

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church: History, Doctrine, and Challenges

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ኢትዮጵያ ታቦታህ እደዊሃ ሃበ እግዚአብሔር
መዝሙር ዳዊት ፮፭: ፫፩ Psalm 68:31

Given the present challenges the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (henceforth EOTC) has encountered, this article intends to critically examine the internal and external foes of the Church and expose the *agent provocateur* mission to emasculate and if possible destroy the EOTC, and I will do so by way of discussing the history, doctrine, and challenges of the Church. However, at the outset, I like to make my position clear that I happen to be a scholar and a professor but not literati in theology; in fact, admittedly, my knowledge of theology is minimal and negligible, to say the least.

Moreover, I would like to make it clear that I will not apologize to anyone for defending the EOTC, and it is for the following reasons: 1) The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Orthodox Church is an embodiment of moral and ethical teachings as well as values rooted in solid Ethiopian mores and traditions; 2) the Church has massively and greatly contributed to the material and intellectual facets of the Ethiopian civilization; 3) the Church has consistently and without wavering stood against all enemies of Ethiopia by sending Tabot (replica of the Ark of the Covenant) to war fronts and in some instances by sacrificing its own leaders while vociferously advocating for Ethiopian sovereignty and independence. Furthermore, it should also be clear to my readers that I would equally advocate on behalf of other Ethiopian religions such as Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism if they are ridiculed and attacked.

I am not a pious orthodox in the strict sense of the term but I happen to be a member of the EOTC and I have great admiration and respect to the tenets, teachings, and festivals of the Church, and I have no doubt in my mind that my sentiment is shared by the fifty six million Tewahedo adherents collectively known as *Me'emenan* (ግድግዳን believers/mass congregation). The EOTC is not only a religious institution and a faith order, but it is also a kernel of culture and history; it is indeed inextricably linked together to the ancient and medieval history of Ethiopia and remains to this day in symbolizing and representing what its followers identify with. For this apparent reason, thus, the EOTC plays a pivotal role in the life and psychological makeup of the *Me'emenan* and the latter embrace their Church and jealously guard it against all detractors.

Brief Historical Synopsis of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church

The EOTC is one of the oldest Christian churches in the world, and as a result Ethiopia was known as the oldest Christian Kingdom in spite of the fact that there are also other faiths in Ethiopia other than Christianity. However, given the different accounts and perspectives of historians, the advent of Christianity in Ethiopia and the beginnings of the Church are subject to interpretation and controversy.

Most Ethiopians in the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, and beyond have taken it for granted, and I might add without being critical, that Christianity in Ethiopia was anchored following Ezana, the first Christian king, in the first half of the 4th century. Some historians have a slightly different view and attribute the coming of Christianity to Ethiopia to one Ethiopian eunuch, a treasurer for Queen Hendake (aka Gersamot and/or Candace), while sojourning in Jerusalem met Philip the Evangelist (not the Apostle) and he was subsequently baptized by him. Thus, the argument continues, the treasurer of Queen Hendake was the first Christian convert, and after he returned to his homeland Ethiopia, he, in turn, undertook the mission of converting other Ethiopians to Christianity.

One other version of the history of Christianity in Ethiopia is also associated with St. Matthew, one of the twelve Apostles, or one of the four Evangelists according to Christian tradition, preached in Ethiopia and died in Ethiopia in 74 Common Era (CE) and it is highly probable that St. Matthew baptized a significant number of Ethiopians before he died. Now, if we put together the story of the treasurer of Queen Hendake and that of St. Matthew's preaching in Ethiopia, there is only a distance of two decades between the Queen's end of her reign (50 or 52 CE) and the death of the Evangelist. In the first two decades of the first century CE, thus, some Christian sects had established themselves in present-day Tigray Regional State of Ethiopia, and it seems to me that this argument is more convincing, viable, and plausible.

Therefore, depending on plausible historical accounts and logical inferences, we can with confidence assert that there were Christians in Ethiopia three centuries before Ezana became Christian. There is no doubt that that Emperor Ezana (320-360) was the first Christian king of Ethiopia but we don't have any credible evidence that mass baptism followed the king's conversion to Christianity, but there is no doubt that those Christian Ethiopians, who for the most part conducted their prayers underground, now came out to the public square without fear and intimidation. This was a great historical event in Ethiopian history because after Ezana embraced Christianity, the latter faith became official religion of Ethiopia and the first Ethiopian church was established and for the last one thousand and seven hundred years, the Church occupied a center stage position in the annals of Ethiopian history.

On top of the above backdrop on the advent of Christianity in Ethiopia, it is important to acknowledge the harbingers of official Christianity and the establishment of the incipient Ethiopian church. According to legend and some documentary evidence, two young brothers by the name Frumentius and Aedasius, whose ship wrecked on the Red Sea, were brought to the court of Ezana, and later the elder Frumentius (known as Freminatos in Ethiopia) became the first bishop of the first Ethiopian church in Askum after he was consecrated by Pope Athanasius in 328 CE. Apparently, Athanasius was the protagonist who argued against Arius at the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE; only three years after Nicaea, thus, the new Ethiopian Christian Tewahedo Church was founded as followers of Athanasius and ever since the Church was headed by an Egyptian bishop until it became autocephalous.

The EOTC further consolidated after the Council of Chalcedon in 451 CE and the coming of the nine saints to Ethiopia around 480 CE. Most of these saints came from Syria and other neighboring countries then ruled by the Byzantine Roman Empire of late antiquity; in some oral history and narrative with respect to the saints they are often confused as Romans due to Roman hegemony but most of them are of Western Asia or what we call today 'middle eastern' origins; they were anti-Chalcedon and they were persecuted by the powers-that-be of the Roman Empire, fled their respective countries and found sanctuary in Ethiopia. Indeed, they were well received by the Christian king Kaleb (Ella Atsbeha) and soon after they began to acclimatize the Ethiopian environment; they began learning Geez and studying the local culture as well as finding monasteries as shown below:

Name of Saint	Place of Monastery
Abba Pentelewon	Aksum
Abba Liqanos	Aksum
Abba Aregawi (aka Ze-Michael)	Debre Damo
Abba Afse	Yeha
Abba Guba	Mudama
Abba Gerima (aka Ishaq)	Adwa
Abba Tsehma	Sedenya
Abba Yam'ata	Gere'alta
Abba Alef	Bi'isa (at Mereb River)

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All nine saints were followers of St. Pachomius (292-348 CE) who pioneered Christian cenobite monasticism, the gregarious community life of monks as opposed to solitary hermitage. St. Pachomius (aka St. Pachome) was very much revered by the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches as well as the Catholic Church; and he is known as 'the renewer' or re-creator by the Lutheran Church.

All nine saints have greatly contributed to the enhancement of the EOTC doctrine and in baptizing and educating the Ethiopian people, but among these saints, it is Abba Aregawi who stands out in terms of expanding evangelism and the scholastic domain of the early Ethiopian Church; it is with his encouragement that the first schools of the EOTC emerged and ultimately produced giant theologians and learned men like Yared (later canonized as St. Yared), who is credited for composing musical notations for the first time ever (see Yared's musical notations in Appendix 1).

Ultimately the EOTC became an autocephalous church by the agreement reached with the Egyptian Coptic Church in 1948 but the road of independence for the EOTC was paved by Emperor Haile Selassie when he founded the Theology College of the Holy Trinity Church in 1944. In 1951, an Ethiopian archbishop by the name Basilios was consecrated as head of the Ethiopian Church and in eight years, he became the first Ethiopian patriarch of the EOTC. In 1971, Abuna Theophilus succeeded Abuna Basilios but he was arrested by the military junta of

Abuna Teklehaimanot to lead the Ethiopian Church but the ignorant and disgruntled Derg government officials were confronted by the Holy Synod, the top echelon of the Church. The Synod of the EOTC, in no uncertain terms, told the Derg that it has not removed Abuna Theophilus and did not know of his whereabouts and hence would not accept Abuna Teklehaimanot as patriarch of Ethiopia.

Although the Synod was firm in its decision against the Derg, it nonetheless confirmed (perhaps inadvertently) the appointment of the archbishop of Gondar, Abuna Merkorios, who at the time was member of the Ethiopian Parliament (then known as Shengo) and who was closely affiliated to the military regime. Abuna Merkorios presided over the EOTC during the entire period of the Derg's Red Terror without ever condemning the fascistic atrocities against the Ethiopian people in which thousands upon thousands of Ethiopians were murdered. But in 1991, after the Derg was toppled by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), Abuna Merkorios was compelled to seek asylum and Bishop Paulos, who led the Ethiopian Church at the Riverside Church in New York, became the Patriarch of the Ethiopian Church until his death in 2012. In February 2013, Abuna Mathias was confirmed as the sixth Patriarch of the EOTC since the latter gained its complete independence from the parent church in Alexandria.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church is a highly organized religious institution and it is administered by a complex hierarchy that, in turn, ordains priests, manages the day-to-day routine religious observations and services, and ensures the efficacy of Sunday sermons. The leaders of the Church, as Stuart Munro-Hay puts it, "are persons who have acquired great experience in the church liturgy, songs, hymns, church calendar, and so on." Moreover, Munro-Hay explains the differences in the structure of the hierarchy from place to place. "These titles and functions of the hierarchy at Aksum are not universally applicable, there being some slight differences at, for example, Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan. In Addis Ababa, the office equivalent of *Afa nebura'ed* is *liqa tebebt*, and that equivalent to *qese gabaz* is *aleqa* (the administrator of a church). The *megabi* is entitled instead *aggafari*, which can be translated as chamberlain; he performs such tasks as supervising entry into a church, or preceding the deacons and priests carrying the host of a dying man for absolution."

"To sum up, says Munro-Hay, the national church is headed by" [the]
Patriarch
Liqa papas
Papas

In Aksum, the hierarchy is as follows:

Nebura'ed

(Choir)	(Ordained priests And deacons in charge Of church services)	(Special officials)
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<i>Afa nebura'ed</i>	<i>Qese gabaz</i>	<i>Kere geta kelebas</i>
<i>Mere geta megabit</i>	<i>Afa qese gebaz</i>	<i>Liqa kahlenat</i>
<i>Liqa mezemiran</i>	<i>Liqa diyaqonat</i>	
<i>Kegn geta gra geta</i>	<i>Mechene</i>	
<i>Male'aka sahay</i>	<i>Diyaqon</i>	
<i>Male'aka ghenet</i>		
<i>Liqa maimaran [memran/memhran]</i>		
<i>Liqa hiruan</i>		
<i>Liqa berhanat</i>		
<i>Liqa Tiguhan</i>		
<i>Re'sa dabir</i>		
<i>Male'aka Sibhat</i>		
<i>Male'aka selam</i>		
<i>Male'aka mihret</i>		
<i>Mechene.</i> ¹		

Doctrine of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC)

The faith and teachings of the EOTC emanates from the Judea-Christian tradition by which the Church accepted the Old Testament (generally referred to as *Orit አገሻ* in Ethiopia) and the New Testament, and the latter two books that make up the Ethiopian Bible, in fact, were translated from Greek into Geez during the reigns of Ezana and Kaleb respectively. The complete Ethiopian Bible was thus in existence since the founding of the Ethiopian Church, although surprisingly a significant number of Ethiopians, including the congregation of the EOTC, don't have knowledge about the Ethiopian Bible which consists 81 books as opposed to the Protestant Bible that comprises 66 books.

In due course of its early evolution, the EOTC, following the Council of Nicaea (325 CE) and the Council of Chalcedon (October 8 to November 1, 451 CE), polished its doctrine and dogma that I like to briefly address here. It is in the latter council that the real schism in the Christian religion occurred; subsequently, the Ethiopians, Egyptians, Syrians, Armenians, and Indians (Oriental Orthodox group) began to identify themselves with the belief that Christ's nature is "one incarnate nature of God the word" as opposed to the "two natures of Christ" doctrine held by the other Christian groups in the Chalcedon conference. The two groups were unable to reconcile their differences and they had gone separate ways. After the split the oriental orthodox group were labeled as monophysite to mean "one nature of Christ" in its superficial sense but the cynical attribute of the concept to the non-Chalcedon group was meant to convey the neglect or lack of recognition of the two aspects (human and divine) in Christ, when in fact, on the contrary, the Oriental group did recognize the humanity and divinity of Christ but they strongly argued that the two aspects were united and once they become one, they were inseparable and as such they must be defined as one indivisible whole.

In order to avoid misconception and confusion on the so-called monophysite, thus, the Ethiopian Church along with its sister churches maintained that “mia” as opposed to “mono” stands for a composite unity and not simply as elemental unity as attested by the Council. Moreover, in order to clearly define the differences between ‘monophysis’ and ‘miaphysis’, the Ethiopian Church called itself *Tewahedo* (ተዋህዶ), a term meaning “made one” and “which is the best expression conveying the faith of the Church, since it emphasizes the inseparable unity of the Godhead and manhood in the person of Christ.”²

In the above doctrinal argument, the word “inseparable” is important, because in terms of depicting the nature of Christ the Chalcedon and non-Chalcedon groups may sound speaking the same language when they underscore the divinity and manhood of Christ, but in the case of the Chalcedon group, it was obvious that they have treated the divinity and manhood of the son of God separately and inferred in their logical deduction that Christ had two natures, as present-day Catholics and Protestants preach in their sermons.

To further elucidate the controversy on the nature of Christ and reinforce the position of the EOTC on this issue, it is imperative to cite Pope Shenoda’s well-articulated reasoning in some length: “The Orthodox concept concerning the nature of Christ, he argues, is the fact that “The Lord Jesus Christ is God himself, the Incarnate Logos who took to himself a perfect manhood. His Divine nature is one with his human nature yet without mingling, confusion or alteration; a complete hypostatic union...As this union is permanent, nor divided nor separated we say in the liturgy that his Godhead never separated from his manhood for a single moment nor even for a twinkle of an eye...The Divine nature (God the Word) was united with the human nature which he took of the Virgin Mary by action of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit purified and sanctified the Virgin’s womb so that the Child to whom she gave birth would inherit nothing of the original sin; the flesh formed of her blood was united with the Only-Begotten son. This unity took place from the first moment of the Holy Pregnancy in the Virgin’s womb. **As a result of the unity of both natures – the Divine and the human – inside the Virgin’s womb, one nature was formed out of both: ‘The one Nature of God the Incarnate Logos’ as St. Cyril called it.**”³ (Emphasis in the original)

The most important, powerful and logically sound argument promoted by the EOTC on the nature of Christ is as follows: “If you separate the natures after the union and say that Christ is in two natures, you will be confronted with serious problems. You should have to admit, for instance, that Christ was crucified merely as a man and that therefore he did not redeem the world, for God alone is to accomplish the world’s redemption. In brief, it is held that Christ, in acting acted as a united being, not separately as man or separately as God.”⁴ While this argument is solid and strong as I have already underscored, in my opinion it would have been much more powerful had the non-Chalcedon group, including the EOTC, have also included the reasoning that Christ would have not resurrected after his death on the cross had his humanity was separated from his divinity; it is the indivisibility of his divine and human nature that enabled him to have risen from the dead. Thus far, I have not witnessed such a supporting thesis in the EOTC doctrine in general and its liturgy and teachings in particular.

However, in an effort to make its position clear on its doctrine, the EOTC also clearly defines sacraments and its differences with the Protestant Church: “The sacraments are not mere symbols and ‘signs of the new covenant’ (as some Protestants say), but according to the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, ‘there is a real efficacy in the sacraments themselves, and that they truly bring invisible graces to the believers. There are seven sacraments: baptism, confirmation, penance, Holy Communion, unction of the sick, matrimony, and the holy orders.”⁴ The seven sacraments of the EOTC and other sister Orthodox churches, by and large, are also shared by the Catholic Church, but the Protestants observe only two sacraments, namely, baptism and Eucharist.

Although the EOTC is part and parcel of the five oriental Orthodox churches mentioned above and also shares faith-related creed with other Eastern Orthodox churches, it is in many ways unique in terms of engagement in practical religious observations such as Festival of the True Holy Cross or Meskel (መስቀል), Epiphany or Timket (ጥምቅት)⁵, and the multitude of fasting observations, including Hudade (ሁዳዴ or ዓብደ ጸም), a total of 55 days in three separate periods; Tsome Herkal (ጸመህርቃል), eight days, commemorating an early Christian figure; Tsome Arb’a (ጸመአርባ), forty days to Lent; and Tsome Himmamat (ጸመሕመማት), seven-day holy week. There are also other fasting days by which EOTC adherents cleanse themselves spiritually (and by default maintain their body health), and they are the Fast of the Apostles or Tsome Hawaria (ጸመሃዋርያ), the Fast of Redemption or Tsome Dihnet (ጸመድክነት) on Wednesdays (when Christ was charged) and on Fridays (when Christ was crucified); the fast of the Dormition, associated literally with the Falling Asleep of the Blessed Virgin and figuratively with the Assumption of St. Mary; the forty-day fast before Christmas; the Fast of Nineveh (ጸመነነዌ), which lasts for only three days; and Fast of Gahad of Timket (የጥምቅት ገሃድ), a fast on the eve of epiphany.

The above analysis is an abridged form of the doctrine and order of the EOTC, and it is not within the scope of this article to discuss the EOTC and its dogma in depth and at length. With the above notes, thus, I move on to the challenges the Ethiopian Church encountered and to some proposed solutions that I will present at the very end of this study.

Challenges of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC)

As indicated earlier, the EOTC is now faced with formidable challenges. These challenges are very complex and require a craftily designed investigative discourse in order to correctly identify the problems and come up with the right solution. In my opinion, the challenges are many and variegated, and although it may be difficult to diagnose the challenges within the Church itself – from the Holy Synod to the bottom hierarchy of the administration of the EOTC – it is easy to analyze and discuss the relatively visible problems the Church faced presently. Before I delve into the parameters of the challenges, however, in an effort to reinforce my thesis with respect to the challenging foes of the EOTC, I like to quote a relevant paragraph from መር ደስሐቅ (Mar Yishaq)⁶ religious guide book, as shown below,

ግእዝ: ወተዓቀብ እምኡ ንብቦተ ዕል ወተመለ ዕልዋን

አሚኛ: የሚገኝ ፍቃድን መቅረብ ከመመልከት ተከልክል

ግእዝ: ዑቅ ከምእቀርብ ሃቤሃ፡፡ እስመ ዝንቱ ግብር ወእቱ ዘየስተናሥኦ ላዕሌከ ፈድፋድ እምግብር ለመንፈስ ፀረፍ

አሚኛ: ገልፀህ አትይ፡፡ ከሥራ በሚቸደም ሥራ አንድም የሚገኝ ፍቃድን መቅረብ ከመመልከትህ የተነሣ፡፡ አንድምበግድ መንፈስ ፀረፍን የሚያነሳሳውይህ ሥራ ነውና ስነ ፍጥረት ነው፡፡

ግእዝ: ወእምክመኦ ፅግብከ ለነፍስከ እቲትሐንቅቅ

አሚኛ: (የነብያት የሐዋርያትን መጽሐፍ ከመመልከትህ በኋላ) የሚገኝ ፍቃድን መጽሐፍ በመመልከት አትደላደል አትቀማጠል፡፡

ግእዝ: ወባሕቱ ቅረብኝ በአንብቦ ትእዛዛት አምላካዊያት፡፡ ከመእትነ ስሕ፡፡

አሚኛ: የአምላክን ነገር የሚገናኝ የነብያት የሐዋርያትን መጽሐፍ ወደ መመልከት ቅረብ እንጂ፡፡ አንድምፆር ተነሥቶብህ የምትመለከትበት አጥብቃል እንዳታዝን፡፡

ግእዝ: እስመኦእምሮ ምክጠራት ዘግዚአብሔር ስቡህ ኢይትረከብ ወስተ ከርስ ጽጉብ፡፡

አሚኛ: ከእግዚአብሔር የመጣውን ምሥጢር መወቅ በስልቹ ልቡና አያድርም፡፡

ግእዝ: ለቡዘ እቤለከ፡፡ ወአንብብከልፈ ወስተ መጽሐፍቲሆመላ መእምራን እንዘ ኢትጸግብ፡፡

አሚኛ: የነገርሁህን አስተወል ሳትሰለች ዘወትር የነብያት የሐዋርያትን መጽሐፍ ተመልከት፡፡

In the last two and half decades, and a little earlier during the Derg military rule, new religious and faith groups have proliferated in Ethiopia, and while Ethiopians in general and the EOTC in particular were tolerant to other religions, the newly constituted Pentecostal recalcitrant variety and the so-called Tehadso (Renewal) group are the main religious contenders that are creating havoc to the EOTC and the Ethiopian society. While the Pentecostal followers are seemingly peaceful, they are, however, cunning in terms of luring young Orthodox Ethiopians and converting them to their faith through pecuniary gains. The Tehadso, on the other hand, are vociferous and disturbing in their operations and although they unsuccessfully attempted to disguise themselves as Orthodox Tewahedo with a reforming mission, they were in fact caught in a cross fire initiated by the EOTC deacons and priests.

What is Pentecostal and what is Tehadso?

The etymology of the word Pentecostal is rooted in the Greek concept of ‘Pentecost’, the seven Jewish Feasts of Weeks or holy convocations by God as explained in the Book of Leviticus. The ‘Fast of the Apostles’ of the EOTC, mentioned above, in fact begins after Pentecost. However the modern Pentecostal movement was founded by Charles Fox Farham in Topeka, Kansas in 1900. Farham believed in divine healing and he founded his own church known as Bethel Bible

School after he “divorced” from the Protestant Church. The Pentecostal church preached the significance of water baptism in the name of Christ (short of the Trinity) and emphasized what it calls the direct experience of God by the believer. For the Pentecostal followers, faith has to be experiential and not ritual. With the latter fundamental belief, the Pentecostal movement began its true mission in 1901 with one Agnes Ozman, a student of Farham, who spoke with a tongue in the first Pentecostal Church. Apparently, the belief in glossolalia (people speaking in languages unknown to them) that is also shared by the Voodoo temple in Haiti and elsewhere; paganism, shamanism, and the Zar spirit among some Ethiopians.

The above brief statement on the origins of the Pentecostal faith and its version of Christianity is unknown to most Pentecostal young Ethiopians, and cases in point are my own students at the City University of New York who have exchanged ideas with me on their new religion and their Orthodox background. Two of the students, who happen to be Ethiopians and Pentecostal, registered for my African Civilizations course at different times and one of them came to my office to ask about the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church contribution to Ethiopian civilization that I mentioned during the course of my lecture on the Nile Valley Civilizations. She said, “I am impressed by what you said today in regards to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and I had no knowledge whatsoever about the Orthodox faith although I was an Orthodox too”. After she paused for a moment, I said to her, “what faith do you follow now?” and she said “Pentecostal” and I continued, “You are entitled to professing any religion you like, but why did you abandon your Orthodox religion?” and she replied, “it is only because I did not know about my original faith and nobody taught me about the mission and objectives of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church.” I said, “That is the bottom line!” and the conversation was over.

The bottom line is that the Pentecostal cadres were targeting unsuspecting and unenlightened young Ethiopians like my students mentioned above because they detected the weakest link in EOTC, that is, in its inability to teach the Gospel effectively and also teach its adherents the essence of its doctrine and order. It is thus not surprising that we now witness thousands of lost lambs from the Orthodox Tewahedo Church who joined the Pentecostal Church. While the EOTC should make efforts by going extra mile to bring back its lost adherents, it should however remain suspect of the spearheads of the Pentecostal Ethiopians who are instrumental to foreign interests and not Ethiopian interests. The leaders of this movement brainwash their followers to such an extent that they forget their previous Orthodox faith and their Ethiopian traditions and values. A case in point, is an interview of Muluken Melese by *Enchewawot* of EBS sometime July 2017; when the hosts of the program asked him whether he has nostalgia to his music and Ethiopia, he replied by saying “none whatsoever”. I was perplexed to hear that response from a former talented and extremely popular Ethiopian music artist, but I immediately realized that his new Pentecostal religion must have had a negative impact on his psychological makeup. Incidentally, Muluken is the son of a priest and would be expected to retain and respect the legacy of his father, but on the contrary, it looks how much this fine former artist is divorced from his Ethiopian values.

With the Tehadso, it is altogether a different matter because these group claim that they are Tewahedo and even argue that they belong to the EOTC, but as indicated above, in a master disguise and by carefully orchestrated sermons, they preach analogous, though not identical doctrine of the EOTC. However in most of their preaching, the Tehadso, although they may sound faithful adherents of the EOTC by giving essential meaning to the teachings of the Tewahedo Church, in actual fact they belittle and undermine the fundamental doctrinal teachings of the Church. For instance, with respect to St. Mary, a most revered saint in the Orthodox and Catholic churches, the Tehadso portray her as ordinary woman with no intermediary roles.

As far as I am concerned, unlike the Pentecostal who are the lost lambs, the Tehadso are disguised infiltrators and agents of an obscure enemy of the EOTC and by extension of Ethiopia; and although they suffer from a short-sighted interpretation of the Bible, they are nonetheless brilliant at deception. As we shall see below in the arguments between the Tehadso and the deacons of the EOTC, these infiltrators are running dogs that are unable to put their flawed pieces of arguments together.

By contrast, the deacons of the EOTC present their neatly sealed capsules of their counter-arguments or rebuke to the Tehadso by making reference to relevant chapters and verses of the Bible. To my surprise and gratification, the knowledgeable deacons of the EOTC offered readymade and convincing answers to the ambiguously suspended Tehadso rationale.

The more and more the Tehadso became vociferous in their deceptive preaching and toxic activities, the EOTC deacons and priests were compelled to organize ‘The Church anti-Tehadso Committee’ and respond to their doctrinal arguments. The Committee strongly believes that the Tehadso group objective is to infiltrate, takeover, and destroy the EOTC and is convinced that they must be confronted with via teaching the congregation the true nature, doctrine, and order of the Tewahedo church. They call them “fifth columnist patriots with the sole aim to disturb and destabilize the fundamentals of the Church’s faith.”

The most daring and militant leaders of the Tehadso are Begashaw Desalegn, Asegid Sahlu, and Pastor Dawit Molalign; according to the EOTC deacons, of these three Tehadso preachers, Begashaw has authored a Protestant song by blending it with Ethiopian Orthodox instruments such as sistrum, drums, costumes, and prayer stands or tau-cross staff (Meqomia ጠቆ ጥዕዖ). The use of the latter EOTC paraphernalia is one way for the Tehadso to camouflage itself and give the impression it belongs to the Tewahedo Church; one of these camouflaged Tehadso by the name Zerfie Kebede, one time famous singer, said, “I am a member of the Tewahedo Orthodox church; I did not change.”

Of the above mentioned prominent Tehadso leaders, Asegid Sahlu was excommunicated by the Synod and Patriarch Mathias and prohibited not to preach in any Ethiopian Orthodox church. Now, with full energy and robust teachings of the Gospel, the EOTC deacons and priests have launched a campaign against the Tehadso group. The Eastern Wollega Preaching Center (የ ምስራቅ ወለጋ ሃገረ ስብከት) and Debre Mihret Qudus Gabriel Gadam of Hawassa (ደብረ

ጥቅረ ት ቅዱስ ገ ብር ኤል ገ ዳግ) and many other chapter churches throughout Ethiopia have combated the Tehadso elements.

Pastor Dawit's scornful and contemptuous remark against St. Mary is a great insult to the religious, devout, and reverent EOTC followers. In a similar fashion to a late night show TV mockery, Pastor Dawit says, "St. Mary could never act as intermediary and when I checked it on the Internet, it says she can't play an intermediary role; and she had children other than Christ; and she is an ordinary human like us." This kind of silly and disgraceful remarks (especially for the faithful) reminds me of Salman Rushdie's book entitled *Satanic Verses*, published in 1988, in which the author stupidly disparages Quran and by extension Islam. Whoever insults a given religion is not only despicable but also downright ignorant of the sentiments and beliefs of the mass congregation.

Memhir Mehreteab Asefa, responding to Pastor Dawit, forwards some seasoned arguments and says, "If she [St. Mary] gets married and begot children would not be sinful...[but]the miracle is the fact that she became pregnant while she was virgin; and when she gave birth she named her son, Emanuel." The other interesting and logical discourse in debate against Tehadso put forward by Mehreteab Asefa goes as follows: "If they [the Tehadso] say they love Jesus, why is that they don't respect the womb of the redeemer?" I don't think the Tehadso will ever find an answer to this challenge.

In a similar vein, other great deacons including Deacon Abayneh Kassa, Deacon Tewodros Belete, Deacon Iyob Yimenu, and Abba Gebrekidan Girma have presented thoughtful rebuttals to the shallow arguments of the Tehadso. For instance, Deacon Abayneh argues that "there is only one church and not two churches" in an attempt to negate and deny the claim of the Tehadso posing as EOTC. Incidentally, Patriarch Mathias also said, "I can represent only one church" and the Tehadso cannot eat their cake and have it at the same time; they should either confess of their wrong doing and embrace only one church or go out of the way.

In regards to Begashaw's argument that "God did not say you should believe in Mary," Deacon Tewodros responds by saying, "'[the] don't' worship Mary'[argument] is equal to the inability to understand the essence of faith; she is the intermediary of salvation and we believe in her virginity, immaculacy, sainthood, and motherhood, and she is the mother of God." And to Begashaw's statement that "Mary does not know anything", Deacon Abyaneh answers, "she is in fact a supreme knower; she even knows what is hidden or has been concealed"; and Abba Gebrekidan supplements by saying, "Mary knew about God and taught about him; even the Apostles were guided by her."

To the pontificating argument of Begashaw that "we can't be sinful because Christ has already shouldered all our sins (literally, "he drunk all our sins") and therefore God does not know about our sins," Deacon Tewodros counter-argues, "when we say Christ shouldered our sins, it does not mean he himself became sinful...and the phrase that 'God does not know our sins' is erroneous."

Furthermore, to Begashaw's argument that "we have been salvaged and we can't be sinful again," Deacon Iyob says, "redemption is not a onetime act; it has to go through a process; salvation is earned via striving and struggle, and that means there is judgment day." Supporting Deacon Iyob's response to Begashaw, Deacon Tewodros also says, "Christ's completion alone is not enough and we must earn our salvation through prayers, fast, and good conduct." Deacon Abayneh also argues that "work and faith are a must" in salvation, and he adds, "Faith short of effort is a dead faith." And to the portrayal of Jesus Christ as an intermediary by the Tehadso, Abba Gebrekidan underscored that "there is only one Lord and God can't be intermediary."

With respect to water vis-à-vis baptism, Begashaw believes that "it is not the water of the sea" but he does not offer an alternative to the meaning of water associated with baptism. Contrary to Begashaw, Deacon Iyob Yimenu reaffirms that water is literally water and "if humankind is not born out of water and spirit, s/he would not be salvaged."

However, in order to combat the Pentecostal and the Tehadso and what Deacon Daniel Kibret calls Islamic Jihadists, it is of paramount importance that the EOTC seriously consider a new agenda to elevate not only the faith-related dogma and doctrinal knowledge of its members but also the political consciousness of all Ethiopians irrespective of their religious affiliations, because as I have pointed out at the very introduction of this essay, the enemies of the EOTC actually are aimed at creating chaos in Ethiopia. The adherents of the Tewahedo Church should be politically enlightened so that they could easily detect the enemies of their religion and their country; an effective intelligent preacher in this regard is Megabi Hadis Eshetu Alemayehu and I recommend all Ethiopians to watch his video on Adwa.

For the above mentioned historic mission, I have confidence that the Synod, the Patriarch Abuna Mathias, the deacons and priests, and the many church officials in the EOTC hierarchy, are going to play an effective and constructive role. At individual level also, some church leaders can play an exemplar role, as for instance the brilliant Kesis Dr. Zebene Lemma has consistently defended the EOTC on many occasions. Kesis Zebene's role model preaching style should be shared and/or emulated by all other preachers in Ethiopia and the Diaspora.

I have watched the video produced by the EOTC Kesate Berhan Church in which Kesis Zebene presented his Five Mystery Pillars associated with the doctrine of the EOTC, and they are the Mystery of Selassie or Trinity (ምስጢረ ሥላሴ), Mystery of the Corporeal – somatic or physical body - (ምስጢረ ስጋዊ), Mystery of Baptism (ምስጢረ ጥምቀት), Mystery of the Holy Communion (ምስጢረ ቄርባን), and Mystery of Resurrection (ምስጢረ ትንሣኤ). After explaining the significance and meaning of the five mysteries, he compares them to the five pillars of the Protestant Reformation and craftily uncovered the fallacies in the interpretation of each mystery in the present Tehadso within the EOTC. He labels them as the five mystery pillars of the Tehadso (አምስቱ አዕማድ ምስጢራት) and they are the following: 1) scripture alone (66 books only); 2) faith alone (spiritual endeavors and efforts are neglected); 3) grace alone (yes, the grace of God redeems, but the Tehadso dismiss EOTC practices such as Lent and ignoring the laws of the Old Testament and those of the New Testament); 4) Christ alone (the Tehadso portray Christ as the sole intermediary, which is wrong interpretation because Christ himself is

God as Abba Gebrekidan underscored; they also dismiss all intermediaries of the EOTC such as saints, Apostles, Engels, and St. Mary; and they belittle the significance of the cross as well; and 5) Glory to God (ክብር ለእግዚአብሔር ብቻ). The last one, if examined superficially could not be disputed but at close scrutiny, as Kesis Zebene contends Jesus Christ once said, “The Father and I are the same” and implies that the Tehadso have a gross misconception of the oneness of Christ and God.

While I have deep appreciation to the efforts made by all the EOTC leaders in the preservation of the Tewahedo Church, I don’t think they are aware that Martin Luther, the founder of the first Protestant Church of the Reformation in fact had great admiration to the Ethiopian Church, and to which I will turn now.

Martin Luther and the Ethiopian Deacon Michael in 1534 Germany

Before my proposed solutions and concluding remarks, I like to incorporate in this article what has come to me as a revelation, which, in turn, I think could serve a potential unforeseen bonus to the EOTC. In due course of my research and while preparing this article, I came across an interesting piece by Dr. David Daniel entitled “Martin Luther’s Dream Church? It was not in Europe”. I was astonished to find out that even Martin Luther, who divorced himself from the Catholic Church, was looking for guidance unto the Ethiopian Church. Dr. Daniel broke the silence and told the truth about what has been hidden for five centuries, and immediately after I read his article I contacted him and we exchanged ideas on the email and he told me that he is not saying Martin Luther was right in his evaluation of the Ethiopian Church, but he simply wants to state the facts.

According to Dr. Daniel, “Luther esteemed the Church of Ethiopia because he thought Ethiopia was the first nation in history to convert to Christianity...this first Christian Kingdom, according to Luther, served as an older wiser, black sibling to the white Christian Kingdoms of Europe...As an ancient church with direct ties to the Apostles, the Ethiopian church conferred legitimacy on Luther’s emerging Protestant vision of a church outside the authority of the Roman Catholic Papacy.”

Dr. Daniel also discusses why and how the Ethiopian Church appealed to Martin Luther in the formative years of the Protestant Church, and this was for two main reasons: 1) “Ethiopian Christians practiced elements of the faith absent in Roman Catholicism, elements Protestants would later adopt: both bread and wine at communion, vernacular scriptures, and married clergy; 2) Luther’s theological fascination with the Ethiopian Church was illuminated in 1534 in his face-to-face dialogue with an Ethiopian cleric, Michael the Deacon, in which Luther tested out his theological portrait of the Ethiopian Church.”

Furthermore, Dr. Daniel tells us how the Ethiopian cleric was perceived and received by Luther and his followers. He says, “Recalling the dialogue with Michael the Deacon, Luther later stated: ‘We have also learned from him that the rite which we observe in the use of administration of

the Lord's Supper and the Mass, agree with the Eastern Church...For this reason we ask that good people would demonstrate Christian love to this (Ethiopian) visitor'."7

Irrespective of what people think of Dr. Daniel's bold unraveling, I believe that this new revelation would add more reverence to the Ethiopian Church, and it may be a major surprise to the Ethiopian Protestants and may even compel the Pentecostal and Tehadso Ethiopians to reconsider their present respective religions, retool to their old faith, and go back to their original home (the EOTC) akin of the prodigal son.

Concluding Remarks and Proposed Solutions

I strongly believe that religious tolerance is the primacy of a civilized discourse and the Ethiopian Church, true to its long tradition of toleration, should tolerate other contraire doctrines that may come as challenges. For instance, although it is quite obvious that the Tehadso movement is invidious to the Ethiopian Church in particular and the Tewahdo faithful in general, the latter should never resort to employing force and/or violence as the Mahbere Kudus (Association of Saints) did in Tikil Dingai, Gondar; they physically attacked a Protestant group instead of entering dialogue with them and attempt to reconcile their differences. The action taken by the Mahbere Kudus could inadvertently fulfill the desire of Ethiopian enemies who wish the country to plunge into a quagmire of violence.

Contrary to the tactics of the Mahbere Kudus, the strategy of the deacons and priests that I have discussed above is the one that must be endorsed and applied tout court. However, this does not mean that the Ethiopian Church should be passive at all times when it is confronted by a major challenge such as the ones I have already discussed. I believe, the EOTC cannot afford to remain silent until it is completely mangled and, on the contrary, it should be assertive and ostensive, and subsequently take action against its enemies. If the EOTC also thinks that the Tehadso are a benign cancer in the Orthodoxy corpus, it should find ways and means to surgically remove them before they metastasize.

Analyzing and dissecting a problem is important but it would remain incomplete if it is not supplemented with solutions, and it is about time that the EOTC come up with a major agenda to overhaul the challenges and clean its own house before it is too late. The Church is capable enough of confronting its enemies and it can rally its millions of *Me'emenan*, its most dedicated congregation, let alone its most revered leaders whom the Ethiopians affectionately call them the most accomplished fathers (የበቋኢባቶች)

Proposed Solutions:-

1. Instead of ruminating with disappointment, it is about time the EOTC purge the infiltrators within the Synod and the rank and file of the hierarchy. This can be done only if Patriarch Mathias takes initiative and gets support from the majority of the Holy Synod. The Church also should cleanse itself by restoring the old order of ordination and sanction the present chaos within the Church with respect to titles and costumes.

Nowadays, a self-proclaimed deacon can buy the church costumes corresponding to titles from tailors in Markato and pretend as real deacon and masquerade within the congregation in the church. These false deacons have done so much damage by a frontal assault to the Church, and as a result the traditional services of the church are messed up.

2. The EOTC should begin series and extensive teachings of the Gospel in local Ethiopian languages such as Amharic, Tigrigna, Afan Oromo etc. The EOTC is known for its ritual practices of prayers and fasting, but was relatively weak in the teachings of the Bible, and I personally recall the Patriarch admitting this weakness in a radio interview. However, unlike the olden days, as of recent the Church has produced bright and knowledgeable preachers and the latter must establish a coordinated bible teaching program via TV, radio, and the internet.
3. The EOTC may find it contradictory to enter into business itself and amass money in order to run the churches and monasteries, but it should acknowledge that we live in a completely different era now. To some extent money is necessary in order to effectively and efficiently administer the institutions of the Church, observing its festivals, conducting its rituals, and sustaining its clergy that serve at all levels. Even if the EOTC does not want to encourage lucrative business and engage itself in profit-making greed as in most capitalist Western nations (that I myself don't support), it could, however, consider a modicum of businesses such as constructing houses for rent; mechanized farming in respective monasteries for surplus farm produce beyond sustaining the monks and nuns and bringing it to the market. The EOTC also could open up its own schools and colleges (the first schools and first teachers were Tewhado) and make substantial earnings; this one goes very well with the teachings of the church itself and it happen to be one of my favorites in this proposal.
4. The EOTC should restructure its administration for effective accountability and responsibility. All EOTC churches and monasteries should be accountable to the Holy Synod in Addis Ababa; restructuring begins with centralizing the administration of the Church without diminishing the autonomy of its denominations. Without centralization, there could not be effective accountability and transparency, and the infiltration could be avoided only when the EOTC is administered from the center and has effective control of its chapters.
5. The EOTC should establish an 'EOTC Anti-Defamation Council' to protest and file charges against people like Pastor Dawit who disgrace, denigrate, and falsely portray the Ethiopian Church. The EOTC should not harbor the illusion that it should combat its enemies via counter arguments and teachings only; it should also consider that it can maintain its existence by pressing charge against the "false prophets" and bring them before the court of law.

Appendix 1

In regards to the genius of St Yared, our colleague in the academia, Professor Ayele Bekrie has the following to say: "We argue that St. Yared was a great scholar who

charted a modernist path to Ethiopian sense of identity and culture. His musical invention, in particular, established a tradition of cultural dynamism and continuity.”⁸

The ten musical notations of St. Yared shown below are adopted from Ayele Bekrie’s article entitled “St. Yared – the great Ethiopian composer”:

1. Yizet	ይዘት	●
2. Deret	ደረት	U
3. Rikrik	ርከርከ	ደ ደ ፡ ፡
4. Difat	ድፋት	^
5. Cheret	ቄረት	!
6. Qenat	ቅናት	፡
7. Hidet	ሂደት	—
8. Qurt	ቁርጥ	፡ ፡
9. Dirs	ድርሰ	ሰ
10. Anbir	አንብር	፫

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