

AN EMPOWERING AND RECONCILING PRESENCE:
PUBLIC MINISTRY IN THE ETHIOPIAN EVANGELICAL CHURCH MEKANE YESUS:
A BRIEF HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE REVIEW WITH SOME PROSPECTIVE REMARKS

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Abstract: There is no doubt that religion, depending on its core values, has a solid contribution to society's wellbeing and worldview. Max Weber has demonstrated how a dominant religion can affect the development of a given society depending on its teaching, attitudes, and values. The dominant ethical values and attitudes in religion may well reinforce the existing social economic and political culture or invite transformation in protesting against the present order of existence. We can clearly observe this assumption when we study the role of religion in Ethiopian Society in general. In some cases, religion was the main societal factor that influenced not only people's relationship but also the structural reality of the society. When closely studied it cannot be missed to observe how dominant religions had both empowering as well as disempowering effects on Ethiopian society in general.

PREFACE: THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN A GIVEN SOCIETY

There is no doubt that religion, depending on its core values, has a solid contribution to society's wellbeing and worldview.¹ Max Weber, in his famous book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, has well demonstrated how a dominant religion can affect the development of a given society depending on its teaching, attitudes, and values.² The dominant ethical values and attitudes in religion may well reinforce the existing social economic and political culture or invite transformation in protesting against the present order of existence. We can clearly observe this assumption when we study the role of religion in Ethiopian society in general. In some cases, religion was the main societal factor that influenced not only people's relationship but also the structural reality of the society. As can be observed, dominant religions had both empowering as well as disempowering effects on Ethiopian society.

THE GREAT DILEMMA OF INSTITUTIONALIZED RELIGIONS IN ETHIOPIAN POLITICS

Religion in Ethiopia has been a dominant factor in shaping both personal behavior and interpersonal and societal relationships. And this shaping relationship is not one directional but interdependent, mutually supportive, and sometimes antagonistic. Øyvind M. Eide, in his book *Revolution and Religion in*

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¹ Sociologists of religion argue that religion keeps the core of the society solid by providing meaning and redirecting feelings of conflicts and hostilities on the "evil one" and on the other hand prevents socially disruptive actions, like absolute power and oppression. Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. Joseph Ward Swain (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 2008).

² Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Stephen Kalberg (New York : Oxford University Press, 2009); *Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress*, eds. Lawrence E. Harrison and Samuel P. Huntington (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

Ethiopia, has written a remarkable study on this role of religion in Ethiopian politics and society.³ He has interpreted the theology, role, and experience of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, with special reference to the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, within the ethno-political, socio-political, and religio-political dynamics of the center and the periphery. He remarked that "the study of religion is absolutely essential to the understanding of the dynamics of Ethiopian society,"⁴ which points to the great role the churches have had in Ethiopian politics.

It is almost impossible to think about major Ethiopian cultures and polities without close understanding of their past religious cultures that comparatively define their identity and social relations until our present time. In the history of Ethiopian politics and formation of its empire, on the structural level, religion played an essential role. For example, Orthodox Christianity, which often was seen as the most profound expression of the national existence of traditional Ethiopia, "provided a theological legitimization of the Empire and of the Amhara claim to primacy in the centre-periphery structure of political power."⁵

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) played an essential role in the securing of national unity not only by assimilating different ethnic groups, but also by fusing itself with the state served as a core element of Ethiopian nationalism.⁶ It furnished unqualified ideological support for the political and economic hegemony of the central Abyssinian state power over the nation. Eide rightly argued that the EOC "carried the function of an ethnic ideology, but indeed an ethnic ideology that holds that their group should dominate the state."⁷ This implies that the EOC has been the source of authority of the Ethiopian state with the ideology needed to legitimize the right to rule, to expand, and to integrate other ethnic groups into the empire. For a long time, the EOC served not only to maintain the status quo but also to persuade deprived non-Amhara Tigreans to accept their position within the established power structure. Today Orthodox Christianity is almost indistinguishable from the Ethiopian state nationalism, that is exclusive in its nature and solely incarnated the vested political, economic, political, and cultural interests of Amhara Tigreans ethnic group.⁸

On the other hand, as a reaction to this relation of religion to politics, there are significant historical facts that demonstrate how, for instance, Islam became a religious expression of other conquered ethnic groups, like the Oromo, in re-establishing their identity in response to the challenge from Orthodox Christianity.⁹ Although the empowering effects of Islam in Ethiopia as a religion needs further objective study, there is no question that as opposed to Orthodox Christianity, which embodied establishment religion, Islam to some extent served non-Amhara Tigreans ethnic groups as anti-establishment religion and the religion of oppressed peoples.¹⁰

From the perspective of Evangelical Christianity, the mass conversion to Evangelical Christianity is also partly explained based by a similar situation. Evangelical Christianity became an alternative for the conquered people, who lost much of their social and religious institutions under the Abyssinian emperors' expansion policy. The introduction of Evangelical Christianity into Ethiopia helped those conquered ethnic groups to develop a sense of worth and pride in their cultural identity.¹¹

³ Øyvind M. Eide, *Revolution & Religion in Ethiopia: the Growth & Persecution of the Mekane Yesus Church, 1974-85* (Oxford: J. Currey; Athens, OH: Ohio University Press; Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2000).

⁴ Eide, *Revolution & Religion in Ethiopia*, 1.

⁵ Eide, 12.

⁶ Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia, 1270-1527*.

⁷ Eide, *Revolution & Religion in Ethiopia*, 313.

⁸ Abbas Haji Gnamo, "Islam, the Orthodox Church and Oromo Nationalism (Ethiopia)," *Cahiers d'Études africaines* 165 (2002):99-120.

⁹ John Spencer Trimmingham, *Islam in Ethiopia* (London, New York, Oxford University Press, 1952):101-102; Mohammed Hassen, *The Oromo of Ethiopia: a History, 1570-1860* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990):77.

¹⁰ Hassen, *Oromo of Ethiopia*.

¹¹ This growth of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus in these regions is closely associated with assumption, particularly among the Oromo of the western periphery. See Eide, *Church and Politics*, 15.

The growth of the Evangelical movement in the non-Orthodox regions of the south and southwest was mainly a result of their identification with the fate of the periphery. Rev. Gudina Tumsa, in his 1971 report on church growth in Ethiopia, remarked that this was one of the major factors that had contributed to the growth of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) in Ethiopia. The Scripture was translated into the vernacular language, large numbers of people were educated, and some democratic practices were introduced within the evolving new church organization. As a result, those people at the periphery gained a sense of worth and pride in their cultural identity.¹²

The EECMY, even under the over-centralized empire, recognized the rights of each ethnic group and encouraged vernacular worship services in their respective regions. Church leaders and clergies of different synods were elected from among the respective peoples. This indigenization of the church, besides enhancing evangelism, helped it to exercise influence early both on the national and the international scene even in the short time of its existence in Ethiopia at the time.

There is no doubt that Evangelical Christianity, in western, central and south-central regions, played an undisputable conscientization role among oppressed southern non-Amhara Tigrean ethnic groups, especially the Oromo people in terms of identity, politics, and economic development. For instance, the EECMY, on whom we are going to focus on this article, through its democratic structure and alternative indigenization character, as opposed to the Orthodox Christianity, has enormously empowered the oppressed ethnic groups through its various social, educational, and development projects.¹³

THE EMPOWERING ROLE OF THE ETHIOPIAN EVANGELICAL MEKANE YESUS IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

Historically, it was the empowering presence of the Evangelical pioneers that enhanced the expansion of the Evangelical Christianity in Ethiopia, especially among southern and western nations incorporated into Ethiopia by military power at the turn of the 19th century. The Evangelical churches were seen as an alternative to the disempowering religion of the Abyssinian conquering power. They were perceived by most southern people and especially the Oromos as a medium toward modernity and independency. In the middle of the immense social crisis and economic miseries created by the Abyssinian conquering power, Evangelical Christianity become an alternative religion that offers hope and future.¹⁴

For instance, this notion can be clearer, when we closely study the works of the pioneer Oromo Evangelical leaders. The earlier indigenous Oromo pioneer evangelists saw their work among their people not merely in terms of evangelization but also as a chance of introducing modern education to their people. Onesimos Nasib was a good example. For him, not only preaching the Gospel but also providing education to the Oromo in their own vernacular were passionate subjects. When he first arrived in Oromo land in 1904 after thirty-five years of exile, the first thing he did was establishing a school among the Oromo of Western Wallaga. His literary works integrated both the Gospel and the secular in a way that that created a great enthusiasm and a raised consciousness among the Oromo people. When writing about the situation to his friends in Sweden, he says, "We have nothing to fear from this side of the people. The land is open to us. The master comes with his servants, the father with his son, brothers with brothers and friends with friends and insists and begs us to teach them."¹⁵

The Oromo people and its leaders apparently felt that their dignity was restored by this work of Onesimos at the site of the conquest and Amhara cultural subordination.¹⁶ Later, concerns and activities of the indigenous local and national church leaders were always seen as a continuation of the work of the

¹² Eide, *Church and Politics*, 15.

¹³ For detailed discussion see Gemechu Olana, *Church under Challenge, The Socio-political Engagements of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus* (Berlin: Dissertation.de, 2006).

¹⁴ H. R. Wesenik, "Kirche und Mission in Äthiopien," in *die Hermannsburger Mission* in Jahre 1967.

¹⁵ Mekuria Bulcha, "Onesimos Nasib's pioneering contributions to Oromo writing" *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 4, no. 1 (1995): 24.

¹⁶ Arén, *Evangelical Pioneers in Ethiopia: Origins of the Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus* (Stockholm: EFS Förlaget, 1978), 424.

pioneer evangelists like Onesimos. Even today, this assumption has remained strong among all Oromo-speaking Evangelical Churches and leaders.¹⁷

The other example is the work of Rev. Gudina Tumsa. His theological thinking and work were practically based on indigenization with oppressed people of Ethiopian, including the Oromo people. By making a clear detachment from the prevailing stands of Orthodox Christianity and the pietistic mission tradition, he saw man and his needs as a totality, in which the verbal communication of the Gospel and the social mission of the Church are seen not to be contradictory, but rather to be the integral parts of the total responsibility of the Church.¹⁸

In most of his writings, he argued for a sound contextual and indigenous theology, a theology which takes the social-cultural, political, and economic reality seriously. In his Memorandum of 1972 for church leaders, Rev. Gudina reasoned that it is only by relating critically to its contextual social reality that the church develops in a given society toward its own identity and authenticity.¹⁹ That was what he tried to bring into the life of the church during his service as General Secretary of the EECMY, a daring attempt in the context of absolute authoritarian state, which finally led to his martyrdom.

The first indigenous Ethiopian Evangelical church leaders, including Rev. Gudina Tumsa, saw their role not as a mere religious leaders, but as responsible Christian citizens called out to demonstrate their Christian faith in action. For instance, the EECMY leaders soon after the official establishment in 1959, which gave the Church the legal status to work and expand its work through its synods, the Church, along with its modern education and medical work, became involved in diversified multi-million **dollar?** rural community development in different regions of Ethiopia, especially the western and southern regions, which has continued to the present day. Even before the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution, EECMY leaders were bold to raise the land reform issue and passed a resolution on the 1973 General Assembly of the EECMY, requesting the state for a land reform law.

Recently, when the Ethiopian political landscape changed, in the case of the Afaan Oromo for instance, when *Qubee*, a Latin-based alphabet for Afaan Oromo, was adopted in 1991, the EECMY leaders immediately transcribed the previous Oromo Bible written on Amharic phonetics to *Qubee* despite strong opposition from some church leaders and institutions influenced by the centralized Ethiopian state ideology. Beside Bible translation, the EECMY has made enormous investment vernacular Gospel and literacy literatures.

In relation to the language issues, when a conflict began in the Mekane Yesus congregations in the Addis Ababa in 1994 with the request of the Oromo-speaking members to have a worship service in their language that was rejected by local church leaders, the EECMY leadership intervened and made a clear policy decision favoring worship services in the vernacular language, despite strong resistance from church leaders and groups who were inclined toward centralistic and monolithic services.²⁰ In response to this problem, and generally to the evolving threat of ethnic and language conflict, the Executive Committee of the Church made a policy decision in January 1995, referring to the multi-ethnic character of both Ethiopia and the EECMY. It was decided that the language groups within the congregations, if they requested it, should have the right to have services in their respective languages. This has been a clear position of the EECMY, in the past even when the political landscape was hostile to such view; and the church has sustained this policy to the present day even though the policy divided the church body for

¹⁷ The union of the Oromo-speaking churches around the world is known as the "United Oromo Evangelical Churches" (UOEC). It was established in 1991 by diaspora and home-based Oromo speaking evangelical churches. Its objectives are to be "encouraging, supporting the Oromo Christians around the world through close relationships and various social and spiritual activities, cultivating the understanding of private and public commitment to lifelong learning and spiritual discipline."

¹⁸ See the 1972 documents of the EECMY, "On the Interrelation between Proclamation of the Gospel and Human Development."

¹⁹ Gudina Tumsa, *Witness and Discipleship: Leadership of the Church in Multi-Ethnic Ethiopia in a Time of Revolution* (Addis Ababa: Gudina Tumsa Foundation, 2003), 68-69.

²⁰ See a detailed discussion on this matter in Olana, *Church under Challenge*, 137-139. See also Anna Lena Schmidt, *Identity and Ethnicity in the Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus: An Anthropological Study of Religious Community* (MTh Thesis in cultural anthropology at the Department of Cultural Anthropology in Ethnology, Uppsala University May 2001), 73.

a while. It is this clear identification and respect of ethnic identity of each group that is contributing to the growth of the EECMY all over the country beside other spiritual and social factors.

In the past, the national church leaders choose to take interest in the needs and misery of their people, despite harsh political settings. To some extent, they saw it as their Christian duty to mobilize all possible sources at their disposal for the development of their people.²¹ The same trend has continued among some Evangelical church leaders, which should not be overlooked but needs more objective study and documentation. Their engagement was not merely a means of evangelization, but a sincere indignation with the fate of helpless majority out of the pure Christian love and liberty. Lacking, however, is prophetic engagement based on sound critical theological reflection and thorough consideration of full participation by the people concerned, particularly active involvement of the congregations in development work and prophetic ministry.

THE CURRENT EVANGELICAL CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT AS AN EMPOWERING PHENOMENON

The current Evangelical charismatic movement, which is characterized with wholistic healing, exorcism, and prophecy, has its own empowering effect on the life of individual and the society in general. It has brought a new experience of fellowship among all ages and groups of people in which everyone is acknowledged and has its place. This new experience of fellowship also created strong spiritual solidarity and brotherhood among all Evangelical Christians of different denomination and regions, despite some tensions that reflects the overall political reality. For instance, more than any time in the history of evangelical Christianity among the Oromo people, the current charismatic movement has brought strong and effective indigenization and enculturation processes to the Christian faith. Christian songs and worship services with traditional tunes flourish in every part of the region in Oromo language. The same is true for other major southern ethnic groups.

This Evangelical charismatic movement that has radically influenced the current EECMY congregations has also brought a limited change in the life of the general population, particularly among the young people in terms of social relations and moral ethics. One of the main features of the charismatic movement is its strong resistance against a traditional authoritarian relationship and its strong option for participatory form of system, particularly in worship and the church leadership, the social impact of which is undisputable in the larger community. In terms of personal or social ethic, biblical ethical norms and spirituality, such as avoidance of adultery, criminality, alcohol and violence has got a new attention, which directly has an implication on the life of the community, especially under the current HIV/AIDS pandemic destroying a life of millions of people. The attention to prayer and healing ministry, in the context of helplessness and all kind of social, political, and economic misery, and marginalization has given the people the power of hope, endurance, and belief in the future.²²

In fact, this feature of the charismatic movement, particularly the emphasis on healing and reconciling ministry of the Holy Spirit, to see life in its totality, is related to the existing traditional religious culture, which has been one of the main factors for the rapid acceptance among all age groups of people resulted in radical church growth.

One of the elements that should be noticed, however, from the dominant features of the Evangelical charismatic movements in Ethiopia, to same extent including the EECMY, is their reluctance to engage in social actions, or prophetic ministry. Unlike the classical revival movements in the church history, particularly in Europe and North America, social concern²³ among some Evangelical churches influenced by the charismatic movements is very low or nonexistent. Despite the charismatic liturgy, which has a more egalitarian, empowering, and democratizing effect on its participants, the adherents of

²¹ EECMY, *Development Policy and Planning* (1993), 25.

²² Lutheran World Federation Department of World Service, *Ethiopia: Annual Report* (Addis Ababa: Lutheran World Federation - World Service, 2008).

²³ Here social concerns refer specifically to social actions like politics, and social and economic developments often emphasized among evangelical ecumenical churches, including the EECMY.

the Evangelical charismatic movement are generally indifferent to the social implication of the gospel and take no interest in politics.²⁴ Among current dominant Evangelical churches and church leaders, social and political activism, in contrary to the tradition of Orthodox Christianity and the EECMY social teachings, is generally viewed as something "unholy game" having nothing to do with Christian faith. This notion has strongly influenced most of the current EECMY congregations and its leader, although the official stand of the church is quite in contrary.

This phenomenon of the Evangelical charismatic movement is related to some degree to the dualistic, apocalyptic, and pessimistic worldview inherent in Pentecostal doctrine that locates the socio-political problems not in history but in a spiritual world and preaches an apocalyptic gospel in which world is destined for immanent destruction.²⁵ This view leaves little room for any social and political action because of its pessimistic view of life.²⁶ On the other hand, social disappointments and the increasingly deplorable situation of poverty, social crises, and political repression strengthen this conviction among the majority of the young Ethiopian Christians. Even though the charismatic movement has transformed Evangelical Christianity in Ethiopia, including the EECMY, in the case of structural social concerns and public prophetic ministry, there is a clear crisis in which faith in action, particularly love expressed in seeking justice is replaced with individualistic sentimental spiritualism.²⁷ In fact, we should not overstate this negative trend among charismatic Evangelical believers without considering the existing socio-cultural, economic, and political realities that usually reinforce passivism and fatalistic views in terms of social action. The repressive Ethiopian state, past or present, does not allow any kind of direct critical social action that presupposes justice and human freedom as a fundamental right of every citizen. However, the Church of Christ has clear mandate for public ministry here in this world by being salt and light of Christ, despite the resistance of the sinful world and the demonic forces.

TOWARD A RECONCILING PRESENCE: A PROSPECT FOR A PUBLIC MINISTRY WITHIN THE CURRENT POLITICAL REALITY OF ETHIOPIA

REDISCOVERING A CRITICAL PUBLIC MINISTRY

Despite the above historical traditions, most EECMY congregations are not able to integrate some of the theological insights developed during the seventies about church public services into their local ministry. All development work and social engagements are resourced at large scale through centralized national or district development departments resourced mainly through donor agencies, which has alienated most congregations from engaging directly unless they are in some way beneficiaries. There is a loss of interest in authentic Lutheran theological thinking yielding a lack of critical socio-political and economic engagement within the EECMY today. Despite deplorable human rights situations and the undemocratic nature of the Ethiopian government that has alienated majority of the population, the EECMY is still hesitant to engage in a more critical prophetic ministry, in which faith and action are integrated. For the hesitance, the experience of persecution and the current regime's limitation on civic organization could be

²⁴ See also the same situation described by N. L. Gerrard, "The Holiness Movement in Southern Appalachia, in *Speaking in Tongues: A Guide to Research on Glossolalia*, ed. Watson E. Mills (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1986), 213. See also N. Wright, "A Pilgrimage in Renewal," in Thomas Allan Smail et al., *Charismatic Renewal: The Search for a Theology* (London: SPCK, 1995), 31

²⁵ A.H. Anderson, *Moya, The Holy Spirit in an African Context* (Pretoria : University of South Africa, 1991), 116-120

²⁶ Anderson, *Moya*.

²⁷ Jürgen Moltmann voices his concern by asking some critical questions. He criticized the neglect among charismatic of the charismata and asks, "Where are the charismata of the 'charisma tics' in the everyday world, in the peace movement, in the movements for liberation, in the ecology movement? If charismata are not given to us so that we can flee from this world into a world of religious dreams, but if they are intended to witness to the liberating lordship of Christ in this world's conflicts, then the charismatic movement must not become a non-political religion, let alone a de-politicised one." *The Spirit of Life: a Universal Affirmation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 186.

factors, but there could be more to this which needs more critical objective study and is beyond this brief article.

On the other hand, because of a dualistic and pessimistic worldview inherent in the charismatic movement, most of the EECMY congregations including its leadership are being overtaken by influential conservative tendencies emphasizing an "otherworldly" faith – a one-sided Christianity exclusively emphasizing an individual's life and future destination and ignoring the reality of the social dimension. This is a dominant trend among all Ethiopian Evangelical Churches. In fact, seen from a sociological and psychological point of view, such an otherworldly view of a Christian faith, including the aspiration for healing, is related, at least in part, to the existential social, political, and economic reality of the people. Turning to very individualistic otherworldly faith could be a form of assertiveness and resistance, admittedly in spiritual terms, to the status quo in the people's struggle for a better life - a search for health and well-being. However, as followers of Christ, we are called to witness to the liberating lordship of Christ, concretely, here in this world, not to flee from this world.

Such assertiveness and resistance in searching for health and well-being should not end at the spiritual level, but ought to be applied also in day-to-day life, here and now, in all aspects of life. There is no doubt that the current charismatic worship in the EECMY has reactivated traditional egalitarian relationships by immersing all in an equalising and holistic act of worship. Hence, it has a democratising and empowering effect in the congregations which should be encouraged and brought into the real socio-political arena of society. This democratising and empowering aspect of charismatic worship should be used for motivating people for collective social action in their specific local contexts.

The EECMY, I believe, must find a way for its congregations and members to take practical and concrete social, political, and economic action, depending on locally available means. Indeed, this would not be any easy task under the current political landscape which limits any kind of objective critical public engagement; however, this situation should not be an excuse a lack of engagement. A method should be sought for a development of sound contextual theological insights, social teachings, and knowhow for a genuine public prophetic ministry that not only criticises but also invites creative transformation and change toward democratic civic society.

For the broader influence and continuity of the public ministry of the church, prophetic ministry should not be limited to work of a specific department but should be encouraged as a part of a local congregation's ministry in which each congregation could be a catalyst for change and development in its concrete setting and reality. For this purpose, pastors, evangelists, and church elders should be equipped and encouraged to engage in critical action, addressing the issues of society, but without associating themselves with specific political organisations or any kind of ideology.

Like Rev. Gudina Tumsa and his co-ministers did in the past, it is a call and duty of all EECMY church leaders and theologians to reinterpret the Bible from the ultimate truth of God's design for humanity and, based on our present experience, to establish sound theological and Scriptural support and inspiration for social, political, cultural, and economic justice and transformation. This cannot be done without proper clarification of church's public theology, especially Christian ethics from the EECMY perspective. Focus should be given to develop a clear articulation Evangelical ethics both for Christian morality and the church's calling to public life in dialogue with its Lutheran tradition. Well-reflected, coherent, and persuasive contextual theological resources and teachings are very essential for the church body to engage in prophetic public ministry with integrity and uniform biblical principle. And such resources will come out of seminars like this, which should be further supported and strengthened. The overall purpose of such an undertaking is to unmask all the evils that exist in society and its structure through addressing the world according to God's law, by pointing to and demanding an alternative just and democratic civic society. This can happen only when the church gets its public theology right from the perspective of its core vision of mission and purpose.

EMBOLDEN RECONCILING PRESENCE

Today, lack of viable and strong opposition parties, persistence of the past ethnic ideology of dominance, and the endless schism and irresponsible divides among various political groups have enormous disempowering effect on the general population. The current disempowering political reality in the Ethiopian state cannot only be attributed to the current oppressive regime but also to the lack of authentic and unifying leadership among all the opposition groups. The lack of creative and imaginative solutions to the humanitarian and political problems of the Ethiopian state is not only because of the predatory political culture, but also because of bondage by all the opposition parties to that specific culture in a very sad way. As a result, the current total estrangement and alienation among various political groups at large is not only strengthening the power of the oppressive regime but is reinforcing the already full-fledged cynicism and hopelessness of our society in terms of political freedom.

To overcome this unnecessary schism and disengagement among all opposing political groups, an attempt should be made to invite all, including the ruling party, to the table for a sincere dialogue and reconciliation, by acknowledging the past failure but also by grasping the future with openness and commitment to the interests of the Ethiopian people in general. Here, the faith community can play a constructive and reconciliatory role on various levels by simply challenging and inviting all concerned groups to a civil discourse.

First of all, the church as a community that believes not only in the God of Good Friday but also in the God of resurrection and new life should boldly echo its voice of justice, reconciliation, transformation, and unity among all people. The heart of Christian message is the message of love, justice, and reconciliation. Salvation is not a mere cancellation of sin and guilt, but includes rebirth, sanctification, and new creation. Reconciliation is the foundation of salvation which is the very heart of the New Testament message. The role and function of a church of Christ cannot be different from this task, be it in the spiritual or the social dimension. Here we are neither saving the world nor reconciling the world to God. However, what God has done in Christ can and should inspire all believers to subsequent reconciling activity in word and deed.

As peace between God and humanity is established in the cross of Christ, being agent of reconciliation in our community is the very mission of the church. The church as a Christian community is a place of reconciliation, a practice which should be taken out into the world in word and deeds. However, to be the agent of peace and reconciliation, the church has the obligation boldly to show itself to be the church by venturing across the political, cultural, and ideological boundaries. The social mission of Christians can only be understood as in service of reconciliation, as in service of peace.

This can be done primarily by helping to develop a right perception of culture and ethnicity against ethnocentrism, cultural oppression, and resentment so that people learn to respect and accept each other. In a country like Ethiopia where suppression of ethnic identity, cultural oppression, and hatred have been dominant trends, the process of reconciliation requires a fundamental attitudinal change and an openness and right perception of one's cultural and ethnic identity. On the other hand, a church should continue boldly to engage in active mediation and reconciliation between conflicting groups as well as to teach reconciliation, forgiveness, and tolerance that challenges believers to be a reconciling presence in their given community.

Secondly, the church must promote reconciliatory love in the community in which it exists. God refuses to abandon the world of sin and death in all its alienated darkness but, on contrary become involved in it even its direct consequences, suffers for it, strives for it, and in conquering liberates it. The Ethiopian Evangelical churches should take stand by refusing to withdraw from active responsible Christian social action because of irresponsible division and disempowering cynicisms in our community. Rather, Evangelical churches must boldly preach in word and deed the ethics of the Gospel. The church must continue to struggle to live in unity, overcome divisions, and welcome others. The church, as its main values and practices, should refuse hostility of any form in our society, but foster civil dialogue and intelligent discussion.

No democracy can survive, or even be established without the practice of forgiveness, reconciliation, and tolerance among the peoples who have experienced hostility and mistrust for centuries. The Christian understanding of human relationships, which lies in the doctrine of grace, can make an important contribution to bring about mature and genuine democracy. But this must first be fully experienced among the believers in the church. Therefore, the church should be a catalyst of reconciliation in each society through its teachings and services, not an excluding and divisive entity. For the benefit of our society in general, the Ethiopian Evangelical churches have a social responsibility to help in word and deed to create an environment for respectful conflict resolution through persuasion, dialogue, and encouraging imaginative solutions to conflicts.

Thirdly, based on its core vision and message, the church should boldly strive for reconciliation in our divided community. God graciously makes people active and gives them the right and ability to be reconciled with God. We have received reconciliation (Rom. 5:11) with God's invitation (2 Cor. 5:20). God was the victim of our rebellion and sin. He is also the sole initiator of salvation by making us active through the Holy Spirit in being made right with him. By refusing vindictiveness, as church of Christ, the EECMY and its members, should promote the spirit forgiveness and reconciliation that creates environment for admittance of guilt and genuine repentance. Despite all the temptations and external pressures, the EECMY should continue tirelessly to identify itself with the cross of Christ and boldly reject the religion and ideology of alienation, fear, and revenge. It is only in this manner that the church remains a beacon of Christ, which points to God's new reality and his holy Law.

Finally, when engaged to such reconciliatory activities, the Church should also guard itself from being a tool for political groups or as instrument to press out dissent. It should boldly disapprove a false ideology of reconciliation which undermines true transformation. First of all, it must challenge the extreme privatizing tendency of Christian faith in among all Ethiopian Evangelical Christians which stresses the individual and the transcendental while dismissing the social aspect of Christian life. In the past, Church leaders like Rev. Gudina Tumsa struggled to help the church and its clergy to avoid the temptation of compliance with the status quo in reinterpretation of the Christian values consciously or unconsciously in such a way to reinforce the existing order and domination of the people. That is what made the EECMY the church of the periphery, the voice of the voiceless majority. At all opportunities, churches should continue preaching in word and deed the transforming power of Jesus, who was in solidarity with the poor and the marginalized in demanding the reorientation of values and the transformation of society. Jesus preached the Kingdom of God, as establishment of new order, not a mere inner mystical world ditched from reality. Therefore, the EECMY and other Ethiopian churches are obligated responsibly to reject an exclusive individualistic interpretation and understanding of the death and resurrection of Jesus or view them as mere subjective experiences.

In our context, there is the temptation of religion sentimentalism, which usually avoids responsibility is societal matters. This is not the reconciliation we are speaking about. We all should renounce any religious sentimentalism that supports oppressive structures or creates an obstacle for genuine change. God reconciled the world to himself not by mere cancelation of our debt, but paying it in full through the person of Christ. Consequently, God graciously invited us to life and a new beginning through forgiveness. Forgiveness is a costly initiative creating a new undeserved opportunity for the wrong doer. It opens the door for repentance. Here, the past wrong will not be denied but deprived of its power to shape the future. Hence, our church must avoid any cheap concept of reconciliation that does not admit the past wrong or that does not include contrition and repartition. Avoiding conflicts, temporary peace, or suppressing the truth is dishonoring God.

Forgiveness and reconciliation involve the idea of grace. But forgiveness and reconciliation alone are superficial. Both need justice as their companion. Without attempts to restore dignity and equality, the brokenness created by the conflict continues to fester. It is when injustice is rectified that reconciliation and peace becomes the prevailing atmosphere of security and respect between all parties. It is when the wrong doer is released from his or her guilt and the wronged is freed from bitterness and hatred that suspicion and fear will be removed and replaced with peace.