethiopians with modern educations, is a major event in the history of the evolution of new ideas in Ethiopia that has not been recognized. The Book was ready to be read by many young Ethiopians who wanted to know more about their faith and dialogue with it more meaningfully instead of subscribing to culturally prescribed religious norms and codes. The emerging elite of the 60's read Biblical narratives such as, the four Gospels, the Book of Acts and the Epistles of Paul, to draw meaning and inspirations for their faith, to test their veracity and practicability, to guide their lives and enable them to effectively witnesses their faith to others.

4. The conflictual dynamics created by the open hostility to an established church with a long history and its impact. The absence of a culture of dialogue and mutual interactions among the religion of the Cross- generated a heightened sense of survival, releasing aggressive energy to expand. This is a significant factor for the spread of the evangelical faith in Ethiopia. Religious harassment and persecution lent militancy and fervor to the evangelical movement in Ethiopia as it drove evangelical Christians to be more committed to their faith and more

aggressive in its diffusion. Opposition did not thwart the evangelical movement. Instead, it provided the optimal condition for its growth and for the formation of an intense community of faith. This is true of both the situations of south and southwestern Ethiopia, where religious harassment received added meaning as people of the margin, as well as the situation of the modern Pentecostal movement, where the experience of persecution has even been more open and more severe because of the largely Orthodox origin of its pioneers. The Ethiopian Pentecostals strengthened their responsive systems by creating various networks and solidarity groups, asserted their beliefs more by recruiting new members, and expanded their base with astonishing readiness to pay the price required.

5. The association of the Orthodox Church with the state has been a liability rather than an asset to the established Church. The Church had historically benefited in the past to stretch itself far and wide in the Ethiopian society as a result of the state support it enjoyed. Yet, its intimate connections with the Ethiopian monarchs and the active backing it provided to their expansionist agenda had also tainted the Church's image. This was particularly true of the people of south and southwestern Ethiopia where the evangelical faith had originally flourished. The people in this region could hardly see the demarcation between church and state for they both came together as part of the new political structure that imposed new social, economic and political order. The relative openness and readiness of the people of the south and southwestern Ethiopia to embrace the new faith has to be partly understood in light of this situation. When the people felt they owned their faith, it created a sense of entitlement and accountability to extend it further

among their kinsmen. A good example of this is the people's movement of southern Ethiopia that developed during the Italian period.

6. The development of Pentecostalism as an indigenous religious movement. The Pentecostal faith arose out of internal dynamics and as an indigenous faith movement drawing a large number of young and educated people, and it has a strong national strain that has significantly advanced the cause of the evangelical movement in Ethiopia. The Ethiopian Pentecostals raised indigenous missionaries based on local resources drawn from voluntary funding from members. These missionaries effectively spread the faith through aggressive evangelization all over the country. Individual Pentecostals who stood up for their faith in spite of continued hostilities from government officials and the clergy also became voluntary missionaries wherever their government assignments placed them in different parts of Ethiopia. They went out converting young men, setting up chapels and raising more zealots for their cause. The Ethiopian Pentecostals used their mobilizing abilities by investing their educational resources, their finances, talents and organizational skills to evangelize the Ethiopians in their own generation. What redoubled the evangelistic thrust of the Ethiopian Pentecostals was their perception that they were the generation to whom the depth of the secret of Biblical truth had been revealed and hence their sense of calling to reach "the lost." This messianic element, in particular, was encapsulated in their motto, "The Gospel for Ethiopia by Ethiopians," and has been one of the most crucial factors that enabled the Ethiopian Pentecostals to acquire unimaginable endurance, commitment and courage to stand up to oppose and push on. The

commitment of the Pentecostals who felt that they were called to initiate changes, their confidence in success and their capacity to articulate their faith are critical factors that are widely noticed, but seldom analyzed dynamics of church growth in Ethiopia.

7. The Ethiopian Revolution of 1974 and associated developments. The times of the Revolution have significantly shaped the character of the evangelical movement in Ethiopia and provided the socio-political context for its remarkable growth. A major component of the context is the fall of the age-old monarchical system and the sudden collapse of an economic, social and normative order associated with it and the general disorienting influence it engendered upon the lives of many Ethiopians. The negative mirroring of the Church because of its links with the deposed system, its de-centering, arising from the separation of the church and state, and the confiscation of its land and property resulting from the government's nationalization policies, significantly weakened the position of the national church. The church lost its political, economic and psychological clout to counter the movement and stem the tide of its progress. Though the evangelical faith met Marxism as the new challenge, it was free from the institutional battering of the national church. This is a crucial context within which to see the expansion of the evangelical faith during the period of the Ethiopian Revolution. Another serious development that helped the expansion of the evangelical faith, especially in the rural areas, was the *Derg's* open and vigorous campaign to eradicate traditional religions. The collapse of pillars and symbols of forces of traditional religions, which had swaying influence on rural societies, made the

people explore other avenues of power and faith expressions, another important conditions that evangelicals have capitalized in their aggressive quest to capture more ground for their threatened faith.

8. The Ethiopian revolution was a defining moment for the evangelical movement.

This was mainly because the revolution led to the flight of foreign missionaries from the country, a unique circumstance that created a situation of forced cessation (moratorium, as it is often referred to in the parlance of missiology) of direct missionary involvement in evangelistic activities. The absence of the foreign missionary factor considerably strengthened the process of indigenization that had already begun in some levels among certain churches and denominations. The indigenization process went along many lines, such as in the area of the emergence of national leadership, form of worship, liturgy and theology that was strongly influenced by Pentecostalism. The absence of foreign agencies meant that local churches were relatively free from doctrinal teachings and creedal restrictions introduced by missionaries of varied denominations, which made them open to some of the practices of the Ethiopian Pentecostals. The influence of the Pentecostals grew significantly during the period of the revolution because of their unwavering faith, reputation of standing up for their convictions against odds, strong emphasis on prayer, active participation in the home churches and their highly influential gospel songs. The decentralized nature of the evangelical church fellowship, the infusion of new blood into its body and the free initiatives that small groups allowed helped the rise of talented gospel singers during the



Revolution whose songs had tremendous instructional and inspirational values to Ethiopians listeners during the bleak years.

9. Emperor Haile Selassie's modernization efforts and its impact. The process of modernization the Emperor initiated has been a facilitating factor for the expansion of the evangelical movement in Ethiopia. In the Ethiopian situation, modernization carried with it secularization, which created considerable constraints on the functions of traditional religions and the outlooks deriving from them. The established church was not able to develop proper institutional and ideational response systems to counter the increasing influences of secular forces and ideologies emanating from the undue valorization of education. In conditions of relative modernity, traditional religious forces tend to lose what Peter Berger calls their "plausibility structures" and the moral and social order they spawn, causing decline of interest and respect for religion. The undermining of what Professor Getatchew has called *Ya-Menfes Kurat*, the pride of the spirit, as they exist in the past is inevitable unless a change of theology, belief and organization transpires. In the absence of adaptive responses, relations between individuals and the religious organizations they belong would get strained, essentially because of the existence of unmet needs, the flaws and weak points members see in their faith. Consequently, members seek to get a resolution to their problem by navigating other avenues if possible within, if not outside a given and familiar space. Not only that, modernization also promotes strong sense of subjective identity, and what modern education did for many young Ethiopians was to estrange them from their social and cultural milieus and place them in new

settings where they began to see themselves as individuals facing the bothersome experience of living with torn identities. For those who have embraced the evangelical faith with its stress on the doctrine of personal salvation and the promise of a new start, it met their religious needs by providing a sure answer to the question of life after death and the way they could develop personal relationship with God. The various voluntary organizations they created gave them new associational spaces on which they reconfigured their new collective identities and created new support systems.

10. Voluntary associations have been critical agents of transmission of the evangelical faith. The reticulating nature of the evangelical movement marked by an absence of central structure was the strong factor that gave autonomy and free initiative for individuals to promote their faith. It is important to note that the evangelical movement does not flow from one foci or structure, it draws its impulses from many locales, internal and external. The voluntaristic nature of the evangelical faith and its adaptability, especially in its charismatic form, is an important dynamic and potent force contributing to its growth. The absence of a center and strict dogma to observe gave the evangelical faith flexibility to adapt to diverse situations and local contexts.
11. Institutional flexibility. In resisting “mainstream” thinking emanating from dominant socio-cultural norms and the political establishment that nurtured them, evangelical Christians have tended to be more creative, and innovative in navigating new approaches and developing flexible institutions to spread their faith and increase their social space. The vigorous application of their creative

energy is a situation that has significantly helped evangelicals overcome marginalization as minority groups as well as gain substantially in their dynamic scores. Evangelical Christians have used not only the church but also created Para-churches and specialized ministries (The Great Commission, Graduate Fellowship, Prison Ministries, the Gospel for the Rural People, various professional fellowships, alumni associations, etc.) to cast their nets far and wide and target diverse sections of the societies for their evangelistic enterprises. Through these institutions the evangelicals exploited their religious vigor and synergistic adaptation to recruit new members to the faith. Such interdenominational agencies, which have worked together so closely, have been major factors in providing fresh impetus and critical edge to advance the spread of the evangelical faith. This is in accordance with findings of current studies, which indicate that mainline or hegemonic religions tend to be complacent, staid and resistant whereas marginal faith groups operating in the context of mainline groups tend to be more innovative, competitive and active to break encirclement and out-rival them.

12. The power of faith in motivating commitment. A crucial element accounting for the growth of the evangelical movement is the conviction people place on their faith, their willingness to pursue it steadfastly, and their dedication to advance it further, no matter high the price. Such devotions to a religious cause mainly spring from the satisfaction people believe to have derived from believing in God. Since historical inquiries do not allow explanations related to miracles and transcendental factors one has to find some temporal and spatial explanation as to

the robustness of the movement and for its capacity to surmount challenges from various dominant structures and ideologies, including the one it successfully resisted and subverted, that of Marxism. Hence, the importance of considering faith-related commitments as a theme and crucial aspect of religious history.

The evangelical movement has met, essentially, the religious, and to a certain extent, social needs of its followers both in the rural areas and in the urban areas. In the end, what explains the expansion of the evangelical movement in all its diversity is the strong and firm religious commitment of those who believed that their faith in God is important to their lives and the society at large, and who, as a result, felt duty bound to communicate it to others at any cost. Ethiopia's socio-economic and political conditions, especially as they existed in the last four decades, have reinforced the religious commitment and opened venues for its spread across diverse regions and groups.

This research exercise has helped me to appreciate the fact that the evangelical movement in Ethiopia is, in effect, a religious movement, though it has been influenced by many social, economic and political factors prevailing in country. The religious convictions and commitment which its members drew from their faith and accepted as final truth, the zeal they demonstrated communicating their faith to others, the strengthening impact of the conflictual dynamics existing between evangelical faith and mainstream culture and institutional forces propping them up, are important conditions that lent strength and militancy to their crusade to advance the frontier of their faith, often at a considerable sacrifice, as shown during the period of the *Derg*.

It has to be emphasized that the evangelical movement in Ethiopia is young. It has not achieved a full measure of maturity, chronologically, numerically and experientially, to discharge its full historical capacity and mission, as was the case in the western tradition. Its complete meaning has still to be expressed, not only in some sorts of theological and ecclesiastical/organizational expressions, but also on the socio-cultural, political and economic life of the people embracing it and the Ethiopian society at large. At the utmost, it has a century' s existence, taking its origin into account. Otherwise, less than half a century, considering its blossoming period. If not in its infantile stage, it is not in its adolescent phase. It is too early to provide a definitive and full assessment of the evangelical movement in Ethiopia since its story has just begun. One thing is clear, however, it has already introduced a major historic shift in the religious tradition and discourse of Ethiopia by providing an alternative pole, becoming a robust faith movement embraced by diverse social groups, and serving as a new metaphor of unity for many Ethiopians experiencing identity crisis stemming from the confusing legacy of the crisis of identity that the new ethnic-oriented government policy has engendered.

There are many dimensions of the evangelical movement that my research has not addressed. On the basis of the records uncovered in this study, I recommend that subsequent investigation consider the following vital themes as the research agenda for the future:

- Evangelical faith, ethnicity, elite role and emerging identity politics,
- Nature, levels and impacts of encounters between the evangelical movement and the Orthodox Church,

- Evangelicalism, social transformation and issues of gender equity,
- Volunteerism, civil society, social capital and democracy,
- Connections between Pentecostalism and elements of traditional religions,
- Globalization, evangelicalism/Pentecostalism, and the Ethiopian Diaspora,
- Comparative study and analysis of impacts of the evangelical faith in core highland regions and peripheral regions,
- Militating contexts of the proliferations of New Religious Movements.

My dissertation has not covered post-*Derg* developments. The evangelical faith has recorded unprecedented growth since the collapse of the *Derg*. There are visible signs that it has also made a confident entry into the public arena looking for social validity. The relative freedom obtaining in the country has allowed the proliferation of a wide variety of evangelical groups, some local some external in origin, all engaged in aggressive evangelism in the forms of big crusades, youth rallies and revivalistic conferences. Appearing in the scenario are local evangelists some of them highly educated with Western connections invoking western names such as the “Winners’ Chapel”, “Rejoice Ethiopia,” and the “Crusaders.” etc. Some of these New Religious Movements (NRM) demonstrate a high degree of activism expressed in some form of nationalism and a growing interest in engagement in politics, unlike their predecessors, who were known for exhibiting unengaged piety by distancing themselves from the wider culture and public arenas due to their exclusive focus on spiritual matters.

Also, the new religious movements tend to stress the message of prosperity and social salvation, which resonate to the youth and the poor confronting existential despair,

unlike the previous generations of Christians who stressed messages of sin and repentance with eschatological appeal. Pioneers of the new faith movement call for new summons social responsibility. They also stress Ethiopia's special place in Biblical narratives and often invoke Biblical verses like Psalm 61: 31 " Ethiopia Shall Soon Stretch its Hand Towards God," to infuse a new national and messianic strain to their evangelism. These are indices that a new political theology of engagement and a re-envisioning of society is in the making. Some of the leaders of the NRM are already re-defining the concept of evangelism and salvation to incorporate socio-economic dimensions of social existence as the contexts of new "redemptive" visions for their nation. Some of them are already contesting public space through determined efforts to enter politics using all legal means, including the parliamentary system. In fact, a sizable number of them have become members of the Ethiopian parliament. They are also using their new referents, biblical and trans- national idioms, to serve as a new glue to the fractured psyche resulting from failed meta-ideologies and faltering ethnic discourses. In general, intended or not, the result of the behavioral consequences of the emphasis evangelical Christianity places on the born again experience has to be critically evaluated in light of Third World version of Weber's "Protestant ethic."

Overall, the heterogeneity of the evangelical experience in Ethiopia should give pause to Ethiopians, both academics and rank and file who tend to assume that there is one dominant form of Christianity, or the misconstrued connotation that the word *Pente* has denoted a monolithic form of the evangelical faith.

Future researchers have to investigate the dynamics of the broader penumbra of the Charismatic groups and decipher the hidden meaning, signals and transcripts they

represent in the light of the current Ethiopian political situations. Post-revolutionary Ethiopia, with the failed record of Marxism as a dominant narrative, and Marxism's disruptive effects on past normative values deeply held by Ethiopia, and the disorienting outcome of the new "democratic" fever, requires a sensitive and contextual study of religious developments in Ethiopia. The Ethiopian society has experienced a second major de-centering process next to the Revolution with far more social and political ramifications because of the rise of a new power group following the collapse of military rule and the new ethnic politics it has introduced. This development has considerably affected Ethiopia's political culture and the dynamics of religious movements in all fronts. The AIDS epidemic and crisis situation it has created also needs to be considered in light of the new spate of mass conversions in Ethiopia and other African countries.

Characterizing the new religious movements as fellowship of the disillusioned in fundamentalist churches, as some have tended to view it, glosses the issue and reduces a complex development into one single generalized conception.<sup>2</sup> In the same vein, the emergence of a highly aggressive and more militant movement that arose within the Orthodox Church under the name of the *mahebere qedusan* in recent years should be seen in its multi-discursive context and appearances rather than as a resurgence of Amhara nationalism under the cover of religion, even though the element of nationalism constitutes a significant facet of the movement. As a nationalistic and strongly anti-evangelical movement enjoying the backing of many Orthodox conservative intellectuals and the urban youth, the new religious strain is becoming a significant force. A serious and careful examination is required to understand the religious phenomenon and the



social and political milieu that has brought into existence this new breed within the national Church.

The current religious situation in Ethiopia demands a much more nuanced and careful analysis that calls for a sympathetic approach and a redemptive oriented analysis. Redemptive here is used not in its strict theological sense but to suggest a forward looking, restorative and transformative social analysis that goes beyond disinterested academic interest. The new situation in Ethiopia is providing another defining moment for the evangelical faith, the chief mark of which is the absence of persecution, a factor that has significantly shaped its character in the past. The formation of a plethora of institutions with transnational links and the explosion of varieties of religious undercurrents ensuing from the relative freedom currently obtained in Ethiopia are also some of the shaping milieus. Just like opposition and the lack of freedom has been a challenge, the availability of liberty is becoming a serious challenge to the church that comes out of a tradition that I tend to describe as a “turtle model,” for lack of broader civic role. The evangelical faith in its contemporary charismatic dimension has enlisted an increasing variety of new members, mainly urban elites with talents, professional experiences and global outlooks. The old leadership of the church has not been prepared for such a sweep. The tensions are beginning to surface in the form of splinter groups to which some studies among seminary students have uncritically applied the term “Independent” from their reading of literature on African Initiated Churches without due regard to the peculiarities of local contexts in naming such phenomena.

This dissertation has taken the challenging task of studying the history of the evangelical movement in Ethiopia in broad outlines by adopting an ecumenical line. It has not sought to focus on one denomination or adopt a binary approach that sees one religious community or institution against another. It has outlined the general pattern of the nature and expansion of the evangelical movement, capturing its main impulse, locale, and the main actors that have played vital role in its transmission by adopting a “centerist” (integrationist) approach that allows me to view things from a holistic perspective rather than in parallels or binary positions. It has highlighted the role of the local actors and emphasized the contribution indigenous agents in the spread and growth of the evangelical Christian faith. In fact, the Ethiopian situation did not allow western agents to engage in efforts of civilizing missions and to impose western culture in their pursuit of evangelization. This was basically because of the existence of countervailing forces and institutions and embedded nationalistic sentiments that were widely shared by most Ethiopians, including evangelical Christians, particularly those who came from the Orthodox background. This social reality renders the use of the term *mete* as a referential index designating evangelical Christians, unnecessary and unhelpful. Viewed from a historical and analytical perspective, the evangelical faith as embraced by Ethiopians does not signify desertion or denial. Rather, it is an expression of the latent dimension of an already existing faith. Significantly, for those who tuned into the faith from the Orthodox background, Christianity simply took renewed emphasis and meaning. The phenomenon can be looked at as a process of re-affiliation. Hence, as viewed by the converts, the process was essentially, one of reinforcement, rather than abandoning. For those who mixed loyalty to the nation and state with religion, it is viewed, as betrayal.

Over the last forty years Ethiopians from all walks of life, class, ethnic group, intellectual backgrounds who embraced the evangelical faith in all its varieties, have contributed to make it authentically Ethiopian.

In fact, I suggest that the evangelical movement, especially in its Pentecostal dimension, is a reformation movement. It was pioneered and championed largely by a new category of an emerging social force, the youth, in particular, who had been alienated from their traditional Orthodox Christian faith, principally due to the secularization influence of modern education. Concentrated in new locale of knowledge production, higher learning institutions, exposed to a variety of new ideas both secular and religious that provoked their sensibilities, the youth looked for avenues by which they could reaffirm their faith and adhere to it faithfully. They investigated the Bible and allied literatures to seek answers to puzzling issues of life, specially concerning their Christian faith. Most importantly, they sought to have a clear understanding of the nature of sin and the meaning of righteousness so as to have a firm assurance of their salvation. They prodded the Bible to establish their faith on solid grounds and draw guiding principles from it. Their collective pursuit gave them a sense that they were called to rescue a buried truth, enmeshed in tradition and dogmas, concerning the essence of salvation and the meaning of exercising a spirit-led Christian life. In the process, they found new spiritual referents from the New Testament upon which they would remodel their Christian faith and pursue their newfound identities. Seen closely, the Pentecostal movement is a venture of religious renewal, a reformation from “without”, a vital and expressive form of spirituality that had existed in some latent dimensions but seeking new venues of authentic articulations.

The evangelical movement, in its stress on individual conversion and a way of life that fostered separation from the world, had a tendency to remove its followers from their cultural matrix and create undue distance between them and their co-religionists. This has given rise to the existence of unhealthy tensions and clashes with the ethos of the National Church that has maintained a centrist, or more specifically, integrationist approach and founded its survival in maintaining stability rather than flexibility. Evangelical Christians should appreciate the role of the national church in defending Ethiopia against foreign aggression, including safeguarding a mainly homegrown Christian faith. Appreciating this situation opens the way for mutual awareness, interfaith dialogue and mutual tolerance in place of mutual acrimony and animosity. As a side note, I do not share the pessimistic view that some Ethiopian scholars espouse that Ethiopia has seen the class war that Marxism engendered, the ugly side of civil war and ethnic strife caused by the ennoblement of ethnic politics, and that the next stage is being set up for religious war. It is my conviction that our traumatized past and the bitter experiences we had from our experiments and varied national projects, bad or good, will help all of us learn from our existential predicaments and live with our differences, appreciating the importance of our diversity and rich common heritage, upon which we can build the new vision of unity.

The research covered considerable ground. I am not under the illusion that I have given any definitive answers to all the various subjects I have raised. However, I hope that the issues I have raised are sufficiently important to provoke fresh thoughts on religious movements and culture change concerning Ethiopia. It is hoped that this work will spur scholars to take up further explorations and studies of the multi –sided

dimensions of the evangelical movement in Ethiopia. I would like to close my conclusion with Professor Ogbu Qalu's reminder, "It is impossible to do any serious academics in the African context, at the edge of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, without concern for the ashes on our faces." <sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The figure has currently increased substantially. The Qale Hewet Church is one of the largest evangelical churches in Ethiopia comprising close to 4 million people where as the Mekane Yesus church is said to have an estimated member of close to 3 million.

<sup>2</sup> For further see, Hamer John, "The Religious Conversion Process among the Sidama of North-East Ethiopia," *Africa*, 72 4 (2002), pp. 599-627.

<sup>3</sup> Ogbu U. Kalu, *Power, Poverty and Prayer: The Challenges of Poverty and Pluralism in African Christianity*, p. 199.

### **List of Informants**

1. Evangelist Abere Darge =November 21 '02: Addis Ababa
2. Aseged Mulat =August 01 '02 : Washington DC
3. Abebe Atero =May 15 '03:Omo
4. Abera Sofera = May 15 '03,:Omo
5. AbdelA Osman= July 03 '02: Pasadena
6. Abebe Tafesse =April 23 '02: St. Lois
7. Abebe Yohannes =June 16 '03: Addis Ababa
8. Abebe Shimelis = February 13 '03: Addis Ababa
9. Abebe Kebede =January 10 '03: Addis Ababa
10. Ayalew Bale :=March 20 '03: Dilla
11. Abebe Watola = May 18 '03: Yirgalem
12. Afework Kebede = June 30 '03:Goshen
13. Addisu Worku = June 27 '02:Denver
14. Abebe Watero =May 15 '03: Omo
15. Dr Amino Hissien = January 03 '03: Addis Ababa
16. Amare Gebre = January 04 '03: Addis Ababa
17. Professor Asmerom Leggess = August 23 '02:Lansing
18. Assefa Ajela = April 28 '03: Omo
19. Dr. Assefa Alemu = April 12 '02: Kansas; August 24 02;
20. Dr. Abera Tilahun = October 25 '02; June 29 '02:Denver
21. Abrham Admassu = April 06 '03: Addis Ababa
22. Dr. Alem Bazezew = February 14 '03; Jan 14; 203: Addis Ababa
23. Assayehgne Berhe = September 21 '02:Addis Ababa
24. Alemayehu Negash:= February 22 '03: Addis Ababa
25. Dr. Amare Getahun = April 09 '03:Nairobi
26. Alemayheu Haile = April 22 '03:Addis Ababa
27. Dr. Atalay Alemayehu = May 07 '03: Addis Ababa
28. Ashenafi Isaiyas = October 12 '02: Denver; January 30 '03: Addis Ababa
29. Professor Carlten Spencer = March 18 '02:Florida
30. Pastor Ashanafi Zemat = November 30 '02 ; December 12 '02: Addis Ababa
31. Dr. Berhanu Abebe =February 19 '03: Addis Ababa
32. Berhanu Belay = December 10 '02: Addis Ababa
33. Ato Berhanu Negash =December 22 '02:Addis Ababa
34. Pastor Bark Farenheistin = September 01 '02: Providence, Rod Island
35. Rev. Berhanu Ofgaa = January 09 '02: Columbus
36. Dr Paul Balisky = January 17 '03 Addis Ababa
37. Pastor Bekele W/ Kidan = February 22 '03: Addis Ababa
38. Dr. Bete Mengistu = August 04 '02; Washington DC; April 22 '03: Nairobi
39. Dr. Berhanu Habte: February 09 '03: Addis Ababa
40. Ato Bedru Hussien = January 29 '03 Addis Ababa
41. Belachew Berdelo= March 16 '03: Omo Sheleko
42. Bogale Haile =May 13 '03: Dilla
43. Belaynesh Zeleke = August 16 '02: Lansing

44. Ato Belete Wondimu= February 05 '03: Addis Ababa
45. Rev. Belete Habte Girorgis = February 26 '03: Addis Ababa
46. Pastor Beniaym Itana =April 09 '03: Nairobi
47. Dr. Bruce Admans, December 19 '02: Toronto
48. Mr&Mrs. Clarence Elg =January 23 '02: Charlotte
49. Dr. Carl Templeton = June 01 '02: Wheaton
50. Charles P. Anderson = January 23 '02: Charlotte
51. Daniel Abebe = December 18 '02: Addis Ababa
52. Daniel Mekonnen = June 21 '02: Washington DC
53. Pastor Daniel Mekonen = June 08 '02: Denver
54. Dr. Debla Birsi = November 27 '02; December 26 '02: Addis Ababa
55. Pastor Demiss Taddesse = April 09 '03: Nairobi
56. Demmelash Abebe = January 28 '02: Addis Ababa
57. Pastor Derge G/Yesus = March 18' 03: Addis Ababa
58. Desseta Wedajo =February 20 '02: Addis Ababa
59. Evangelist Daniel Tassew = December 22 '02; February 13 '03: Addis Ababa
60. Professor Daniel Lemma =June 28 '03: Los Angeles
61. Debebe Lemma =December 29 '02; February 26 '03: Addis Ababa
62. Emebet Alemu = May 16 '03: Dila
63. Endale G/ Meskel= April 02 '03: Addis Ababa
64. Earlin Scotman = August 15 '02: Philadelphia
65. Ezra Eshete = March 02 '03: Addis Ababa
66. Evelyn Thompson : Sep. 05 '02; Sep. 24 '02 :Abbotsford, British Colombia
67. Pastor Eshetu Asfaw =June 26 '02: Denver
68. Eshetu Work = November 20 '02: Denver
69. Ato Fekade Tefera = April 29 '03: Addis Ababa
70. Fetle Zemam = December 29 '02: Addis Ababa
71. Dr Fissha Gurmessa = April 13 '03: Nairobi
72. Evangelist Fasil Kebede =December 18 '02 : Addis Ababa
73. Gebre Meskel G/Andu =January 22 '02: Charlotte
74. Gaati Chacha Maluki = January 18 '05: Nairobi
75. Professor Getatchew Haile = March 07 '01: Minnesota
76. Ato Girma Tessema =January 06 '03: Addis Ababa
77. Girma Tsige =February 06 '03: Addis Ababa
78. Girma Fogi= December 09 '02: Addis Ababa
79. Girma Kano F May 15 '03: Omo
80. Getachew Regassa= March 15 '03: Addis Ababa
81. Kahsai Berhe =February 13 '03: Addis Ababa
82. Hailu Mamo= January 07 '03: Addis Ababa
83. Hailu Bete = April 14 '03: Nairobi
84. Pastor Demisse Taddesse = April 13 '03: Nairobi
85. Dr. Howard Brant = January 23 '01: Charlotte
86. Louise F. Carlson= September 25 '02: Timonium, Maryland
87. Dr. Dennis Carlson =September 25 '02: Bainbridge, Washington
88. Kasahun Mulat = April 12 '02: Kansas City
89. Iyob Mamo =November 02 '03: Addis Ababa

90. Pastor Hiruie Tsege : March 20 '03; May 20 '03: Addis Ababa
91. Evangelist Kidamo Mechato= May 27 '03: Addis Ababa
92. John Cumbers =January12 '02: Charlotte
93. Qes Colin Maunsell =December 24 '02: Addis Ababa
94. Pastor Getu Ayalew =April 26 '03: Awasa
95. Gezahegne Mussie =December 07 '02: Addis Ababa
96. Ferne& Campbell Millar = October 09 '02: Denver
97. Pastor Girma Demissie =December 24 '02: Addis Ababa
98. Girma Begashaw =April 20 '03: Nairobi; May 09 '03: Addis Ababa
99. Girma Tessema =December 27 '02: Addis Ababa
100. Dr. Habtamu Wondimu = May 26 '03: Addis Ababa
101. Dr Haile W/Michael = March 21 '03: Addis Ababa
102. Dr. Eshetu Abate = August 28 '03: Columbus
103. Hailu Cherenet =January 08 '03:Addis Ababa
104. Dr. Legesse Watero =June 06 '03: Addis Ababa
105. Lemma Mesgana= April 12 '02: Kansas City
106. Lemma Eshetu =May13 '03: Addis Ababa
107. Kasahun Abebe =March 23 '03: Addis Ababa
108. Kasaye Berehe =May 19 '03: Addis Ababa
109. Kashaun Sisay = April 20 '02: Kansas City
110. Kebebew Daka =March 28 '03: Addis Ababa
111. Dr. Kebede W/ Mariam April 23 '02: Kansas
112. Evangelist Gebru Woldu = May 28 '03: Addis Ababa
113. Rev. Paul Johansson = July 22, '03: Rochester
114. Professor Melbourne Holstein = May 12 '02: Lansing
115. Mulugeta Abebe=December 10 '02: Addis Ababa; April 12 '03: Nairobi
116. Mekonen Haile= February 28 '03: Addis Ababa
117. Menase Dessalegne =April 20 '03: Addis Ababa
118. Dr. Melaku Mekonen =June 22 '02: Un Arbor
119. Mekuria Mulugeta= May 29 '03: Addis Ababa
120. Manzkes (Albert and Marian) = October 03 '02: Hanibal MO
121. Mesfin Lessanu =February 22 '05: Addis Ababa
122. Simon Hulliso = January 22 '03: Addis Ababa
123. Mukuria Mulugeta =December 28 '02: Addis Ababa
124. Dr Menwyelet Mussie =April 02 '03: Nairobi
125. Mekonen Negere = February 22 '03: Addis Ababa
126. Evangelist Milkias Borena =May 19 '03: Awasa
127. Ruth Creamer = December 25 '02: Addis Ababa
128. Qes Gebez Mogos Tesfaw =April 25 '03: Nairobi
129. Evangelist Tadesse Ayssa = December 25 '02: Addis Ababa
130. Melaku Tsgeaye =December 25 '02: Addis Ababa
131. Pastor Tekie Mebratu = January 03 '02: Columbus
132. Solomon Lulu =February 22 '03: Addis Ababa
133. Dr. Tilahun Mamo= December 29 '02: Addis Ababa
134. Solomon Tilahun= March 28 '03: Addis Ababa
135. Sisay Firew = April 22'02: Kansa



136. Tenagne Lemma = April 24 '03: Addis Ababa
137. Thomas Tolcha = May 30 '03: Addis Ababa
138. General Taye Tilahun =August 29 '02: Denver
139. Pastor Thoma Hawaz =May 26 '03:Addis Ababa
140. Pastor Taye Takele =November 30 '02: Addis Ababa
141. Evangelist Shagna Anjaro = May 19 '03: Awasa
142. Evangelist Mussie Amesso = May 18 '03: Yirgalem
143. Professor Negussay Ayele =June 28 '03: Los Angeles
144. Taddese Eshetu =December 07 '02: Addis Ababa
145. Seifu Degene = January 04 '03: Addis Ababa
146. Pastor Seifu Kebede = April 13, 03: Nairobi
147. Pastor Sileshi Kebede =January 18 '03: Addis Ababa
148. Pastor Seyum G/ Tsadik = January18 '03:Addis Ababa
149. Dr. Solomon Mulugeta =February 20 '03: Addis Ababa
150. Shimelis Mazenghia =June 11 '03: Addis Ababa
151. Evangelist Mengesha Baso = May 14 '03:Yirgalem
152. Dr. Muleta Hurissa =February 10 '03: Addis Ababa
153. Mekre Haile Sellass = April 13 '02: Kansas
154. Dr. Samuel Ayana = April 28 '03: Addis Ababa
155. Sisay Ferew = April 12 '02: Kansas
156. Evangelist Mehari Choramso =December 30 '02: Addis Ababa
157. Dr. Mekonnen Bishaw =November 18 '02: Addis Ababa
158. Evangelist Mulugeta Zewde = October 05 '02: Goshen
159. Rev. Tibebu Alemayehu = March 12 '02: Detroit
160. Dr. Taddesse Beriso = December 12 '02: Addis Ababa
161. Dr. Tesfaye Shiferaw =February 20 '03: Addis Ababa
162. Dr. Tolosa Gudina = March 25 '03: Addis Ababa
163. Dr. Tekeste Teklu : October 25 '02: St. Louis
164. Pastor Tsadiku Abo = December 12 '02: Addis Ababa
165. Evangelist Mengistu Kuri = January 03 '02; Jan. 18 '03: Addis Ababa
166. Ato Million Belihu = Nov. 19 '02:Addis Ababa
167. Dr. Mellese Wegu =July 22 '02: Minneapolis
168. Ato Milion Belete =January 07 '03: Addis Ababa
169. Ms. Mildred Young =August 17 '02: Penny Dog, Florida.
170. Meskerem Assefa = November 29 '02: Addis Ababa
171. Dr. Negussie Tefera =August 28 '02:Addis Ababa
172. Sofia Asefa= August 15 '02: Washington DC
173. Evangelist Shibesi Taddesse= December 31 '02: Addis Ababa
174. Ato Tilahum Haile = December 22 '02; January 06 '03:Addis Ababa
175. Ato Wibshet Desalegne = December 19 '02; Jan 28 '03: Addis Ababa
176. Pastor Tesfay Gabisso = December 30 '02: Addis Ababa
177. Dr. Steve Strauss =July 14'02: Charlotte
178. Mekuria Jimma : December 12 '02 : Addis Ababa
179. Simon Galore =April 10 '03: Nairobi
180. Ato Shemelis Alemu = April 10 '03: Nairobi
181. Ato Simon Heliso = February 11 '03: Addis Ababa

182. Evangelist Sentayehu Mengistu =April 13 '03: Nairobi
183. Getachew W/Mariam = February 01' 03: Addis Ababa
184. Girma Tsege = February 12 '03: Addis Ababa
185. Wolde Amlak Dike =February 14 '03; March 28 '03: Addis Ababa
186. Mulatu Belachew = March 28 '02: Addis Ababa
187. Evangelist Shiferaw Feissa = June 04 '03: Addis Ababa
188. Shiferaw Gule = March 26 '03:Addis Ababa
189. Shiferaw W/ Michael = April 15, 03: Nairobi
190. Yosehp Imama =December 22 '03: Addis Ababa
191. Paul Gingrich = July 20 '03: Goshen
192. Dr. Tadesse W/ Giorgis =January 10 '02: Chicago
193. Solomon Kebede= December 09 '02: Addis Ababa
194. Petros D = April 06 '03: Nairobi
195. Pastor Paulos Gulilat= August 29 02: Denver
196. Mesfin Haile =August 20 '02: Washington DC.
180. Mattewos Gichele = August 15 '02: East Lansing
197. Ato Shimeles Abebe = February 17 '03: Addis Ababa
198. Tuja Jimma = December 28, 02: Addis Ababa
199. Terefe W/Micheal = August 16 '01: East Lansing.
200. Evangelist Seifu Kebede = April 20 '03: Nairobi
201. Balcha Deneged = January 26 '03: Addis Ababa
202. Negewo Buso = January 26 '03: Addis Ababa
203. Ato Temesgen Gobena June 15 '03: Addis Ababa
204. Colonel Tsega Kebede = April 21 '03: Addis Ababa
205. Professor Tilahun Yilma =June 26 '03: Los Angeles
206. Tesfaye Deneged = July 25 '02: New Jersey
207. Colonel Tessema Abaderash =May 23 '03: Addis Ababa
208. Dr Melesachew Mesfin = June 01 '03: Addis Ababa
209. Tirunesh Yemer = January 10 02: Chicago
210. Ato Tamirat Bely= May 28 '03: Addis Ababa
211. Tamirat Yergu = November 20 '02: Addis Ababa
212. Tamirat Haile = June 06 '03: Addis Ababa
213. Tesfahun Agidew = June 29 '02: Denver
214. Dr. Tesfa Tsion Delel =June 15 '02: Lancaster
215. Tsegaye Demisse =January 30 '03: Addis Ababa
216. Tsersu Eguale Tsion = January 30 '03: Addis Ababa
217. Minase Desalegne = January, 10 '04: Addis Ababa
218. Pastor Tiru Work Mesfin = December 21 '01: Los Angeles
219. Ato Gebriel T. Galatis = January 04 '03: Addis Ababa
220. Alemayehu Zerihun = May 03 '03: Addis Ababa
221. Solomon Tilahun = May 03 '03: Addis Ababa
222. Emahoi Tigist = March 02 '03: Debre Zeit
223. Berhanu Abegaz = December 23 '02 : Addis Ababa
224. Sehen Degene = December 23 '02: Addis Ababa
225. Fikre Abera= May 06 '02: Addis Ababa
226. Mekonen Haile =January 03'03: Addis Ababa

227. Professor Seyoum G/ Sellassie = May 05 '03: Addis Ababa
228. Pastor Teshome Worku = May 17 '03: Awasa
210. Pastor T/Medhin Ketema = November 27 '02: Harar
229. Pastor Itefa Gobena = December 18 '02: Addis Ababa
230. Pastor Daniel G/ Sellassie = January 21 '03: Addis Ababa
231. Mulugeta Dejenu = December 22 '02: Addis Ababa
232. Daniel Gezahegne = June 10 '03: Addis Ababa
233. Alganesh Tessema = November 20 '02: Addis Ababa
234. Melat Hailu = January 13 '03: Addis Ababa
235. Messeret A. = April 18 '03: Nairobi
236. Yenagu Dessie = December 11 '02: Addis Ababa
237. Gete Leggesse = December 11 '02 : Addis Ababa
238. Lulseged Abebe = July 28 '02: Denver
239. Iyob Mehari = October 22 '02; January 18 '04: Addis Ababa
240. Solomon G/ Yohannes = March 11 '03: Debre Zeit
241. Pastor Benyam Alemayehu = April 18 '03: Nairobi
242. Tamirat Haile = May 25 '06: Addis Ababa
243. Captain Yohanes Ijigu = July 22 '02: Wheaton
244. Rev Yohannes Mengisteab = July 02 '05: St. Louis
245. Zewde Jimma = January 13 '02: Harar
246. Apostle Zelalem Getachew = March 11 '02: Addis Ababa
247. Zelalem Tefera = April 11 '02: Kansas
248. Dr. Philipos Kemere = August 22 '03: Washington DC
249. Rev Zeleke Alemu = September 29 '02: Washington DC
250. Zamanuel Abraha = February 26 '02: Addis Ababa
251. Evangelist Solomon Tesfaye = August 16 '01: Lansing
252. Pastor Zakarias = August 24 '02: Toronto
253. Getachew Tiruye = May 22 '01: Grand Rapids
254. Dr. Zewde Yemer = Jan 28 '03: Addis Ababa

### **Profiles of selected informants**

***Dr. Bete Mengistu (Nairobi):*** Bete was raised in an Orthodox Christian family in Gojjam. He was one of those who pioneered the Pentecostal movement in Ethiopia. He also became one of the founding members as well as one of the first men to serve as an elder of Mulu Wengel Church, the first independent Pentecostal Church to emerge in Ethiopia. He later came to the US, received his Ph. D. from Wheaton College and continued his active involvement in expanding the evangelical faith amongst the growing Diaspora communities in the US and Canada. Bete played a pivotal role in the planting of various churches among the Diaspora group in the US and the formation of the Ethiopian Evangelical Christian Fellowship in North America. Latter, he became the Executive Director of the International Bible Society in Africa, based in Nairobi. In Kenya, he closely worked with Ethiopian refugees and founded a church that drew its congregation mainly from Ethiopian refugees.

***Dr. Atalay Alem (Addis Ababa).*** He was one of the young men actively involved in the Pentecostal movement in Ethiopian in the 70's. Though he came from a strict Orthodox family from Gojjam, he became a committed Pentecostal and a famous gospel singer. He suffered imprisonment for his faith several times. He studied Medicine and graduated from the Medical Faculty in Addis Ababa University. Currently, he is the Director of the Emmanuel Hospital in Addis Ababa and is also offering courses related to psychiatry in the Faculty of Medicine. He still composes and sings gospel songs.

***Dr. Leggese Watero (Addis Ababa):*** Leggese was an active participant of the Pentecostal movement while being a student in Haile Sellasse I University in the 70's. He made significant contributions to the growth of the Pentecostal movement through the composition and singing of gospel songs. He later became a faculty member of the Addis Ababa University in the department of Physics. He received his Ph. D in Astro-Physics in the US. He still continues composing and singing gospel songs.

***Dr. Tilahun Mamo (Addis Ababa):*** Tilhaun was raised in an Orthodox family in Harar. He was converted to the evangelical faith in the early 70's after a long search of a Christian faith that made sense to himself resulting from his brief and disturbing encounter with Marxism. He became an instructor in the Geology department in Addis Ababa University. He received his Ph. D from Italy and still continues teaching in the same university. For a long time, he has been involved as an itinerant Bible teacher mostly in southern Ethiopia, while at the same time holding a teaching position in the National University. He has also been involved in organizing various Christian professional fellowships and is currently serving as an elder of his local church.

***Tilahun Haile (Addis Ababa):*** Tilahun came from an Orthodox family in Bale southern Ethiopia. His early contacts with the SIM led to the embrace of the evangelical faith in the late 50's. He had been involved for the most part of his life in the expansion of the evangelical faith using several venues such as teaching, preaching, organizing seminars, writing Christian literature and serving in various leadership capacities at his local Qala Heywet Church. Tilahun had been a well-known figure among evangelicals of all denominations for his involvement in the creation of the Fellowship of Evangelical Christians at the national level and for his long and dedicated service in its leadership. In

his public duty, he served as a teacher, chief accountant and regional manager of the Ethiopian Telecommunication Authority. He was one of the few Evangelicals who kept memoirs and wrote on a variety of material including of the history of local churches in Ethiopia. He suddenly passed away in February 2003.

***Wubshet Desalegne (Addis Ababa):*** Wubshet came from a strict Orthodox Christian family in Bale. Early contact with the SIM led him to embrace the Evangelical faith in the 60's. After graduating from Haile Sellassie I University in Management, he served in various leadership positions in different line ministries of the Ethiopian government. He was a founding member of the Ethiopian Institute of Management, located in Debre Zeit. He played a key role in the evangelical movement by actively participating in teaching and preaching ministries in his local Emmanuel Baptist Church, which he also served as one of its leaders for a long time. He has also been a board member and director of Christian Businessmen Committee, a para-church organization that seeks to reach out businessmen, professionals and high-ranking political and state figures. Though he maintained a cautious distance from the Pentecostal faith, he is widely known for his ecumenical stance among the various denominations of the evangelical churches.

***Pastor Tsadiqu Abo (Addis Ababa):*** Tsadiku was a convert from a Moslem family in Goba, southern Ethiopia. As a young man, he was one of the key persons who played a significant role in the expansion of the Pentecostal movement in the former province of Bale. He suffered imprisonment both during Haile Sellassie's period and during the *Derg* for his faith. Currently, he is the Dean of Pentecostal training Center in Addis Ababa and the General Secretary of the Ethiopian Full Gospel Church.

***Solomon Kebede (Addis Ababa):*** Solomon came from a well-known and well-respected priestly family in Nazareth. He was one of the foremost figures of the *Haymanote Abew* reform oriented Orthodox Christian group and the leader of the *Semay Berhan* group in Nazareth town. He was attracted to the Pentecostal faith in his youth and became its chief advocate. He later jointed the Meserete Kirstos Church of the Mennonite background and became one of its most important leaders. He graduated from Haile Sellassie I University in Physics and became a teacher. He made significant contributions to the evangelical church in Ethiopia during the period of the *Derg* through the production of valuable materials to counter the ideology of the Marxist regime and the sound leadership he provided to the church when it was forced to go underground. He has served the Fellowship of Ethiopian Evangelical Christians for several years as its General Secretary and board member. While serving as the National Director of the International Bible Society, he was a significant force behind the translation of the Bible into various vernacular languages in Ethiopia.

***Afework Kebede (Lancaster, PA):*** Solomon grew up in Nazareth town. He was raised in an Orthodox Christian family. As a high school student, he enjoyed secular life. He stayed out of the Pentecostal movement when his brothers and most of his friends took

active part in it. Later on, he was employed in the Ethiopian Air Lines. He became a Marxist in the 60's and joined the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Party during the Revolution. He joined the armed wing of the EPRP and fought the *Derg* from the party's operational area in Tigray. He rose to prominent leadership in the party. Due intense strife within the leadership, he left the party and gave his hand to the military rulers. The bitter experience led him to start a walk of faith with God. After a while dissatisfied with the rulers, he fled the country and came to the US. He studied Theology and now is actively involved in organizing Christian fellowships in Lancaster.

***Mehari Choramo (Addis Ababa)*** : Mehari is a man from Welayta, Southern Ethiopia, who came in contact with the SIM and embraced the evangelical faith as a young man. He is a pioneer evangelist who has traveled across all parts of the southern regions as itinerant preacher for well over 50 years. He is one of the few surviving local evangelists belonging to the older generation still preaching at an old age. He has suffered imprisonment several times because of his faith during the days of the monarchy as well as during the *Derg*.

***Milkias Borena (Awasa, Southern Ethiopia)***: Milkias has served as an evangelist and church leader for forty years by traveling as an itinerant minister and planting churches in the former Sidamo province. He was one of the first men to have come under the influence of the Swedish Pentecostal mission based in Awasa. He served as an evangelist under the auspices of the Swedish Mission. He is one of the few Ethiopians I have interviewed who has kept records of major events in the past.



***Aba Shagna Angaro (Awasa):*** Aba Shagna came in contact with the SIM missionaries operating in Welayta and embraced the evangelical faith while he was a young man. He worked as an evangelist partially supported by SIM and by his local congregation from Welayta. He traveled in different localities in southern Ethiopia as an itinerant minister. He later joined the Swedish Pentecostal mission in Awasa and became a strong advocate of the Pentecostal movement in southern parts of Ethiopia. He has served as a missionary for well over forty years and was one of the key actors in the spread of the evangelical faith in the south.

***Pastor Bark Fahnestock (Providence, Rhode Island):*** Pastor Fahnestock is an American who served as a missionary for more than 20 years in southern Ethiopia connected to the SIM. He was the pastor of the International Evangelical Church for the most part of the Ethiopian Revolution. The IEC was one of the few churches openly operating during the period of the military rule. IEC had strong influence in attracting the middle class youth and the elite in Addis who were dissatisfied with the prevailing political conditions of the day. During the military rule the local officials in southern Ethiopia put him under house arrest suspecting him of being a CIA agent. Pastor Fahnestock has once served as the Director of the SIM Youth Center in the late 60's.

***Paul Gingrich (Goshen, Indiana):*** Gingrich served as a Mennonite missionary for several years in Ethiopia based in Nazareth. He was one of the few Western missionaries who closely and boldly identified himself with the Ethiopian youth in Nazareth who were actively involved in *Ye Semay Berhan* group from the Orthodox Church and later became Pentecostals.

***Rev. Colen Maunsel (Addis Ababa):*** Rev. Maunsel was a missionary from Britain affiliated with the Bible Churchmen's Missionary Society that has been working closely with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. He has been in Ethiopia for well over forty years teaching the youth members of the Orthodox Church mainly in the Holy Trinity Church in Addis Ababa. He has prepared a dictionary of Scriptures in Amharic and a variety of material from the Scriptures mainly designed for an Orthodox Christian audience.

***Dr. Carl Templin (Wheaton, ILL):*** Dr. Templin is a Presbyterian missionary from US who worked among the Gambela people of southwestern Ethiopia prior to the Ethiopian Revolution. He mostly served as a teacher of a mission school in Gambella. He witnessed the spread of the Pentecostal movement amongst the youth in Illubaor in the early 70's and left Ethiopia forced by the difficult situations missionaries experienced during the revolution.

***Dr. Steve Strauss (Charlotte, North Carolina):*** Dr. Strauss has worked as missionary affiliated with the SIM for over 15 years. He was the assistant pastor of the International Evangelical Church located in Addis Ababa. He spent most of his missionary services during the period of the revolution. His dynamic teaching was well received by the young Ethiopians attending the IEC. Currently, he is the Director of SIM-USA.

***Dr. Paul Balisky (Addis Ababa):*** Dr. Balisky is a Canadian missionary who had quite a long service in Ethiopia extending for about thirty years. He was serving as the Director of Grace Bible Training Center in Jimma, southwestern Ethiopia, when the military rulers confiscated it. He later became the Director of the SIM in Ethiopia.

***John Cumbers (Charlotte, NC):*** Cumbers was a longtime missionary in Ethiopia. As the East African Director of the SIM during the Ethiopian Revolution, he witnessed the persecution experience of the evangelical Christians and the conditions of the churches in general under the *Derg's* regime. He recorded those experiences in two books, which I have used as my sources. He was one of the SIM leaders who presided over the meeting that settled the transfer of SIM leadership to the indigenous Qale Heywet Church in the turbulent period of the Revolution.

***Albert Manzke (Hannibal MO):*** Manzke has served as an SIM missionary in Addis Ababa for many years. He was the second man to take charge of the running of the Youth Center in Addis Ababa after William Brant. He was one of most influential missionaries in Ethiopia with a remarkable influence upon university students in the 60's. He accommodated all sorts of Christian from all denominations including the Pentecostals as well as Orthodox Christians whose confidence he won through his friendship and warm reception.

***Evelyn Thompson (Canada):*** Misses Thompson was a wife of William Brant who served as a missionary in Sidamo area, southern Ethiopia and who in the early 60' s established the SIM Youth Center in Arat Killo, close to the Haile Sellassie I University campus. The Youth Center played a crucial role in influencing many university students to embrace

the evangelical faith. After the death of her former husband, she was married to Mr. Thompson, one of the most influential missionary figures who had a distinguished public service in Haile Sellassie's government throughout the 40's and 50's, mainly as an educational and political advisor to the Emperor. Ellen Thompson was one of the missionaries who came up with the idea of Key Scripture Project during the revolution.

***Earlin Scotman (Pittsburgh):*** Earlin Scotman was an American missionary from the Presbyterian group who worked as a nurse in Illubabor in the 70's. She was one of the few missionaries who came under the influence of Pentecostal faith through young Ethiopian Pentecostals working in the region.

***Ferne Miller (Denver):*** Ferne Miller was an American who served as missionary in the South Western part of Ethiopia. Miller witnessed the revival of the Pentecostal revival when it broke out in Illubaor in the late 60's. The American missionary also felt the experience of Pentecostalism because of their close association with the young Ethiopian Pentecostals organizing evangelistic conferences in the area.

***Ruth Cremer (Addis Ababa).*** Ruth Cremer is an American missionary from the SIM who worked closely with various groups of the people of southern Ethiopia for several decades. In the past few years, she has been working with local leaders and evangelists from the region of Kaffa, southern Ethiopia, in translating the Bible into their vernacular languages. She was also one of the coordinators of the Key Scriptural Project that was launched in the initial years of the Ethiopian Revolution.

***Pastor Tekie Mebratu (Columbus, Ohio):*** Tekie was born in the former Eritrean province and was raised in an Orthodox Christian family. He has been very active in the expansion of the evangelical movement in Eritrea and Ethiopia. He was one of the guest

speakers in the annual Pastor's Conference that was held for a few years during the Revolution before it stopped due to government pressures. Currently, he resides in Ohio State pasturing an Eritrean Church while at the same time working closely with Ethiopian evangelicals.

***Dr. Eshetu Abate (Columbus, Ohio)*** : Dr. Eshetu Abate was raised in a family that embraced the evangelical faith due to the activities of the Norwegian missionaries in Sidamo region, southern Ethiopia. His family came from the Welayta ethnic groups who had been very influential in the spread of the evangelical Christian faith in southern Ethiopia. He is one of the few young theologians the country has produced. He is also a scholar who writes on the history of the growth of local churches in Kambatta , Welayta and Hadiya. Currently he is a faculty member of Concordia University, California.

***Pastor Assefa Alemu( Kansas)*** : Dr. Alemu was raised in an Orthodox Christian family in Harar. He was one of the early pioneers of the Pentecostal movement that arose in Harar Teacher Training Institute. He was one of the key figures who organized the various revivalist conferences of young Pentecostals in the 60's. He played an important role in shaping the Pentecostal faith and in the establishment of the Mulu Wengel Pentecostal Church, of which he became one of its first leaders and its first voluntary evangelist. He served as a missionary in many parts of Ethiopia, especially in the regions of Ilubabor and Kaffa. He and a number of other young Ethiopians like Dr. Bete were believed to set the fire of the Pentecostal movement in the Gore and Metu areas, which began to affect even some American missionaries working in the area. He moved to the US in the early 70's and continued to actively engage in organizing churches and ministering to the ever-increasing Ethiopian Diasporic communities in the US. He played

a conspicuous role in organizing the annual revivalist conferences of Ethiopian evangelicals, which started more than 25 years ago in Chicago. He earned his Ph. D in Theology in the US and is currently pasturing an Ethiopian Church in Kansas.

***Dr. Kebede W/ Mariam ( Kansas):*** Kebede grew in an Orthodox family in Addis Ababa. He embraced the evangelical faith in the late 50's as a result of his contacts with the Faith Pentecostal missions who operated in his neighborhood. His disappointment with the Finnish missionaries led him to start fellowship of like-minded friends, which formed the nucleus of the independent Pentecostal movement eventually leading to the formation of the Mulu Wengel Church. He was a key figure in the spread of the Pentecostal movement in Ethiopia/ He was one of the first leaders of the Church and served as its chairman for seven years. Coming from an artist and literary background he was involved in several innovative activities. He was a speaker at the Radio Voice of the Gospel and was the editor of a popular Christian magazine that has an ecumenical dimension. He left the country after the Revolution harassed by the new rulers and came to the US and is still active in the spreading the evangelical faith amongst the Diasporic communities.

***Professor Daniel Lemma (California):*** Daniel Lemma grew up in an Orthodox Christian family in Harar. While studying history in the former Haile Sellassie I University in the 50's, he discontinued his program because of his desire to bring public enlightenment to the Ethiopian people through education and the teachings of the foundational tenets of the Christian faith. He worked as a teacher in one of the schools established by the Mennonites in the Eastern part of Ethiopia. After earning his Masters in the US, he served as an instructor and dean in Alamaya College. After an active Christian

commitment in his life, he turned his attention more to his career as an educator. He got his Ph. D from Michigan State and is currently a university professor in the US.

***Professor Negussay Ayele (Los Angeles)*** : Professor Negussie was also raised in an Orthodox Christian family in Nazareth. He was one of the few students in the 50's who were terminated from their trainings in Harar Teacher Training Institute because of their evangelical convictions. His active commitment to the evangelical faith led him to voluntarily entrust his life to the cause of mission. He served as a teacher of the Gospel close to two years in Dire Dawa and Nazareth cities. He was an active participant and a key figure in the youth initiated Christian movement in Nazareth and was one of the leading men in organizing the annual revivalist conferences held in the city. He also played a major role in the smooth transition of the leadership of the Meserte Kirstos Church from the American missionaries into the hands of the Ethiopians. Negussie later studied political Science and became one of the most outspoken professors in the department of Political Science in Haile Sellassie I University. In his later years he distanced himself from the evangelical movement and pursued his career as a writer, researcher and teacher. He is currently teaching in the University of California.

***Professor Tilahun Yelma( Los Angeles)*** : Professor Tilahun was raised in an Orthodox Christian family in Nazareth. He was keenly involved in the various Christian activities of the youth in Nazareth town in the 50's. As a young man he developed deep evangelical convictions and was involved in the dissemination of the evangelical faith through his teaching and preaching of the Bible. In his later life, he seemed to have gradually detached himself from the evangelical movement and focused more on his career as a scholar and scientist. He came to the US in the 70' s and became a

distinguished Scientist in Virology. Currently, he holds a faculty position at University of California, Davis.

***General Taye Tilahun(Denver):*** General Taye has been a long time member of the Lutheran Mekane Yesus Church. He has been one of the few evangelical Christians in Ethiopia with a distinguished public service both under Haile Sellassie's government and the *Derg* . He held high government positions such as: the Chief Commander of the Ethiopian Imperial Air Force, Defense Minister, and Interior Minister. At the end of his career, he served as the ambassador of the Ethiopian government to Switzerland. Dissatisfied with the military rule, he abandoned his position as an ambassador and came to the US as a political asylee. He is still active in his Christian faith working closely with the leadership of the Ethiopian Church in Denver.

***Captain Yohannes Ijigu (Wheaton):*** Captain Yohannes came from an Orthodox background. He came in contact with the SIM missionaries serving as instructors in Teferi Mekonen School in Addis Ababa in the 1940's. Together with his friends like Dr. Mulatu Bafa, he was terminated from his school because of his evangelical convictions. Unable to pursue his education further, he joined the Air Force. He left the Air Force in the early 70'd and joined the Ethiopian Air Lines as a pilot. He worked very closely with the leaders of the various evangelical churches in Ethiopia especially when the church was facing difficult situations under the *Derg*. He suffered imprisonment for his faith during Mengistu's regime. He studied Theology at Wheaton after he moved to the US in the 80's . He has pastured an Ethiopian Church in Chicago for several years. Currently, he is the associate pastor of an African American Church in Wheaton.



***Pastor Tolosa Gudina (Atlanta):*** Pastor Tolosa had a Lutheran background from the Mekane Yesus Church. However, he later became one of the foremost revivalistic Pentecostal preachers in Ethiopia and amongst the Diasporic Ethiopian communities in Europe and North America. He studied at Fuller Theological Seminary and earned his Dr. degree in Theology. Based at his Church in Atlanta, Pastor Tolosa frequently travels to Ethiopia and organizes crusades and training programs to evangelists and leaders of the Church. Recently, he has increasingly been involved in national reconciliation programs through a ministry called “Truth in Love,” which seeks to bring healing and unity not only among various church denominations but also between various ethnic groups in Ethiopia. He is a well-respected leader and well received even among the political leaders of the current government in Ethiopia.

***Shiferaw Gule (Addis Ababa):*** Shiferaw was raised in an Orthodox family in Wello. He actively participated in the radical student movement that was unfolding in Haile Sillassie I University in the early 70’s. During the Ethiopian Revolution, he joined the Ethiopian Peoples’ Revolutionary Party in opposing the *Derg* and became an important figure of the party’s organization. He was imprisoned for more than six years in one of the major prison centers in Addis Ababa where high-level political prisoners were kept in custody. He embraced the evangelical faith while serving his indefinite prison terms. Upon his release from the prison, he joined the Emmanuel Baptist Church of which he became one of its leaders. Currently, Shiferaw holds an important public position serving as the Attorney General for *Kellel 14* ( Region 14, Addis Ababa) while still active in serving his church.

***Melaku Tsegaye (Addis Ababa):*** Melaku was raised in an Orthodox Christian family in a rural Guraghe community. As a young student, he joined the EPRP underground opposition group that stood against the military regime. After being arrested by local officials for his involvement in the EPRP, he was put in one of the major jails in Addis Ababa. During his years of imprisonment, he embraced the evangelical faith and became its active promoter. Upon his release, he continued his education in Addis Ababa University and graduated from the Faculty of Law. As a legal expert, he worked in Amnesty Ethiopia, founded by Professor Mesfin W/Mariam. Currently Melaku is practicing law privately, while at the same time he serves as the President of *Wengel Begeter*, the Gospel for rural areas, initiated by Gurage Christians to evangelize the Gurages and other ethnic communities in the rural areas.

***Wongelawi Gebru (Columbus, Ohio):*** Gebru was raised in a Christian family in the former province of Tigray. He embraced the evangelical faith at a turbulent time during the revolution and the civil war in the north. As a student in the Addis Ababa University, he became actively involved in the underground Christian student fellowships and soon emerged as a charismatic preacher. After working for a few years with the Ministry of Mines, he felt called to be an evangelist. He became an evangelist mainly involved in the healing ministry. Later he founded his own international ministry under which he has been able to travel around the world serving Ethiopians and foreigners alike. He has written a number of popular books both in Amharic and English dealing with the Holy Spirit and healing ministry.

***Tesfaye Gabbiso (Addis Ababa):*** Tesfaye grew in Yergalem and became follower of the Pentecostal faith in the early 70's. He is one of the most talented and most influential gospel singers and widely known for his gospel songs among Christians of all denominations. The local officials in Sidamo threw Tesfaye in prison for well over 7 years because of his unwillingness to deny his faith. He continued to compose and sing famous songs even in the prison houses. He later studied Theology in Kenya and became a pastor of a local Pentecostal church in Awasa.

***Abera Sofera (Omo):*** Abera is a convert from one of the social outcast communities commonly known as *Fugas* in southern Ethiopia. He is one of the elders of the pariah community and is a member of the committee that runs a local flower mill provided by the World Vision Ethiopia.

***Belachew Amsho (Omo):*** Belachew is one of the most important hereditary figures among the Tembaro tribes in the vicinity of Omo Sheleko, southern Ethiopia. He has embraced the evangelical faith through the activities of local missionaries from Wellyata when he was young in the early 50's. He has served as a church leader of a local Qale Heywet Church and was involved in several mediating activities that put an end to a number of internecine conflicts between the Tembaro, Kembata and Donga ethnic communities in living in Omo Sheleqo.

***Bogale Haile (Dila):*** Bogale is a member of the Amaro ethnic groups in southern Ethiopia. He was raised in a Christian family who were members of the Qale Heywet Church. Currently, he is one of the coordinators of a local development project sponsored by the Qale Heywet Church in Dila.

***Abreha Admassu (Addis Ababa):*** Abreha held a very important position in the BIS Private company before he became a chief aid of a well-known witchdoctor. known as *Qengazmatch* Taye, who was based in Nazareth town. Abreha gave several years of service to Taye and witnessed many officials of Haile Sellassie's and Mengistu 's regime coming to seek advise and guidance from the seer. He later left the practice and embraced the evangelical faith. Based in Belgium, he travels widely in Ethiopia and Europe engaged in what he calls, "deliverance ministry" which seeks to unmask the world of witchcraft practices from his experiences and teaches people against its use and practice.

***Pastor Thomas Hawaz (Addis Ababa):*** Thomas embraced the evangelical faith during the times of the Ethiopian Revolution. He is one of the emerging Charismatic leaders with big influence upon the youth in the Capital City. He established a church under the name, "Faith Army International Church," which is attracting a growing number the middle class youth and the educated mainly in the Capital City.

***Apostle Zelalem Getachew(Addis Ababa):*** Zelalem is a young man who is involved in the new religious movement in Ethiopia (referred by some as the Apostolic movement) following the collapse of the *Derg*. He is pasturing a young but growing church in the capital city with branches in Europe. Zelalem is not only a charismatic preacher but he frequently contributes to a Christian magazine called, " Vision of the Generation," which he founded to spread the ideals of the Apostolic faith movement in Ethiopia. Zelalem considers himself a prophet called to save not only his generation but the Ethiopian nation, which has been enmeshed in endless civil war and poverty. He represents one of the new strains of the faith movement that is messianic, militant and nationalist that invoke the Book of Psalm 68:31, "Ethiopia Shall Soon Stretch it hands Towards God."

***Evangelist Iyob Mamo( Addis Ababa):*** Iyob embraced the evangelical faith in Kenya as a refugee. He later managed to come to the US where he stayed for a number of years. After getting his masters in the US, he returned to Ethiopia to launch church planting program in the rural areas and serve as an itinerant preacher. He founded a church in Addis Ababa called the “Crusader” connected to a local African American Church in Chicago bearing the same name. He represents one of the strands of the new faith movement in Ethiopia , which lay stress on promoting prosperity gospel and active social engagements. Currently he is the Director of an organization called, “Impact Network Ethiopia,” of which he is its founder. He is also involved in writing Christian literature in Amharic.

***Shiferaw Wolde Micheal (Nairobi):*** Shiferaw came from an Orthodox Christian family. He embraced the evangelical faith while he was a student in Haile Sellassie I University in the 60’s. He was one of key men who founded *Ye Hebret Amba* Church, near the main Campus at Sidist Killo, which inherited the legacy of the SIM Youth Center. He later became not only its leader but a prominent figure in the evangelical movement at the national level. He played a crucial role in the formation and development of the FEEC. In his public service he has served as an instructor in the Faculty of Law, Addis Ababa University, Justice Minister and National Director of Compassion International.

***Daniel Mekonnen (Denver):*** Daniel was raised in an Orthodox Christian family and was a devoted member of the Church. He was a factory worker in the town of Nazareth. During the communist regime he organized Bible study fellowships among his friends working in the factory. After the collapse of the Marxist regime, the Bible study he was

leading began to experience trouble because of the local clergy's suspicion that it was leaning towards the *Pentes*. This led to a conflict that led to the birth of an independent movement popularly known as *Ortho-Pentes*. Daniel is the leader of this new movement that has gathered tens and thousands of followers across the nation and is affecting even monks and priests of old monasteries.

***Evangelist Kedamo Mechato(Addis Ababa):*** Kidamo has been one of the foremost evangelists that came from Kambata area. Though a man of little formal education, he is one of the most respected Bible teachers among evangelicals of all denominations. He has served as an evangelist for well over 40 years. He was one of the leaders who played a strategic role in safeguarding the Geja Kale Heywet Church in Addis Ababa from the attack of the local officials. He was also one of the key men who were involved in new ecumenical initiatives aimed at bringing unity among evangelical Christians during the initial years of the Ethiopian Revolution.

***Professor Melbourne E. Holsteen (East Lansing):*** Professor Holstein is a Canadian who went to Ethiopia in the 1950's as a missionary from the SIM. He served as one of the first groups of instructors in the SIM founded Girls Christian Academy School located in Addis Ababa. He later became a Professor in Anthropology and became in a University in Canada. He lived in Ethiopia at a time when missionaries were entering the country in an increasing number. He participated in inter mission fellowships and as a result he was able to get acquainted with many missionaries serving in Ethiopia including those working closely with Emperor Haile Sellassie.

***Pastor Getu Ayalew (Awasa):*** Pastor Getu was raised in an evangelical Christian family in southern Ethiopia that came under the SIM influence. As a young man he was drawn to the Pentecostal movement and was actively involved in promoting it in the area of Awasa and its surrounding areas working closely with the Swedish Pentecostal Missions. Getu studied Theology in Sweden and has been pasturing the Berhane Heywet Church, an offshoot of the activities of the Swedish Pentecostal Mission in Southern Ethiopia.

***Pastor Tekle Medhin (Harar):*** Pastor Tekle Medhin was raised in an Orthodox Christian family in Holeta in the former province of Shoa. In his childhood, he served as the deacon of his parish Orthodox Church. He embraced the evangelical faith in the 60's while he was a young man. He later joined the army and served as an officer during the Ogaden war in 1977/88. He courageously spoke about his faith and witnessed to many officers and army generals and secretly converted some of them to the evangelical faith. He left the army and got involved in organizing the underground church during the Marxist military rule of Mengistu Haile Mariam. He suffered imprisonment in the hands of the local officials in Harar and repeated threat from members of the EPRP who were also opposed to the Pentecostal faith.

***Pastor Derege Haile Gebre Yesus(Addis Ababa):*** Derege was raised in an Orthodox Christian family of a middle class status. He belonged to the generation of young Ethiopians who were affected by the events of the Ethiopian Revolution and were forced to leave the country. He and his friends made a long and arduous journey across the Ethiopian border and made their ways into the Sudan. He stayed as a refugee in the Sudan for many years. He then moved to Kenya where he embraced the evangelical faith. Derege quickly became an active member of a local Ethiopian evangelical Church in

Nairobi that has an outreach programs to Ethiopian refugees. He got involved in the evangelistic program tailored for the Ethiopians staying in the various refugee camps in Kenya. He later became one of the pastors of a charismatic Church mostly attended by ex-or current Ethiopian refugees. After a brief pastoral service in Nairobi, he moved to Canada and is now pasturing an Ethiopian Church in Ottawa.

***Solomon Lulu ( Addis Ababa):*** Solomon Lulu came from a strict Orthodox family in Addis Ababa. He embraced the evangelical faith as a student in Haile Sellassie I University. As a student in the national University, he kept close connections with the missionaries at the Youth Center. He was one of the principal figures behind the establishment of the Evangelical Association of University Students in the late 60's. Solomon played a vital role in students' association by organizing revival programs to strengthen the fellowship of the young students and attract new converts. Solomon and his friends combated the core Marxist groups, known as the Crocodiles, in Haile Sellassie I University in the late 60's and succeeded in foiling the assumption of a candidate of their choice in the presidency of the Students Union. After his graduation, Solomon played an important role in the birth of the Christian Graduate Fellowship that brought together professional Christians working in various spheres. The Graduate Fellowship offered strong financial and logistic supports to the students' Christian fellowship. He now owns a big metal manufacturing firm and is the president of the Christian Business Fellowship in Ethiopia. Solomon obtained his MA from the Faculty of Education at Michigan State University in the 1980's.



**Mulugeta Zewde (Goshen):** Mulugeta was raised in an Orthodox family in Nazareth. As a high school student, he was one of the key leaders of the *haymanote abew* reform oriented Christian group. He later embraced the evangelical faith and became an active participant of the Pentecostal movement in 70's. During the Ethiopian Revolution, he discontinued this education from the National University and chose to serve his local Meserete Kristos Church as an evangelist. Mulugeta was one of the key men involved in organizing the home-based churches in Nazareth and Addis Ababa. He traveled to different parts of Ethiopia to plant and organize underground churches. He was involved in teaching and preparation of materials with contextualized messages relevant for the times.

**Dr. Alem Bazez (Addis Ababa):** Alem was an active member of the *haymanote abew* group from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church while he was a high school student in Asmara. He embraced the evangelical faith as a Freshman student in 1971 and became an active participant of the Pentecostal movement. Alem had been an active participant of the various activities of the University's Christian students association in the 70's. Together with his friends like Melesachew (now Dr.) and Tekeste Teklu (now Dr.), he organized various activities to safeguard the youth from falling into the influence and trap of communism in the early years of the revolution by providing teachings, trainings, organizing seminars and the production and distribution of relevant literature. He also played a key role in organizing the Mulu Wengel Pentecostal Church when it had to relocate its position as an underground church. He has served as the Dean of the Faculty

of Engineering and the recently as the University's registrar while at the same time serving as one of the elders of his local church.

***Emehoy Tigist ( Debre Zeit):*** Tigist became a nun discontinuing her education in the famous monastery of Debre Libanos during the last years of the Ethiopian revolution. She joined the monastery to live a righteous life fully committed to God. Despite her efforts to stick to all the rules to lead an austere and righteous life, she found monastic life unrewarding. After encountering a disappointing experience in the monastery she left the monastery. After quitting her monastic life, she joined one of the clandestinely operating reform groups within the Orthodox Church in Ethiopia. Recently she has joined the local Meserete Kristos church in Debre Zeit and is serving as an evangelist.

***Belaynesh Zeleke ( East Lansing):*** Belaynesh was one of the former members of the *Serawite Krestos*, the Army of Jesus who, received training in Biblical teachings and vocational schools in Fitech ( Shoa) established by the Bible Churchmen Missionary Society. After finishing her training from Fitch in the late 50's she has been involved in organizing social events following the Orthodox Christian holidays with the aim of spreading the Gospel for Orthodox friends and relatives along culturally familiar lines.

***Tefera W/Michael (East Lansing):*** Tefera was a learned figure in the tradition of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. After attending church education in the famous monastery of Debre Libanos he became *memher*, teacher in one of the churches in Addis Ababa. In 1950 he came across a book , *mekerena tegtsas*, exhortation and reproach, written by *aleka* Gorfu, another learned figure from the Orthodox faith with evangelical convictions. He embraced the evangelical faith after the encounter and started teaching it openly. He

was dismissed from his position. He later became a health assistant and continued to teach the salvation-centered message to members of the Orthodox church clandestinely.

***Abebe Kebede (Addis Ababa):*** Abebe was one of the former Haile Sellassie I Universities students who actively participated in the students' movement of the early 70's. During the Revolution, he was one of the few intellectuals who maintained distance from the Marxist parties siding or opposing the *Derg*, while at the same time being critical of both. A theoretician and thinker on development studies with Marxist orientation, he serves as a social and political advisor of the current leadership in Ethiopia.

***Simon Galore( Nairobi) :*** Simon was raised in a Christian family that has embraced the evangelical faith. His father was a local preacher in the southern Ethiopia. While as a student in Haile Sellassie I University, he was attracted by the radicalism of the student movement of which he quickly became its chief exponent. During the Ethiopian Revolution, he joined one of the organizations working with the military rulers. He soon rose to high political prominence serving as an administrator, party and Politburo member. He fled the country when the military regime collapsed and is now residing and doing small businesses in Kenya

***Petros T(Nairobi):*** Petros was raised in a family that embraced the evangelical faith through the SIM missionaries in Welayta area, in southern Ethiopia. Like most of the people of the south, he was sympathetic to the Ethiopian Revolution. He served as the chief administrator of Welayta district appointed by the *Derg* officials. He is widely remembered by the local people as a man who had a liberal attitude towards the Christian faith and not engaged in repressive activities to harm Christians during his tenure of office, unlike most of his colleagues.

***Dr. Neguisse Tefera (Addis Ababa):*** Negussie was one of the pioneers of the Pentecostal movement in Addis Ababa. He was also one of the first elders of the Mulu Wengel Pentecostal church. He has been known as a remarkable preacher who has combined his journalistic gifts with his gifts of teachings of the Bible. He is one of the few Pentecostal Christians who was willing to hold a sensitive position during the period of the *Derg* for which he suffered partial ostracism from his Christian friends. He has for many years been very active in the leadership of the Mulu Wengel Church. After earning his Doctorate degree in the field of journalism and demography, from England, he returned to Ethiopia and became the advisor of religious affairs for the current government. He is now the Director of an International NGO called, Population Media Center, which renders public services the area of conscientization using literature and drama as main venues. Now- a -days, the NGO is particularly involved in creating awareness on HIV and AIDS related issues and providing contextualized education to the public through trainings seminars and radio programs.

***Tenagne Lemma (Addis Ababa):*** Tenagne was raised in an Orthodox Christian family in Selale district in the former province of Shoa. As a high school student, she was actively involved in the *haymanote abew* Orthodox reform group. She later embraced the evangelical Christian faith when she was a student at Haile Sellassie I University in the late 60's. She was one of the few women who actively participated in the Pentecostal movement in its formative stage, together with Yinagu and Chaltu, the wife of Goshu Welde, one of the former ministers of the *Derg*. While still strongly committed to her Christian faith, Tenagne has served as a long time teacher and dean of Kotebe College of

Teacher Education and assistant dean of the Civil College under the new rulers. Currently, she is the National Director of Compassion International located in Addis Ababa.

***Tiru Work Mesfin (Los Angeles):*** Tiru Work came from a strictly Orthodox family from Gojjam. She was one of the few women to have embraced the Pentecostal movement as a student in Haile Sellassie I University in the late 60's. She actively participated in the University's Christian Fellowship and played a key role in training and equipping the young Christian students with sound Biblical teachings at the beginning of Ethiopian Revolution by organizing workshops and the producing and distributing relevant literature. She created strong networks among the Christian youth participating in the government coerced program called *Edeget Behberet*, Development Through Cooperation, more known by the term *Zemecaha*, through newsletters and prayer exchanges to exhort the youth to stay strong in their faith in their isolated and scattered locations. She is now the assistant pastor of an Ethiopian evangelical church in Los Angeles.

***Lemma Mesgana(Kansas):*** Lemma was a longtime participant of the Pentecostal movement and a prominent lay leader of the Mulu Wengel Church. He was one of the key leaders involved in panning and organizing the home –based fellowships of the Mulu Wengel church in Addis Ababa during the entire period of the Marxist regime. After the collapse of the military rule, he was one of the men who provided sound leadership in transitioning the church from an underground to an open publicly operating Church. Currently, he is serving as one of the elders the evangelical Christian Church in Kansas.

***Bedru Hussien (Addis Ababa):*** Bedru is a convert from the Moslem background. He embraced the evangelical faith as a student in Haile Sellassie I University in the late 60's. He was one of the pioneers of the Pentecostal movement who committed most of his life to its expansion. He later got connected with the Mennonite missionaries and became the director of the Nazareth Bible Academy. He joined the Meserete Kirstos church and soon emerged as one of its prominent leaders. He and his friends, like Solomon Kebede, played a very important role in reorganizing the Meserete Kirstos Church to adjust to the challenging situations of the Revolution. He was involved in planning and organizing cell groups operating clandestinely. As a former Biology student, Bedru wrote a number of material that countered evolution and dialectical materialism that were secretly distributed amongst leaders of the evangelical Churches of all denominations. He is a well-informed person and a scholar who has produced a sizable literature on a variety of materials dealing with religion, issues of development and ethnicity as they relate to Ethiopia. Besides, he is one of the few evangelicals who kept some records of the past and was more than willing to share them. Currently, he is the Dean of Meserete Kirstos College in Addis Ababa.

***Colonel Tessema Aba Derash (Addis Ababa):*** He is a man from an Orthodox background who embraced the evangelical faith in the early 50's. He had for many years served as an Air Force colonel and has been one of the pivotal forces in disseminating the evangelical faith among members of the Air Force officers in his long service. During the Revolution, he was appointed by the *Derg* officials to be the General Manager of the Ethiopian Electric and Power Authority. He served his public duty honorably and was one of the most popular managers of ELPA. He initiated a number of reforms that

considerably increased the efficiency of its working at the national level and earned a good respect by the *Derg* officials. While discharging his public duty, he was also involved in organizing underground fellowships during the times of the revolution. After retirement from public duty, he established his own training ministry of inter-denominational Biblical teaching for local leaders and evangelists at his own residential compound and is still actively promoting the evangelical faith.

***Rev. Paul Johansson (Rochester, Upstate New York):*** Paul Johansson served as an American missionary from the Assembly of God in Kenya. He and Omahe Cha-cha, the Kenyan Pentecostal preacher who had greatly influenced the Ethiopian youth in the 60's, worked together. From his base in Kenya, he kept his connections with the Ethiopian Pentecostals, which he reinforced through his periodic visits to Ethiopia. Currently he is the principal of the Ellen Bible Institute in Rochester.

***Dr. Mekonen Bishaw (Addis Ababa):*** Mekonen Bishaw was one of the key players in the Ethiopian student movements in Haile Sellassie I University. In fact, in a decisive contest between him and the late Tilhaun Gizaw for the Presidency of the University's Student Union in Addis Ababa, he won the vote and was elected President in 1968. He enjoyed the support of the Pentecostals, who, though a small minority in the University, became a critical voice in opposing Tilhaun and his radical leftist camp. The Pentecostals gave support for Meknonen because of their suspicion that Tilahun represented the interest of a mysterious Marxist circle, known as the Crocodiles, who were openly hostile to them.

***Shimeles Mazengia (Addis Ababa):*** Shimeles was raised in an Orthodox Christian family in Gara Muleta, Harar. He was one of the shakers and movers of the student movement in the early 70's. In 1974, he ran for the presidency of the University's Student's Union

in Addis Ababa and lost the contest won by Getachew Begashaw. At the time of the Ethiopian Revolution, he took side with the EPRP opposition group. However, he left the EPRP and joined the ranks of the cadres working with the *Derg*. An orator and a theoretician, he soon rose to a political prominence and became one of the chief ideologues of Mengistu's regime. He was a member of the Political Bureau and a secretary of the Central Committee for ideological matters. His role in Ethiopian politics has often been compared with Mikhail Sulov of the Soviet Union. Following the collapse of the military regime, the EPRDF leadership arrested Shimelis and put him in prison for eleven years. The government released him in 2003. While in prison, Shimeles embraced the evangelical faith and is studying its history judiciously to understand it more fully.

***Mesfin Lissanu (Addis Ababa):*** Mesfin Lisannu was one of the few surviving men who had come to embrace the evangelical faith under the influence of the Bible Churchmen's Missionary Society that was closely working with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church to revive its evangelistic activities. He was a close personal friend of David Stock, the missionary from the BCMS that has left major impact on the Orthodox Church in Ethiopia. He later joined the Evangelical Church of Mekane Yesus and became one of its key leaders.

***Mesfin Haile(Washington, DC):*** Mesfin has witnessed the beginnings of new stirrings political and religious amongst the universities in the 60's and has keenly observed the development of the evangelical faith in Ethiopia, though he has not embraced it. He is a strong believer and proponent of the Ethiopian Orthodox faith, albeit with an open attitude towards the evangelicals. He has served as the General Manager of the Ethiopian Telecommunication Authority for several years. Currently he resides in Washington.



***Seifu Degene (Addis Ababa):*** Seifu Degene is a lawyer who has been recruited by the *Derg* officials to be the Legal Advisor of the Ministry of Public Safety and Security upon his graduation from the national university in 1980. He received a key position as a legal analyst of security information related to social and political issues in the Ministry. He also worked as one of the close advisors of the Minister of Public Safety and Security. The government appointed Seifu as the Head of the Security officer for the region of Kaffa, Southern Ethiopia. Seifu is a well-informed and keen observer of political developments in the country with sharp memories of events concerning sensitive issues of the past. The leaders of the new government imprisoned him for his involvement with the past regime and released him after two years of service. He has embraced the evangelical faith about six years ago and soon became its ardent fan. Committing his life to its expansion, he studied Theology in a local seminary in Addis Ababa evangelist and graduated with a top grade. He is currently serving as a gospel teacher in the Faith Army International Church in Addis Ababa and occasionally contributes articles to a Christian magazine of his local church.

***Dr. Mulletta Hurisa (Addis Ababa):*** Mulletta is a man from Wellega who had been an active participant of the Pentecostal movement in his youth in the early 70's. He was later influenced by Marxism and became a member of the ruling party of the *Derg* (WPE) while teaching at Kotebe College of Teacher Education in Addis Ababa. After the collapse of Mengistu's regime, he slowly drifted back to his faith and became involved in the Peace and Reconciliation ministry of the Mekane Yesus Church. He later founded his own a research organization called, " Research Center For Civics and Human Rights

Education” that seeks to study traditional conflict resolutions methods and appropriate them to modern situations to resolve ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia.

***Pastor Tamirat Haile (Addis Ababa):*** Tamirat was raised in an Orthodox Christian family in a rural town in Gurage region. He spent his youth being a shoe shiner in the Capital City. He embraced the evangelical faith in the early 70’s and soon rose to prominence as one of the best gospel singers in the nation. By taking classes through extension programs he improved his level of education and his career as a modern gospel singer. He committed his life to be an evangelist and music composer and singer in Meserete Kirstos church. During the period of the Revolution he composed comforting songs as well songs which critiqued the *Derg* and its bankrupt ideology using innuendoes, metaphors and other discursive languages. He is one of the few gospel singers in Ethiopia composing and singing gospel music with social and political messages. After pasturing a local church in Addis Ababa, Tamirat recently moved to the US to serve as the pastor a local Ethiopian church in New Jersey. .

***Pastor Daniel Mekonnen (Washington):*** Pastor Daniel was raised in an affluent Orthodox Christian family in Addis Ababa. He was one of the active participants of the Pentecostal movement in the late 60’s. He later joined a small, but influential Pentecostal group, known as *Tsion*, known for its choir and gospel songs, in Addis Ababa. In the late 70’s and early 70’s, Daniel became one of the most widely known and famed Charismatic preachers involved in healing ministry in the Meserete Kirstos Church. He has been reported to perform several miracles during the Revolution drawing the attention of the government authorities, which also brought its closure. He later moved to the US and continued his charismatic preaching that stressed healing services while

pasturing a Church in Washington that has one of the biggest Ethiopian congregations in the Diaspora. After a long sojourn in the US, Daniel returned to Ethiopia and opened a para-church organization called, “ Gospel Light Ministry” while still pasturing a local church in Addis Ababa.

***Million Belete (Addis Ababa):*** Million was raised in an Orthodox family in Deder, in the eastern parts of Ethiopia. He came in contact with the Mennonite missionaries working in the town. He became actively involved in the youth revival movement in Nazareth, which eventually led to the formation of the Meserete Kirstos church. He was among the Ethiopians who worked closely with the American missionaries to make the local church an indigenous organization. He served as the Assistant Director of the Poly-Technique Institute in Baher Dar in the 60's. He also served as the General Secretary the Bible Society and Regional Secretary of United Bible Society for Africa. Million has served as Vice President of African Mennonite World Conference (1965-73) and President of Mennonite World Conference (1973-78). After his retirement from his long service, he returned to Ethiopian and established a publishing house called, “Raey Publishers,” which publishes and distributes Christian literature in Ethiopia.

***Dr. Debela Birri (Addis Ababa):*** Debela was raised in a Christian family from a Lutheran background in Wellega. He studied Theology in the US and wrote his dissertations on the history of Bethel Church, a local church that was born out of the activities of Presbyterian missionaries from the US. He taught and served as the dean of the Mekane Yesus Theological Seminary for many years before he assumed his Current position as the Director of the Ethiopian Graduate School of Theology.

***Ezra Eshetu (Addis Ababa):*** Ezra was an active member of one of the youth organizations created in the Holy Trinity Orthodox Church in Addis Ababa. He was among the many youth who were banned from the church because of their inclination towards the evangelical faith. He later joined the Emmanuel Baptist Church, then located in Arat Killo. He served as an elder, teacher and preacher in his local Church. Currently, he serves as the administrator of the Emmanuel Baptist Church.

***Dr. Berhanu Abebe (Addis Ababa):*** Dr. Berhanu Abebe is a Catholic Christian raised in a Catholic family. He was one of the most privileged Ethiopians who came from an upper class and who also had the benefit of studying abroad in the 50's. He has a distinguished public career as a university instructor in the Department of History in Addis Ababa, Director of the Haile Sellassie I Prize Award and Vice Minister of Ministry of Culture.

***Evangelist Shibeshi Taddese (Addis Ababa):*** Shibeshi is one of the few evangelists who committed his life to be an evangelists in the 70's while still very young. During the revolution he served as an independent missionary who supported himself in his evangelistic undertakings. He traveled widely in the country to preach the Gospel often running great risks. He also organized underground fellowships in Addis Ababa in an attempt to build a strong community of believers that would stand the challenge of Marxism. Currently, he is affiliated with the Mekane Yesus Church, and is engaged in teaching the Bible across all denominations.

***Weizero Zewdie Jimma (Harar):*** Weizero Zewdie, has been one of the few women who embraced the Pentecostal movement in Harar. She has suffered social ostracism from her community because of her faith. She was one of the women who were involved in organizing underground fellowships in Harar. She provided financial and logistic support

including allowing her shop and her residence to be used as secret meeting places and home churches during the communist period.

***Tsegaye Demisse (Addis Ababa):*** Tsegaye is a well-learned man in the tradition of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. In the 1950's he came in touch with Meserete Sibhat the theologian and teacher who sought to introduce reform within the Orthodox Church. His evangelical convictions led to him to experience some troubles with the clergy, which forced him to leave the church. He and his likeminded friends founded an organization called, *Mahbere Bekuran*, the fellowship of the firstborn, which seeks to introduce reform and renewal within the national Church while keeping their Orthodox identities. He contributes several Scriptural articles mainly addressed to Orthodox audience in *Chora* , morning ray, of which he is the main editor.

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