

The ongoing crimes of the dictator “Patriarch Abune” Paulos against the Ethiopian Orthodox Church

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When ever the history of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church is raised, one finds the archbishops and patriarchs who contribute a lot for the expansion, growth and glorification of the Church. *Abune Fremnatos* the first Patriarch of Ethiopia has accomplished his apostolic duty by preaching the nation and translating religious and other canonical books to the Ethiopic language *Geez*. His effort to spread Christianity in Ethiopia has been intensified by the nine saints who introduced and expand monastic life for the church. The 13th century archbishops of Ethiopia Archbishops *Abune Michael* and *Abune Gabriel*, who played significant role in reconciling administrative and theological split between *Bete Tekle Haymanot* and *Bete Ewstatitos* and protected the church from the heretic teaching of *Estifanos*, can never be forgotten¹. During the reign of Susnyos, Archbishop Selama died defending his faith from Jesuits missionary plot². The recent past 20th century story also tells us how Archbishop *Petros*, Archbishop *Michael*, Patriarch *Baslios* and Patriarch *Teweflos* died for their religion and beloved country. The third Patriarch of Ethiopian Orthodox church, His Holiness, *Abune Tekle Haymanot* died for the same reason. He preferred to die of hunger than handing over the historic church right and pride to the atheist Communist Junta³. Though Ethiopian Orthodox Church history is full of such martyrs and committed church fathers act, Patriarch *Paulos*, the fifth Ethiopian Patriarch, is exercising a strange and odd behavior like nepotism, dictatorship, xenophobia, ethnocentrism and the likes which have never been exercise before, in the millennium old history of the apostolic church.⁴

The rise of the dictator Patriarch Paulos

The author of the memoirs of the journalist, *Tesfaye Gebre Ab*, who was very close to the key intelligence officers of the state, in his book argues that Patriarch *Paulos* enthronement and Patriarch *Merkorios* dethronement was engineered by the ruling government. I don't want to get deep down to this issue since there are many controversies being raised from different sides. But let us examine how this patriarch, step by step, became a tyrant.

The first “apostolic duty” Patriarch *Paulos* did, soon after his enthronement, was to change the 1,600 years old different traditions of the church. Unlike his predecessor, he declared that the dress for a Patriarch should be white and for the first time in the history of the church he ordered this costly new dress and publicize that this should be the dress of a Patriarch. During that time it was fascinating for the faithful when they observe that the new Patriarch first task was to worry for his dress design and color. Though many scholars of the church were against his new dress style for violating the age old tradition, some took it for granted considering his relatively young age and the cultural influence he may have faced from his stay in United States of America while studying for his masters and PhD. He then changed the previous title of Patriarch and came up with new and long title: Patriarch *Paulos*, head of all Archbishops of Ethiopia, *Ichege* of the see of *Tekle Haymanot* and archbishop of Axum. It was fascinating for every follower of the church,

again, why this patriarch was so hungry of power and authority this much. The reason why he singled out and took the title of Axum Archbishop was also a puzzle for many. No Patriarch before him has claimed such centrality of power. But his thirst for power and authority doesn't stop there. After some years he claimed that the Holy synod shall be accountable to him. The Holy synod, for the last 1,600 years, was accountable for The Holy Ghost. But Patriarch Paulos, shockingly, claimed this power. Surprisingly surprising!

His dangerous and meaning less reformation act initiated huge resistance from everywhere. Archbishops who are members of the Holy synod like the late Abune *Selama*, Abune *Kerlos* and etc expressed their serious opposition. Aleka *Ayalew Teamiru*, the foremost scholar of the church zealously criticized and rejected his proposal.⁵ Different monks, priests, hermits did the same. The faithful protested strongly against him. But the response from his side was militaristic. Hermit who used to critically oppose him was gunned down by his entourage pistol⁶. The vocal critic of him, *Aleka Ayalew*, was fired out of his job, as simple as garbage, with no recognition for his 50 year of service in various positions and passed away eventually⁷. For the reasons, which historians may decode it in the future; his major opponents like Abune *Selama* were pronounced dead in various occasions. The opposition of the public in many churches, for the newly emerged ill administration in the church, was crushed by police forces.⁸

The patriarch who was supposed to protect the followers of Ethiopian Orthodox church from spiritual crisis became source of crises for the church and the followers. Since his anointment, the church lost millions of dollars through corruption⁹. Promotion by merit, for the key administrative position of the church, was changed to promotion by blood ties and kinship. The spiritual father who was anointed to be the father of all the 47, million followers became the source of xenophobia¹⁰. All this unethical, dictatorial and visionless management of the patriarch for the last 17 years costed the church a lot. As per the report of the recent census, 2007, the church lost millions of its followers. This is the first time in the history when the church lost this much followers since the invasion of Ahmad Ibn Ibrihim al-Ghazi, commonly called *Gragh Ahmed*¹¹. Members of the Holy Synod Archbishops exactly depicted the situation of the church under Patriarch Paulos like this, "Patriarch Paulos killed the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, we the other archbishops buried the church killed by his holiness by failing not to oppose him(the Patriarch)"¹²

The Current Challenge the Church faced the Patriarch's response

Recently the three big religious movements: Judaism, Christianity (different denominations) and Wahabiyism, backed by huge finance and powerful states are in competition for the soul of the country. Israel has shown its commitment to immigrate *Falashmura* i.e "Christians who are apparently the descendants of Jews who accepted Christianity under the influence of European or Ethiopian Church missionaries during the second half of the 19th century."¹³ Parliament members are expressing the plan to airlift thousands of Christians from the strong hold of Ethiopian orthodox Christian city, Gondar, to Israel. No question these new immigrants will convert their religion to Judaism which is another loss for the church¹⁴

Muslim fundamentalists are also working so hard to Wahabiyaze Ethiopia as fast as possible. United States, British, Germany and many other countries elites, politicians, reporters and religious leaders have exposed this fact and are advising for the church to wake up. The German Newspaper paper ¹⁵, “Bund Freier Evangelischer” Gemeinden Kdor had reported that the Arab countries were spending multi millions of petro dollars to completely transform Ethiopia into a Muslim country within twenty years.(it is quoted by Admas, Amharic periodical published in Zurich, May 1992. The London based Islamic Watch October/November 1992 alleges Libya’s huge and secret plan of Wahabiyasing Ethiopia like this: "Col. Ghadafi is reported to be financing a plan to turn Ethiopia into an exclusively Islamic country by the end of the century"¹⁶. Many more Arab countries are fueling billions of dollars to change the nation to their Wahabiy camp soon.¹⁷ Here I am not talking against Islam but the fundamentalist wehabiya movement which never allows social mix and tolerance with Orthodox Christians and others. The Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council (EIASC) have also genuinely and responsibly announced the danger of the expansion of these fundamentalist again and again like this

“. Members of the EIASC state that the Wahhabists believe in supremacy and do not tolerate a mix of Muslims and Christians. The majority of Ethiopian Muslims continued to enjoy collegial relationships with their neighbors, attending cross cultural and religious ceremonies such as weddings and funerals. The Wahhabists within the country shun this type of social mixing.” ¹⁸

Different non orthodox Christian denominations have also huge projects to attract Ethiopian population to their respective camp.Vatican have started new operation to Catholicize Africa, Ethiopia included¹⁹. Different protestant denominations, being backed up by westerns, are also busy of hunting souls of Ethiopia. The followers of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido church are the pray and the target be it for the Jewish, fundamentalist, Catholic or protestant movement since a huge segment of the population of Ethiopia is follower orthodox religion still and for the inefficient leadership *Abune Paulos* is exercising in maintaining its flocks .

It was definitely clear that the church cannot keep its ground and accomplish its pastoral service under the existing leadership as a result concerned and committed archbishops like *Abune Matios*, *Abune Samuel*, *Abune Kerlos* and other confronted the Patriarch. They strongly criticized the Patriarch for his visionless leadership and even requested to limit the power of the Patriarch and conduct a new administrative reform which can make the church conduct its apostolic mission effectively²⁰

The shocking response

The response for the quest, raised by members of the holly synod, was one and the same. “Unknown gangs” raided the compound of the *Bete Kihnet*, broke the residence of the opposing archbishops who confronted the patriarch for administrative reform and gave strict warning and intimidation.²¹ On this coordinated raid, even police was not allowed to enter the compound of *Bete kihnet* and save the archbishops from the gangs, despite the continuous plea they made to Federal police by phone. These “unknown gangs” also attempted a murder trail to the journalist (he was seriously beaten with angle iron) of the

reputed newspaper Addis Neger for extensively reporting the oppositions of the archbishops against the patriarch. It is also good to bear in mind that all these crimes were being done within a few meters from the national presidential palace of *Arat kilo*

On the long awaited synod meeting of October 2009, which was expected to resolve this problem, it was exposed that those archbishops who were asking for visionary leadership and freedom of the church were told not to raise any issue about such things and Mahibere Kidusan by EPRDF government officials²². Within that day, the government owned Ethiopian News Agency reported that “the Church fathers have resolved their difference”. Funnily enough the news came before the end of the synod meeting.²³

The Patriarch game still has continued. By the time when multi millions are reported to have converted their religion from orthodox to other religion, EOTC church Patriarch Abune Paulos gave an award for high performance of the church²⁴

He further expressed that he strongly support the recent expansion of Catholics in Africa (Ethiopia) like this

*“I am really very happy to participate to this Synod of the Catholic Church on Africa. ...I carry my support as a friend and a brother to this endeavor of the Catholic Church for Africa. I thank His Holiness for the invitation and I wish to him a long life and a fruitful ministry.”*²⁵

I am not questioning the constitutional right of every religion. But Catholics have committed a significant atrocities and crime in Africa. When the fascist Italy invaded Ethiopia, Catholics bishops have blessed the poison gas and other weapons which were used to kill Ethiopian Orthodox Monks and priests and other citizens. They even gave their golden cross as a support to the invading army. To that end concerned Ethiopians were asking, time and again, Vatican to apologize for that dark history. But his holiness has zero courage to confront such issues. Rather to warmly welcome them.

By the time when the church needs more supporting man power, Patriarch Paulos responded by giving warning and intimidation to Mahibere Kidusan , an association under Sunday school department which is strongly fighting to defend Tewahido church and its tradition.

Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church is under pressure and danger. The visionless, irresponsible and ethnocentric leadership of Patriarch Paulos and the unnecessary huge negative interference of EPRDF government on the issue of the church are threatening the legacy of the church.

In a nut shell His Holiness has become a shame and a spiritual parasite to the church. If the church is needed to exist in the coming centuries, avoiding him is an imperative task. Orthodox Tewahido Church is in danger. The followers of the church and others concerned Ethiopians should think now, before the time is over.

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