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**THE MISSION THINKING OF THE ETHIOPIAN
EVANGELICAL CHURCH MEKANE YESUS
(EECMY)**

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ABBREVIATION

AACC	All African Council of Churches
AEUP	All Ethiopia Unity Party
ATR	African Traditional Religion
CUDP	Coalition for Unity and Democracy Party
DASSC	Development and Social Service Commission
EECMY IMS	Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus International Mission Society
EECMY	Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus
EOTC	Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church
EPRDF	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
GA	General Assembly
GC	Galla Collection
LC	Lausanne Covenant
LWF	Lutheran World Federation
MYS	Mekane Yesus Seminary
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NLM	Norwegian Lutheran Mission
OFDM	Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement
OPC	Oromo People's Congress
PMAC	Provisional Military Administrative council
Rev	Reverend
RVOG	Radio Voice of the Gospel
TPLF	Tigray People's Liberation Front
UDJ	Unity for Democracy and Justice
UEDF	United Ethiopian Democratic Forces
WCC	World Council of Churches

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CHAPTER ONE

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. THE EECMY

The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) is one of the Christian Churches in Ethiopia. The church was established neither from the realization of an individual's vision of planting church nor is the end result of an expansion of certain western church . It is rather the direct end result of a century old evangelistic effort by both the indigenous and the western missionaries.¹ The EECMY was founded by four synods namely, the “Western Wollega Synod”, the “Eastern Wollega and Shoa Synod”, the “Sidamo and Gamo-Gofa Synod” and the “Wolo and Tigre Synod”² These four synods consist of believers who were the labor fruits of the indigenous Ethiopian evangelists and the European Protestant missions to Ethiopia.³

During the inception of EECMY, answering the question whether it was necessary to establish another Church besides Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC) was the main question. Several factors considered as reason for the need of other church According to Emmanuel Abraham. Firstly, the purpose and the attempt of foreign and indigenous evangelists to reform and revitalize the EOTC did not achieve the desired result. Secondly, the opposition and persecution inflicted by the EOTC and government practically necessitated it. When evangelical believers were excommunicated and denied baptism and funeral services, they were forced to look for other alternatives to get such services. In addition, the persecution they endured affected the relationship evangelicals have with EOTC. Thirdly, establishment of the new church was necessary in order to fulfill the practical and the pastoral needs of the evangelical believers. These needs consisted of organizing themselves as congregation, building church buildings, training and assigning church leaders, giving and getting spiritual ministries.⁴ Finally, the resolution of Lutheran World Federation that requires

¹ For detail treatment of the evangelistic efforts by both western missionaries and indigenous people, See Are'n's two books 1978 & 1999

² Abraham 1995, 288

³ See Sæverås 197, 5, where he attributed the formation of EECMY as the end result of active evangelical messengers for more than a century.

⁴ Abraham 1995, 251

Lutheran Missions to establish indigenous Lutheran Church in the mission field is one factor behind the missionaries' effort in establishing a new church.⁵

Therefore, evangelical believers from different denominations sought to establish indigenous national church pressured by persecution, prompted by mutual love and with the hope of giving spiritual services for their members.⁶ However, the bold vision could not be materialized primarily because they failed to agree on the doctrinal statement by which the church would be instituted. Then the Lutheran Mission Committee⁷, which is the forum for Lutheran Missionaries work in Ethiopia, took the responsibility to organize Lutheran evangelical believers. The Ethiopian Evangelical leadership that contacted the Lutheran world Federation was motivated to establish the national church with strong Lutheran confession.⁸ Then, after meeting and consultations over the years, the delegates of the Evangelical (Lutheran) congregation in several parts of the country met on April 23 and 25, 1958. The meeting was held under the leadership of the Addis Ababa Evangelical Congregation, with the encouragement of the Lutheran Missionary Committee and the Lutheran world Federation to deliberate on a draft constitution and establish the EECMY.⁹ Then the General Assembly was convened on January 21, 1959. The new church was formally constituted on the national level and the leaders for the first four years were elected.¹⁰

1.2. THE EECMY'S STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT

According to the Emeritus president of EECMY Reverend Itefa Gobena, the church has gone through three notable stages. These are: formation stage, time of trial and growth, and stage of Maturity. These stages are chronological and at the same time related to the phenomenological experience of EECMY.

The formation was the period from 1959 to 1975. It was the time when important institutions and facilities were put in place. This includes the founding of the Mekane Yesus Seminary (MYS) 1960 and the submission of the constitution and by-laws to the Ministry of the Interior (1962). It is the also the period when Radio Voice of the Gospel (RVOG) (1963) was founded and the Central Office and Youth Hostel (1966) were built. The Pension fund (1967) and the signing of Integration agreement between the Missionary organizations and EECMY also

⁵ Sæverås 1974, 78 and Gurmessa 1999, 339

⁶ Gurmessa 1999, 337

⁷ Sæverås 1974, 78- see for detail discussion about Lutheran Mission Committee

⁸ Gurmessa 1999, 343

⁹ For detail discussion Sæverås 1974, 83-107 and Abraham 1993, 244

¹⁰ Sæverås 1974, 105 and Abraham 1995, 244-5

happened during this time. It is the period of transition when the national leaders assume full responsibility of the work and ministry. The later part of this period is considered as “the golden years in the history of EECMY”¹¹. During the later years, the church developed her theological direction and began to see her work theologically. The famous paper on the holistic ministry of the church entitled, “the interrelation between proclamation and human development” was written during this time (1972). In this paper the EECMY articulated its ministry to serve the whole person: both the spiritual and the physical dimensions. This was what perceived as the understanding that challenged the attitude and criteria of the European donor organizations.

The stage of trial is the period from 1975 to 1991; until the fall of revolutionary government. In this period the church went under severe persecution from the communist government in the form of torture, imprisonment, killing, and confiscating church properties. Contrary to the experience of persecution, the church continued its growth. Reverend Itefa noted that, “after the 17 trial years, the number of church members grew to become 1.2 million from 450 000.”¹² That means during this period there was active evangelism done by self-less sacrifice of EECMY members which resulted in numeric growth.

The period from 1991 onward is the current stage. This period is characterized by excessive growth and Maturity. The growth here refers to a numeric increase, measured by baptized members of the Church. In the history of EECMY, it is hard to consider one single stage as the growth stage. There is no one single stage where the church experienced decline. The entire history of the church is characterized by growth. But the growth in this stage is excessive. The numeric growth can be noted from the statistical report of EECMY recently prepared by Mr. Shibru Galla. The report included the period of five years from 2005 to 2009. It indicates that during this period the new baptized members were 1, 303,777 making 267,336 average new baptized members per year¹³. The growth of communicant members in the same period was 1,246,409 making the average annual growth 249,282.¹⁴ In the same period the total growth in established congregations was 1292.¹⁵ According to the same report,

¹¹ Gobena O.I. 27/10/2010

¹² Gobena O.I. 27/10/2010

¹³ See the appendix I Chart A

¹⁴ See Appendix I chart B

¹⁵ See Appendix I chart C

the number of pastors, increased from 1,287 in 2004 to 2,215 in 2009.¹⁶ Also, the number of evangelists almost doubled from 1436 in 2004 to 2,732 by 2009.¹⁷

The reasons for the numeric growth of the church can be complex. Some factors that are mentioned to explain the growth of EECMY are as follows: The first is the active experience of charismatic gifts and the reviving power of Holy Spirit that resulted in evangelistic success.¹⁸ The second is the lay movement that expressed itself in the form of volunteerism. The active lay ministry is the mark of EECMY past and present. According to the research conducted in 70s, “80 percent of the church members say that they came to receive Jesus Christ after being witnessed to by other church member be it friend or family members. This means that the entire church is missionary church and every member is testifying the good news.”¹⁹ The recent statistical report also shows that the great majority of the church service is run by lay ministers.²⁰ The third is due to the church’s credibility and reputation in holistic service. The use of vernacular languages for Bible translation and instruction is also very important factor. Lastly, the availability of clear structure that was there since the establishment of the church is another reason. The structure secures efficiency in the flow of information and checks power abuse by decentralizing it.²¹

The current state of the EECMY is also the stage of Maturity. There are indications that support this valuation. The declaration of reconciliation and re-unification of the two EECMY Churches that were separated is one clear indication of the maturity of the church. After 12 years of conflict, disagreement, accusation and separation, the situation is totally reversed on 17th January 2010. The humility of leaders to leave aside their ego and differences is one obvious reason for reconciliation. This reconciliation and unification serves as the great input for the mission of the church both as the moral authority to proclaim the reconciling gospel to Ethiopian people, and to consolidate the resources for effective use in God’s mission.

The second indication is that the church has boldly decided to stop receiving the block grant from western partners starting from 2012. This is the determination to become economically self-reliant.²² The church further showed her maturity by rejecting same sex marriage and the

¹⁶ See Appendix I chart E

¹⁷ See the appendix I chart F

¹⁸ Gobena O.I. 27/10/2010, Sheta O.I. 14/11/2010 &, Daniel O.I. 12/11/2010

¹⁹ Gobena O.I. 27/10/2010

²⁰ See Appendix I chart G compared to chart C and E

²¹ Guta O.I. 22/10/2010

²² Gobena, O.I. 27/10/2010

ordination of registered gay couple, which is practiced by some founding mission partners.²³ This shows a mature church standing on her conviction against the former founding missions.

The other trend in EECMY that shows the maturity of the church is the apparent shift in the mission thinking. First and foremost the shift is in the church's view of her call and her task. Now the church has begun to see herself not only as the mission field but also as a mission base. The old dream of western missionaries to reach the central Africa and Muslim countries bordering Ethiopia has finally become the genuine call of the EECMY and its members. There is a bold vision to play a crucial role in mission of God at the global stage. It is in this context that the next chapters attempt to study the theological or missiological assumptions that undergird this vision.

1.3. RESEARCH RATIONALE AND MOTIVATION

To write a thesis on a certain topic requires a lot of effort. To put such an effort on something one must have personal interest and good reasons. It is not any different with me. It is my passionate curiosity that stands behind the choice of this topic. First and foremost mission activity is responsible for who I am now. I was born in a clinic that was run and started by mission activity. The midwife, that helped my mother while giving birth to me, was a missionary who had come long way from her home to my village. The first four classes in early school age, I went to the school that is founded by missionary initiatives. Both my parents and my siblings attended the same school. My first Sunday school teacher, who gave me both my first New Testament Bible and song book, was also a missionary. Some of my theological educators were also missionaries who left their home to get involved in missionary activities. In short, both spiritually and physically, in one way or the other, I am who I am because some people took the missionary mandate very seriously. The sense of gratitude to all expatriate missionaries and mission institutions that have positively affected my life has placed an obligation to be part of the same mission. Hence, it is in hope to contribute to the mission effort that I wanted to do a study on this topic.

The other reason for my interest in this topic was the apparent absence of “cross cultural missionary call” in my Christian experience in EECMY. I am a third generation Mekane Yesus on my mother's side. I was born and grew up in the church. I have taken part in different worship services and also engaged in church ministry with different capacities.

²³ Shibru Galla, <http://www.eecmy.org/?page=!news&pagenr=2&article=39> and <http://www.eecmy.org/?page=!news&pagenr=1&article=62>

Based on my own personal observation I can give witness to the fact that cross-cultural missionary call is not the dominant feature with regard to self-consciousness and ministry of EECMY at least at the congregation level. And the intentional reflection and systematic articulation on such missionary call is by far less the case.

But on the contrary, during my visit to the Norwegian Lutheran Mission prayer houses in Norway, I was privileged to witness a different mission identity and practice there. I could see the contrast to my upbringing in EECMY. During every service, mission is intentionally focused up on. Either report is heard from one mission field or prayer is going to be offered for missionaries that are serving in different parts of the world. Besides, I was asked to talk about mission work addressing both younger and older groups. The effort to keep the fire of mission burning among the mission friends and the eagerness by the leaders to pass it to the next generation shows how the mission institution bear the “call for mission” exactly as its name suggests. Having seen this, I couldn’t help but question why it was not the case with my church and Christian experience? This question led me to have hard look into my Christian tradition in order to find out why it is the way it is.

Another important factor behind choosing to write on this topic is my observation after my involvement in mission activity of the Church in South Omo outreach center. The South West Synod of EECMY has an outreach that it carried out in cooperation with Norwegian Lutheran Mission (NLM). My wife and I were stationed in the zonal town called Jinka. My wife was working in the hospital and I was teaching at the Bible school. The center in Jinka is responsible for all the work in south Omo which is composed of unreached people groups. The graduates from the one year Bible schools will be given a responsibility to establish churches and care for the spiritual wellbeing of the newly established churches. And that was more or less the effort that was done by the church and the mission as they practice mission outreach in south Omo.

As I took part in this outreach activity, I made some observations. The first one is that the effort of EECMY in the entire planning, financing and follow up of the work is very low. Secondly, the missionaries (evangelists) that were given one year Bible training are ill equipped to deal with the problem that they are facing. Most of the Bible school graduates could hardly articulate the Christian message. The competence to distinguish the gospel from the culture and contextualize the gospel in the culture of the people was absent. The monthly salary that was paid for evangelists was so small that most of them engaged in other activities

to get additional income to take care of their families. The fruit of these evangelists was also consistent with the effort put in the process. Quite frequently we heard that a great portion of church members had decided to go back to their old life. The health service that is run by the money coming from abroad is not connected to the evangelistic effort by both the mission and EECMY. This and many other observations led me to attempt to unveil the belief and understanding that is beneath such missionary practice.

Christian Missionary practice is what primarily is causing expansion of Christianity. The distinguished Christian historian, Andrew Walls explained Christian expansion as the result of the missionary effort.²⁴ Missionary effort of Christian witnesses is depending upon how believers are thinking about their missionary obligation. Bosch's book entitled "Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission" is devoted to demonstrating the extent to which the understanding and practice of mission have changed during the last two thousand years²⁵. His book further gives an account to the fact that missionary efforts and practices are dependent on the distinct mission understanding of its corresponding era.²⁶ In the same way, Samuel Escobar affirmed that Christians are sharing their faith with others because they view themselves as the "church sent out to the four winds under obedience of God"²⁷. Hence, one's view of the mission obligation has a direct relationship with the way one engages in the task of mission. That means the study in to what one understands about mission has a bearing implication on how that missionary obligation is fulfilled. It is with this conviction that, the mission understanding of EECMY will be investigated.

1.4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE

This project has the objective of presenting and assessing the mission understanding of the Church as she has been carrying out God's mission within the border of Ethiopia for the last 51 years (1959-2010) and also as she is preparing herself to spread the gospel beyond the Ethiopian border. Being a study based on qualitative research, the approach this thesis will take is mainly historical. The historical presentation can be either diachronic or synchronic. Diachronic presentation is the chronological historical presentation whereas synchronic presentation is the description of present history. This thesis will take mainly synchronic historical presentation. The main focus of the study will be the current understanding one can find in the church. The mission understanding in EECMY for the past five decades is the

²⁴ www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=2052 (Aug. 30, 2010)

²⁵ Bosch 1991, xv

²⁶ Bosch 1991, 182

²⁷ Escobar 2002, 4

background. The Mission thinking of EECMY will be explored as the church has been involved in mission and responding to different internal and external factors that were affecting her during this period. This means that thematically some topics will be explored.

The missionary effort to spread evangelical faith in Ethiopia which later ended up in the establishment of Mekane Yesus Church was there long before the church is instituted in 1959. That means that there were missionary activities and probably a missionary thinking prior to the establishment of the church as the national church. Framing the time of this study to fifty one years has neither an agenda of downplaying the effort before the establishment of indigenous church nor of denying the impact the mission thinking prior to establishment has on the subsequent mission history. This time frame has been chosen in order to limit the extent of this research. The efforts that are made prior to the establishment of EECMY are well documented by some of the books that will be listed on the literature review. Lastly, this research aims at documenting the indigenous thinking within the Ethiopian Evangelical Mekane Yesus Church after its establishment until present time.

The first objective this research is the systematic presentation of a mission thinking of EECMY members. The work to a large extent concerned with analytical presentation of the findings according to the informants. Effort will be made to bring out the thoughts of the informants as accurate as possible even if exact presentation is impossible. During the process of presentation minimal level of discussion may be included in order to investigate facts. The presentation also includes the mission understanding as it is evident both in belief and practice. The mission thinking is assumed to be the summation of both the views (attitude) and the activities (praxis) in the ministry of the church as related to respective topic.

The second objective of this research is the normative evaluation of the EECMY mission thinking as it is presented on this research (chapter 4-7). Following the presentation, the evaluation also addresses both belief and practice. The belief is investigated if it is well founded on the Christian tradition (Scripture and theology) and justification for it is clearly stated. On the other hand the practice is evaluated from its ability to come in to terms with the contextual concerns on the ground.

1.5. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Under the above-stated scope and objectives, the research questions have different facets. It is formulated to uncover the attitudes, views and understanding of EECMY members. The questions further attempt to uncover the thinking in practice. Practically, the way the church is

fulfilling her missionary mandate and call will be demonstrated in her diverse ministries. Furthermore, the thinking is investigated within the context. The mission thinking is investigated from the cultural, social, political, and religious context of Ethiopia. The research question includes both the reflection and practice of EECMY members. It questions the view that EECMY members have about their missionary call, mandate, task and its practical fulfillment. In order to answer these questions, one overarching question and four leading questions are developed. In order to formulate the questions in this form, the 3rd and 4th chapter of Hwa Yung's book²⁸ was consulted. The specific question includes:

1.5.1. What is the understanding of EECMY members about their missionary mandate and how are they fulfilling it in Ethiopian context?

- What is the understanding of EECMY about the evangelistic and pastoral concerns of the Ethiopian society and how is she responding to it?
- What is the understanding EECMY with regard to her social responsibility to Ethiopian society and how is she fulfilling it?
- What is her understanding about her duty to the Ethiopian societies so that they grasp the gospel message from an Ethiopian context and how is she carrying out this duty?
- How faithful is the mission thinking of EECMY to the Christian tradition past and present?

1.6. METHODOLOGY

1.6.1. REFLECTION ON PRACTICE

The critical task at this stage is to choose from various paths that can lead one to the intended result of solving the question at hand. Reflection on mission practice is the missiological method that this research will use. Reflection on Practice is the method where the researcher takes practice and experience as the starting point or point of departure. It is quite common among the Liberation theologians²⁹ and missiologists. According to Gutiérrez, “theology is the critical reflection on the Christian praxis in light of the word”³⁰. The historical reality is

²⁸ See Literature Review (Chapter one, 1.10.2)

²⁹ Escobar 2002, 12-20 Escobar dedicated the whole chapter to argue for “practice and Reflection” as the methodology in mission today.

³⁰ Gutiérrez 1974, 13- for detail on the theological method of liberation theology see pages 13ff

taken very seriously. The historical praxis will be discussed and appraised in light of the scriptures, the Christian history, systematic mission theology and insights from social science.

There are three reasons for choosing the method that takes the practice as the starting point rather than giving out theoretical framework against which the mission thinking of EECMY may be investigated. First, it is the philosophical assumption that sees thinking as part of practice. The relationship between praxis and theory is seen neither as mutually exclusive nor as in linear terms. While discussing the relationship between praxis and theory (thinking) Moltmann insists that “the relationship between theory and practice shouldn’t be defined in a linear term but dialectically. Perception and decision go together for no one decides blindly”³¹ Then the actual thinking goes along with practice or to put in the other words thinking itself is part of the practice. Therefore it is when we begin by practice that we can include both the articulated perception and that which is embedded in practice. Secondly, if the contextual nature of the church, its theology and the nature of its mission obligation is assumed, then it is self-defeating to use foreign theory to investigate a local phenomenon. Thirdly, the nature of EECMY necessitates the study by making use of reflection on practice. EECMY is the church that is in active mission practice long before her inception as the national church and up to present. Going with dogmatic framework may cause one to ignore the resources in spontaneity, miss out un-reflected grassroots stimulus, and forcing the dynamics to fit into single worked out theory. On the other hand, reflection on practice seems to be more humble and open minded to learn more and enjoy the adventure of discovering thinking in its multi-faceted expressions.

Even if the starting point is the missionary practice, it is reflected up on by the light of the Scripture. In this method, The Bible is assumed to show a norm for how Christian mission should be carried out. As Escobar succinctly puts it, “each new generation of missionaries inherits models from its predecessors, but it is challenged to correct, invent or rediscover certain principles in the light of the word of God”³². Hence, a return to the Biblical perspectives for mission is the way mission practice should go. This firm surrender to what the Scripture envisions as what it means to be sent by God is the new perspectives³³.

Reflection in light of the mission history does have value to avoid narrow reflection.

Contextual reflection does not mean disconnectedness. The reflections must be enriched with

³¹ Moltmann 2000, p 294

³² Escobar 2002, 12

³³ Bosch 1993, 177

the events in different parts of the world under different circumstances. The reflection in light of the social science is also useful because “they help us to analyze the different social and institutional mechanisms as well as the types of social relationships established as Christianity expands”.³⁴

1.6.2. QUALITATIVE METHOD

Empirical methods in social studies are becoming more and more popular. The first reason for its popularity is that information attained by it is contemporaneous. In addition, its indispensability where there is no enough written material is the other reason. The empirical social research strategies can be divided in to two methods namely quantitative research and qualitative research.³⁵

“Quantitative research entails the collection and analysis of numerical data. It also entails a deductive approach to the relationship between theory and research, in which accent is placed on testing of theories.”³⁶The main preoccupations of quantitative researchers are measurement, causality, generalization and replication. Measurement deals with giving numeric results.³⁷Causality is concerned not only with describing the phenomenon but also explaining its causes. Generalization means that the researcher may generalize the findings beyond the confines of the particular context in which the research was conducted. Replication means that the research result should be an “affected by the researcher’s special characteristics or expectation”³⁸. That means others should be able to replicate it through experiments. This research method is primarily used in natural science researches.

But the “Qualitative research is a research strategy that usually emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data.”³⁹ Qualitative researchers are preoccupied with different features⁴⁰. First, they see through the eyes of the people being studied. The underlying premise here is that the subject matter of the research does attribute meaning to events and to their environment. Hence, the social world is studied from the perspective of the researchers. Second, they focus on description and emphasize on context. Qualitative researches give detail description during reporting of the fruit of their research.

³⁴ Escobar 2002, 12

³⁵ Bryman 2008, 21

³⁶ Bryman 2008, 22

³⁷ Bryman 2008, 155

³⁸ Bryman 2008, 157

³⁹ Bryman 2008, 366

⁴⁰ for detail see Bryman 2008, 384-389

Thirdly, there is a conscious emphasis on process for it tends to view social life in terms of processes.

The method this thesis will use is the qualitative research strategy for obvious reasons. First, the kind of information that this research is attempting to acquire is not quantity but quality. It is not for instance how many people think this or that way. It is rather the question of what people are thinking. This requires a thorough knowledge⁴¹ where the informants are given the opportunity to state their case clearly and justify it adequately. The frequency of their opinion is not of interest but their point of view is. Hence, this qualitative method serves this purpose much better than quantitative method.

Qualitative research includes several diverse research methods that differ from each other considerably. This includes participant observation, qualitative interview, focus groups, and the collection and qualitative analysis of texts and documents.⁴²

1.6.2.1. PARTICIPANT OBSERVER

Participant observation (ethnography) is an approach to data collection in which the researcher is immersed in the social setting for sometime in order to observe and listen with a view to gaining an appreciation of the culture of a social group.⁴³ This means that the accumulated experience of the researcher and the fresh observation on the research field is incorporated in the research process.

As one born and grew up in EECMY, the extended years of experience would assist me to understand common understanding and consciousness when it comes to gathering information and interpreting them. Admittedly, there may be a temptation to lack naivety and curiosity that is required to obtain necessary information. However, this research is conducted by keeping the delicate balance between distancing from too much familiarity and using the benefit of familiarity to get and interpret information as the participant observer.

1.6.2.2. SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

An interview is a conversation that has structure and purpose. It is a careful questioning and listening approach with a purpose of obtaining thorough and tested knowledge⁴⁴. According to Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann, “The qualitative research interview attempts to

⁴¹ Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, 3

⁴² Bryman 2008, 369

⁴³ Bryman 2008, 369

⁴⁴ Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, 3

understand the world from subject's point-of-view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations"⁴⁵. One form of research interview is a semi-structured interview which is going to be used by this research as well. "Semi-structured interview is neither an open every day conversation nor a closed questionnaire. It is conducted according to the interview guide that focuses on certain themes and that may include suggested questions"⁴⁶. The information that is acquired through semi-structured interview can be regarded as valid knowledge because "in post-modern era research interview is a production site of knowledge. Knowledge is socially constructed in the interaction of interviewer and interviewee"⁴⁷.

In addition to its theoretical viability, practical possibility can also be the reason why semi-structured interview is the feasible method for this research. This practical privilege can be shown in two ways. First, my personal background, the personal knowledge and access to the important figures in the leadership of EECMY, has given me an immense opportunity to get the desired information from them. Second, the evangelistic activity of EECMY, little attention is paid to recording its mission history and theology, and much less to interpreting and explaining it in academic terms particularly from an indigenous point of view. The older generation, which has instituted EECMY, has almost left the scene. The second generation leaders of the Church who themselves grew in the church taking part in important decision making processes are retiring. Therefore, it is indeed high time to let these experienced people speak out their passion and motives for ministry in their own mouth, which can be done via semi-structured interview.

To this end the two presidents, two Mission and Theology Department Heads, former General Secretary, Two congregation pastors, the executive secretary of EECMY IMS, the Youth and Children Ministry Division head, and evangelists from country side and cities together with members from country side and cities have been interviewed. The interviews were conducted during my field research period in Ethiopia from October to November 2010. The conducted interviews were taped, transcribed, and translated in to English to make it accessible for reference while writing this thesis.

During the interview process, in order to get variety of information different groups have been assumed. The basis of grouping is based on geographical distribution and the responsibility

⁴⁵ Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, 1

⁴⁶ Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, 27

⁴⁷ Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, 54

one has in the Church. Geographical distribution is based on urban dwellers and rural dwellers as well the synod distribution. On the basis of responsibility one has the groups include the Elites (high officials of the Church), the congregational leaders (Pastors and evangelists) and the lay members. The Elite group, given their high education level and long years of experience, provides the official and well articulated thinking in the church focusing on the overall picture. Since the congregation is the center for the ministry of the EECMY, the view of congregation leaders reflect the day to day life, ministry and reflection on it. The view of lay members is also very important for it gives much focused, detailed and grassroots impulse and reflection on the Mission of the church. However, assuming the variety of informants does not mean the opinion of all is equally valid. The view of the “elite group” was assumed and treated as representing the official thinking of the church in this research.

1.6.3. DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

Official documents of the church will be consulted in order to answer the question better by comparing the output from the interview with that of the documents and vice versa. The information gained by interview might be an explanation or clarification of the documents. Since some of the informants are going to be the personalities that were there for more than three and four decades, their insight is very important in shading light to the dynamism behind the written document.

To this end, the main document to be analyzed is the letter written by EECMY to LWF in 1972 entitled “On the Interrelation between Proclamation and Human development”. This document is important because time and again my informant referred to it as the publication of EECMY’s philosophy of Mission. Further, it is the most well known and quoted official document of EECMY where her mission understanding is clearly articulated. This document is scanned and attached to this thesis as an appendix II.

1.7. DELIMITATION

This study will have limitations due to logistics, space and time. For instance; the study will not be a comprehensive chronological history of the EECMY and her evangelistic outreach. It is a missiological inquiry in to the thinking behind the ministries of the Church. In addition, when one talks about the mission thinking of EECMY, it should be noted that there is going to be a gross generalization. First, it will fail to account for detailed diversity. EECMY has more than six thousand congregations and 21 synods. The trend in the mission engagement varies from synod to synod. At times, a striking difference can be observed from one

congregation to the other in the same synod. This depends on the competence and charismatic gifts that the leaders are endowed with; both in reflecting about mission and in communicating it to their members. Further, the motivation level and mission initiative among the young people and old people, younger and older congregations, cities and rural areas can also be different. Therefore, talking about the EECMY Mission thinking in general will fail to account for such detail factors.

Secondly, it is a generalization concerning the qualitative information. Considering the qualitative information gained from few informants and saying it is the mission thinking of EECMY can look problematic. EECMY has more than five million members. And the thinking this thesis presents is not of each and every member of the Church. However, since the view of the key leaders of the church (past and present) is included, it can legitimately be conceived as the representative view of EECMY thinking.

The Lutheran mission organizations from America and Europe have played an important role in the establishment of EECMY. They are still partnering with EECMY in different and important ways. That means there is a possibility of continuity in thinking between founded church and its founding organizations. The comparison and contrast of mission theology and strategy of the two might be an interesting research topic. But this work is not about the mission organization's mission thinking even if it is possible that it has significant influence on the mission understanding of the indigenous church. Only when necessary and mentioned by informants some comments might appear.

1.8. DEFINITION OF MISSION

The definition of the term mission that is presented here is to assist the reader to see the way it is conceived in this research paper. This is not to suggest that any time the informants use it this is what they had in mind. The way it is conceived by the informants may be clear from the context in which the term is used. To present the definition of the term and the concept of mission, the definition by Nordic missiologists as translated in to English by Tormod Engelsviken and Lausanne Covenant paragraph 4 is consulted and paraphrased.

“Mission is the sending of the Church (in its local and global expression) to the world, a sending which has its origin in the Triune God and consists in the task of communicating the gospel about the kingdom of God- in word, deed and sign.”⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Berentsen, Engelsviken, Jørgensen 2004, 16

The result of this mission includes “obedience to Christ (receiving him as Lord), incorporating into the church through baptism and faith and responsible service in the world (being a witness for Christ and engage in social service and social action)”.⁴⁹

“The mission of the Church by its very nature has to do with transcending boundaries of geography, culture and time by aiming at reaching new people who have not yet heard or understood the gospel.”⁵⁰

The mission of triune God in which the church is part has social implications in the form of “social service, social action and interfaith dialogue (which has the aim of facilitating understanding, reconciliation and joint social action). However these ministries alone do not constitute mission because mission according to the model of Jesus (John 20:21) should always be holistic, reaching people in all dimensions; spiritual, physical and social.”⁵¹

1.9. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter few of the literature that has been utilized in the process of writing this research may be presented.

1.9.1. PREVIOUS WORKS ON EECMY

Although there is no scholarly work that have directly addressed the topic of my research (as far as my knowledge is concerned), there are many who have preceded me to study EECMY. Their works in one way or the other have provided me with valuable information to construct this thesis. Here I will give brief outline about their significance for the Missiological research in Ethiopia and EECMY.

1.9.1.1. OLAV SÆVERÅS

Olav Sæverås is the first person to publish an academic monograph that deals with the EECMY. In his book entitled “On Church-Mission Relations in Ethiopia 1944-1969: With Special Reference to the Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus and the Lutheran missions” (1974), he gave historical account for the effort to form the Evangelical Church and the history of the formation of EECMY. His book also gives an account for the relationship between Mission and Church in general and the cooperating relationship between EECMY and the Lutheran Missions that ended up in signing agreement in 1969. His book is an important contribution to this thesis with regard to the history of the formation of EECMY.

⁴⁹ Lausanne Covenant 1974, Paragraph 4

⁵⁰ Berentsen, Engelsviken, Jørgensen 2004, 16

⁵¹ Berentsen, Engelsviken, Jørgensen 2004, 16

1.9.1.2. GUSTAV ARE'N

Gustav Are'n's pioneering works as found in his two books, *Evangelical Pioneers in Ethiopia (1978)* and *Envoys of the Gospel in Ethiopia (1999)*, provides detail presentation on the history of the evangelical movement in Ethiopia that led to the formation of EECMY. The history gives about the roots that gave rise to evangelical Christianity in Ethiopian with intentional attempt to recognize the indigenous evangelists. The books are covering the time span from 1866-1936. In these books both the early attempts to revitalize Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC) through dissemination and study of vernacular Holy Scripture and pioneer evangelism to the "Gallas" (inhabitants to the south western Ethiopia) is recorded as the attempts that led to EECMY. These works will remain important for mission study in Ethiopia and particularly in EECMY as its present mission identity and future is being shaped by the history these books documented.

1.9.1.3. FEKADU GURMESSA

Fekadu Gurmesssa's book, *Ye Wengel Imnet Inqeseqase be-Ityopiya (1999)*, presents a comprehensive history in Amharic about the formation and growth of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus. This book is useful for it pays attention to the indigenous effort in the spread of the evangelical movement in the southwestern part of Ethiopia. Since the book is published by the Church under the supervision of her intellectuals, it can be considered as the self-biography of the Church. While presenting the history of EECMY, the heavy dependence of this thesis on this book is justifiable. First, it is the history of EECMY by herself. It is the fruit of self-historization. It is history from an indigenous point of view. This also goes with the indigenous thinking that this thesis attempted to uncover.

1.9.1.4. EMMANUEL ABRAHAM

Emmanuel Abrahams book, entitled *Reminiscences of My Life (1995)*, also have part that could be valuable for one who want to study the history of EECMY. The book is based on rich personal memoirs, rich experience and meticulously collected information. Since he was the leader of EECMY for 22 years, the theological convictions that were included in his book are considered as one written source for the representative mission thinking of EECMY.

1.9.1.5. JOHNNY BAKKE

Johnny Bakke's book, *Christian Ministry -Patterns and Functions within the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (1987)*, has important contribution to the understanding of EECMY with respect to the organization and understanding of her ministry. The attempt made to survey the religious and cultural setting as the context in which evangelical Christian

ministry patterns may develop is missiologically insightful. The effect that both the political development in Ethiopia and the aid money from abroad had on the ministry pattern of EECMY is well documented.

1.9.1.6. ARNE TOLO

Arne Tolo's book, "*Sidama and Ethiopia: The Emergence of the Mekane Yesus Church in Sidama*" (1998) is also one source that has documented the history and the growth of EECMY in Sidamo region. His book intimately relates the history of EECMY with the foreign mission movement. He further attempted to identify the contextual issues that paved the way for the advance of the gospel and the growth of the church. The impact that the evangelical Christian message has on the society is one area that was addressed. Finally he elevated the role of missionary movement as being a vehicle of progress in this part of Ethiopia.

1.9.1.7. ØYVIND EIDE

Øyvind Eide's book, *Revolution and Religion in Ethiopia (2000)* is important contribution as it examines the church and state relationship during the Ethiopian Revolution with respect to EECMY. In his book he presented the role EECMY has played in Ethiopian society during the revolution. It also included the experience of both growth and persecution the Church experienced. He also investigates to what extent a religious consciousness was transformed in to a more explicit political awareness during the revolution. Hence, his work compliment the historical gap regarding the period of Ethiopian Revolution as his work disclosed the role of religion. Regarding the social implication of the Mission, his work represent valuable resources with regard to EECMY from 1974-1991.

1.9.2. HWA YUNG, 1997

The analytical tool utilized both to gather data and present the Mission thinking of Mekane Yesus is taken from Hwa Yung's book entitled, *Mangoes and Bananas: The quest for Authentic Asian Theology*. In the 3rd and 4th chapters of his book he outlined what he believes should be the four broad concerns for a contextual theology of mission by providing necessary justification for each of these concerns⁵². He further suggests that these concerns should function as a set of criteria for ascertaining the adequacy of any theology of mission or missiological theology.⁵³ These four concerns include Evangelistic and pastoral concerns of

⁵² Yung 1997, 61-120

⁵³ Yung 1997, 61-120

the church, Socio-Political Concerns of the Church, Contextualization and Inculturation, and Churches' faithfulness to the Christian Tradition.

Even if his book is written from an Asian perspective and primarily for the Asian church, the issues he raised are equally relevant to the Church in Africa and particularly in Ethiopia because the socio-cultural, political and religious realities are similar. Further, the elements he listed can be conceived as the expression of contextual mission thinking that is expected in any church.

The decision to use these four concerns for adequate contextual mission theology suggests that mission thinking of EECMY is studied within the context of the Church. This means that the mission understanding of the Church is seen in its ability to respond to and interact adequately with the concerns that emerge out of context. Hence the study is not mere theoretical which is abstracted from the actual ministry of the church. Rather it is the general look into the ministry of EECMY and the thinking that goes along it.

CHAPTER TWO

2. BACKGROUND (CONTEXTUAL) INFORMATION

2.1. PREFACE

The mission thinking of EECMY that is investigated in this research is assumed to be the thinking in the context. The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) is one of the Christian Churches in Ethiopia. Any discussion about EECMY and her missionary mandate can be full only if it is seen in the macro context of Ethiopia. The mission thinking as it interacts and dialogue with the larger context will be treated. As an Ethiopian church, the history of Ethiopia has a major role to play in shaping the identity of EECMY. As the church in the Ethiopian society, the political, economical, cultural and religious factors and developments in Ethiopia present the context that the mission thinking of EECMY must come into terms with. Even if an all-inclusive treatment of such factors is beyond the subject matter of this thesis, a brief glimpse will be provided to assist the reader to get the feel of the context. Therefore, this chapter gives brief description of Ethiopia, the coming of Christianity from 4th century, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC) and her contribution in laying the foundation and the context in which the latter development of EECMY took place.

2.2. BRIEF INFORMATION ABOUT ETHIOPIA

Ethiopia is a country that is located in the area commonly called the Horn of Africa. It is bordered on the north and northeast by Eritrea, on the east by Djibouti and Somalia, on the south by Kenya, and on the west and southwest by Sudan. According to Bahiru Zewde, “the Ethiopia in its present form got its shape consecrated by the boundary agreement made after the Battle of Adwa in 1896 with the adjoining colonial powers”⁵⁴. This is the end result of the unification efforts and the expansion process by Menilik II; the emperor of Ethiopia (1889-1926).

Ethiopian is a country with a population estimated to be more than 82 million from highly diverse ethnic backgrounds⁵⁵. According to the population census of 2007, “the following are the percentages of the major ethnic groups: Oromo 34.5%, Amhara 26.9%, Somali 6.2%, Tigray 6.1%, Sidama 4%, Guragie 2.5%, Wolayta 2.3%, Hadiya 1.7%, Affar 1.7%, Gamo

⁵⁴ Zewde 1991, 60- Battle of Adwa is the confrontation between Italian colonial ambition and Independence of Ethiopia that resulted in the death of Italian Ambition and the survival of Ethiopian independence. It should also be noted that it is not the creation of modern of Ethiopia. It is rather her recognition by the free world.

⁵⁵ www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2859.htm (May 13, 2011).

1.5%, Gedeo 1.3%, other 11.3%.”⁵⁶

Coming to the government and the political milieu: “Ethiopia is said to be a federal republic under the 1994 constitution. The executive branch includes a president, Council of State, and Council of Ministers. Executive power resides with the prime minister. There is a bicameral parliament; national legislative elections were held in 2010. The judicial branch comprises federal and regional courts.”⁵⁷

Following the constitutional stipulation of multi-party system, there are different political parties competing to control the political power in Ethiopian society. These political parties include the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), Unity for Democracy and Justice (UDJ), Oromo People's Congress (OPC), Arena Tigray for Democracy and Sovereignty, Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement (OFDM), Coalition for Unity and Democracy Party (CUDP), the United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF), All Ethiopia Unity Party (AEUP), and many other small parties.⁵⁸

Ethiopia is also a country whose people are adhering to different religions. According to the recent census in 2007, the following are how religion is distributed in Ethiopia: “Orthodox 43.5%, Muslim 33.9%, Protestant 18.6%, traditional 2.6%, Catholic 0.7%, other 0.7%.”⁵⁹

2.3. ARRIVAL OF CHRISTIANITY AND ETHIOPIAN ORTHODOX TEWAHEDO CHURCH

The discussion about Ethiopian Orthodox church is relevant for it has a value in shedding light upon the context for mission understanding of EECMY. First, Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church can be viewed as the church that facilitated the missionary success for both western and indigenous evangelists. Being the church allied with the empire, it has successfully resisted the Islamic expansion around the country. This is very important especially when one observes how it has been less success in evangelizing Muslim communities in Ethiopia than EOTC believers. Secondly, the Orthodox Church has contributed to the weakening of preexisting matrixes as it expanded its sphere of influence in areas where primal religions had been dominant.⁶⁰ This can be seen in introducing Christianity as the religion with the prestige. This is part of its facilitating contribution

⁵⁶ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/et.html> (September 29, 2010)

⁵⁷ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/et.html> (September 29, 2010)

⁵⁸ <http://www.electionethiopia.org/en/political-parties/active-political-parties.html> May 13, 2011

⁵⁹ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/et.html> (september 29, 2010)

⁶⁰ Eshete 2009, 36

because both the western missionaries and the pioneer evangelists have met both adherents of African traditional religion and orthodox believers in their mission activity⁶¹. Thirdly, Ethiopian Orthodox religious identity is deep rooted in some societies of Ethiopia. The converts to the evangelical Christianity are seen as traitors. It is also not difficult to understand the reason for the painful persecution that the converts to evangelical faith frequently face. Hence, EOTC represent more than religious identity that EECMY inevitably interact with as she takes her mission mandate seriously in Ethiopian context.

It is hard to establish when exactly Christianity was introduced in Ethiopia. There are theories that suggest that Ethiopia is one of the ancient countries to embrace Christian Faith probably because of its proximity and dialogue with the Mediterranean world. Some Ethiopian historians believe that Christianity is introduced to Ethiopia by the Ethiopian eunuch recorded in Acts 8.⁶² Irenaeus, one of the church father seem to support this view when he said that “The eunuch became a missionary to the Ethiopians”⁶³

Christianity became the official religion of the Aksumite kingdom in the fourth century.⁶⁴ EOTC claim that the evidence was left by emperor Ezana whose conversion can be seen in stone inscriptions and in the coins he minted during his reign⁶⁵. Christianity became a state religion in 350 and remained so until 1974. The Coptic Church became the custodian of Ethiopian Church by sending the bishops until 1959. Due to this fact, the EOTC strongly identify itself with the other four Oriental Orthodox churches.

“The introduction of Christianity as the State religion marked the turning-point in Ethiopian history.”⁶⁶ The manner in which Christianity in Ethiopia spread was from royal court to the people gradually.⁶⁷ “The church was not only a religious institution, but has for many centuries been the repository of the cultural, political and social life of the people.”⁶⁸ The

⁶¹ This is very important to note. Both the western missionaries and the pioneer evangelists were not introducing the Bible for the first time. Rather they made it accessible in the vernacular language and encouraged the reading of it in contrast to reverence to the extent that one is not allowed to read it. They did not introduce going to church and being part of the mass. They rather made the liturgy comprehensible and the sermons understandable. They did not needed to introduce and convince the people about God, they rather preached about his message and the possibility of relating to him through Christ in a personal level.

⁶² For detail see Sergew 1970, 3

⁶³ Yesehaq 1989, 17-18

⁶⁴ The church of Ethiopia 1970, 3- Aksumite kingdom is the name for the ancient Ethiopian or Abyssinian empire.

⁶⁵ Eshete 2009, 16 (<http://www.ethiopianorthodox.org/english/ethiopian/prechristian.html>) (Sep 29, 2010)

⁶⁶ Sergew 1970, 5

⁶⁷ Sergew 1970, 5

⁶⁸ Sergew 1970, 5

support that the church was getting from the state contributed to the expansion of its influence across culturally and geographically diverse areas. In addition to providing security, the missionary enterprise was greatly assisted by grants of the land from kings and the wealthy.

In the fifth century the country opened itself to monks mostly from Syria, who fled their country facing persecution by the Romans because of their anti-Chalcedon theological stance⁶⁹. These monks called the “nine saints” in the Ethiopian tradition, engaged in vigorous evangelistic activities that took them to many parts of the empire. “The Nine Saints contributed greatly to the development of the Ge’ez liturgy and literature. They introduced terms and vocabulary into Ge’ez, such as Haymanote(Religion) qasis (priest) and ta’ot (idols).”⁷⁰ “Their great contribution was undoubtedly their great work of Bible translation into Ge’ez”⁷¹. Further, the Nine Saints are associated with the beginning of the new era of liturgical life of the Ethiopian Church.⁷² In addition, Music, art and architectures flourished in different ancient cities because of them. In short, the nine saints have contributed to the expansion and consolidation of Christianity as a state religion in Ethiopia.

In short, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church is deeply rooted in the culture of Ethiopia. It was not only an official religion of the empire, but was considered to be the most profound expression of the national existence and the most important cultural force in the lives of many Ethiopians.⁷³ This can be one explanation for negative attitude toward foreign mission agencies. Their mission activity can be viewed as the attack against the national existence and its cultural expression. It is probable to interpret leaving behind the Orthodox faith as one and the same as leaving one’s national identity. As part and the instrument of the government institution of the pre-revolution Ethiopia, EOTC had a direct impact on the work of missionaries, the establishment and history of EECMY.

2.4. TRADITIONAL RELIGION

The religious system of the people is the heart of their culture⁷⁴ and of their identity. Any Mission thinking of certain society in one way or the other depends upon their religious system. The religious system provides with the religious context where the Mission activity is in serious dialogue and interaction. It is the same with EECMY. The traditional religion gives

⁶⁹ Eshete 2009, 17

⁷⁰ Sergew 1970, 8

⁷¹ Sergew 1970, 8

⁷² Sergew 1970, 9

⁷³ Eshete 2009, 35

⁷⁴ Burnett 1988, 42

the religious background upon which EECMY is established. It also provide with the contextual framework with which the mission thinking of EECMY must be in serious dialogue. It also gives as the criteria against which the contextual interaction of the EECMY mission thinking may be evaluated. Therefore, it is in this assumption that the brief overview of African Traditional Religious (ATR) structure that is relevant for the discussion of EECMY mission thinking will be presented.

David Burnett's in his book entitled "unearthly Powers" gives helpful presentation of the world view in primal religions. First, he said that the primal religion provides with integrated view of the world where the border between the natural and the supernatural is blurred. Secondly, the material world is conceived of as being greatly influenced by the immaterial forces. This opens up the room for universe as the product of personal agents such as gods and spirits. Thirdly, various phenomena may be controlled by means of signs and rituals such as magic.⁷⁵ Fourthly, the primal worldview also assumes that humankind is seen as being essentially part of the universe as a whole and must live in harmony with their environment. For this reason the primal religions are generally based up on traditions and taboos.⁷⁶ The primal religions understand that all powers (physical, political, economic, social and religious) have their origin outside of the visible world.⁷⁷

The universe of African worldview is densely populated with varied spiritual beings.⁷⁸ This includes the Supreme Being that is acknowledged by many societies in Africa and particularly in Ethiopia who is the creator of all. He is known by many names both in African and particularly in Ethiopia. The Nuer call him Kwoth, the Ibo Chukwu, the Krobo Mau, the Akan Onyame, the Oromo Waaqqa, the Sidamo Magano or Kallaquancho, the Wolayita Tosso, the Burji Wonto etc... The other important belief about the Supreme Being is that he has withdrew from human, or regarded as too exalted to be concerned with the affairs of men.⁷⁹

The transcendence of the Supreme Being necessitates various forms of intermediaries (saint like divinities) such as Ayyanana and spirits. The Ayyananas and the spirits are conceived as the manifestation of the Supreme Being. Witchdoctors or Qallichas in Sidamo and Oromo traditional religions for example are ritual experts who have special relationship with one of the Ayyaana. When they are possessed by Ayyanna spirits, they serve as mediator between

⁷⁵ Burnett 1988, 19-21

⁷⁶ Burnett 1988, 22

⁷⁷ Burnett 1988, 24

⁷⁸ Burnett 1988, 35 and Mbiti 1969, 75

⁷⁹ Tessema Zewde 2010, 19 and Burnett 1988, 37

god and the public.⁸⁰ Hence, Mbiti rightly calls them priests and as a rule they formally trained and commissioned (ordained), they may be male or female, hereditary or otherwise.⁸¹ The duties of such intermediary includes “making sacrifices, offering prayers, conducting both public and private rites and ceremonies, giving advice, performing judicial or political functions, caring for the shrines where these exist, and above all fulfilling their office as religious intermediaries between men and God”⁸². Given such a huge responsibility, it is easy to note the authority and control they have over the society they exist in. The worshipper in the society worships via the mediators as they perform Prayer, invocation, blessings and salutation⁸³

⁸⁰ Mbiti 1969, 75-83 and <http://www.balaams-ass.com/journal/housechu/oromoeth.htm> 21/02/11

⁸¹ Mbiti 1969, 68

⁸² Mbiti 1969, 68

⁸³ Mbiti 1969, 61

CHAPTER THREE

3. EVANGELISM AND PASTORAL CONCERNS

3.1. PREFACE

Evangelism is at the very heart of Mission; for evangelism has been a prime motivation for the mission of the church throughout the ages.⁸⁴ Accordingly, Donald McGavran stated that theologically mission was evangelism by every means possible.⁸⁵ Bosch also defines evangelism as the dimension and activity of Church's mission.⁸⁶ That means any thinking of mission must have evangelism at its centre. Evangelism in the above sense includes both the aspect of proclaiming and nurturing (pastoral concern). Hence, it is by this assumption that the mission thinking of EECMY as it is related to evangelism will be assessed in the following.

The presentation includes the diverse views that account for how evangelism is understood, and its task is defined. The motivating factors for engaging in evangelism by EECMY members will be discussed. The message used for evangelizing will be examined. The way evangelizing action is carried out will also be included. Finally, how the ministry of EECMY is responding to the ongoing pastoral needs of its members and the role of the pastor in evangelism will be addressed.

3.2. EVANGELISM

3.2.1. TERMINOLOGIES AND MEANING

In order to get the feel of how people think about Evangelism, the first effort is to understand the dictionary meaning of the words that are used to describe both the concept and the activity of evangelism. Even if there are different languages in Ethiopia, only Amharic and Oromo terminologies are to be analyzed. Amharic is the national and working language of the church and of the country whereas Oromo is the majority language that is spoken by EECMY members.

Several indigenous words are used to describe evangelism in EECMY. For instance, the Amharic phrases that are often used to describe evangelism are “wongel madares” (to make the gospel reach) and “wongel sirichit” (the spread of the gospel). These two phrases have the

⁸⁴ Corrie 2007, 115

⁸⁵ Glasser and McGavran, 1983, 17

⁸⁶ Bosch 1991, 420

idea of taking the gospel so that it is proclaimed to reach certain destinations. Other words utilized are “memesker” (witnessing), which describes the task of evangelism. The equivalent word in Oromo language is “dhuga bahu” (testify to the truth) again describing the task of evangelism, which is essentially witnessing to the truth, Christ or what he has done. There is another Amharic term that is also used at the grassroots level: “Le wongel mewotat” (to go out for the gospel). This word describes evangelism as both an intentional and itinerant effort that is primarily done outside of the church building.

Therefore, as indicated in these terminologies, for EECMY evangelism is an active effort. The witnesses are deliberate about sharing what Christ has done with others in proclamation with specific desired result. Active evangelism is also indicated in its itinerant nature where believers go from one place to the other with the purpose of winning people for Christ. The movement may be from their house to their neighbor’s house, or to the next village or to faraway places, rather than sitting and wait for people to fill the church.

3.2.2. STATE OF EVANGELISM IN EECMY

Evangelism is a burning priority of EECMY. This priority is even highlighted in the constitution of the Church. According to article 4/3/1-2 the evangelism is recorded as the main call and ministry of EECMY.⁸⁷ It can also be observed from the liturgical benediction, which reminds people to go out and serve in the world following weekly congregations worship. The church’s commitment for evangelisms is a widespread sentiment among her leaders. For example, for Revered Megerssa Guta, the EECMY is there to proclaim the gospel⁸⁸. Similarly, according to Mr. Emanuel Abraham, proclaiming the gospel is “the primary obligation”⁸⁹ of EECMY.

According to EECMY, Evangelism has a dimension other than the proclamation of the gospel to those who have never heard, be it locally or internationally. This includes the activity of nurturing those who have become members of the church. The process of nurturing includes, spreading of the gospel, church planting and making disciples of Jesus.⁹⁰ Nevertheless, others have a differing view on the scope of evangelism. For instance, according to Lalissa, evangelism is not about the denominational expansionism (congregation building). It is rather

⁸⁷ EECMY Constitution, 5th edition, 6th publication, 2005, 14

⁸⁸ Guta, O.I. 22/10/2010

⁸⁹ Emanuel, 1995, 274

⁹⁰ Yigezu, O.I. 18/10/2010

directing people to know Christ and live under his Lordship. It is helping people have an opportunity to know Jesus in their personal life.⁹¹

When the terms Evangelism and mission are utilized in EECMY they mean one thing seen from their goals. They both have a meaning of enabling people to hear the gospel. The distinction is however; evangelism is used when people reached by gospel are living in the same area and the same culture. On the other hand, the term mission is used to describe when the effort of spreading the gospel requires crossing geographical and cultural boundaries.

Nevertheless, not all church workers agree with the evangelical commitment the church claims. The grassroots workers, both in urban and rural areas, question the church's commitment. For the urban evangelist, "evangelism is not prioritized in EECMY. It is done as seasonal work and only by few individuals on the regular basis"⁹². Similarly, a member in rural area compared the evangelistic outreach of the church with "the field without the owner."⁹³ For him, evangelism should not be about a superficial effort of starting evangelistic outreach in certain area, erecting building, and counting the baptized members. It should be about exposing people to the saving gospel of Jesus Christ. Preaching the gospel for disciple making is different from a statistical propaganda that measures only number of buildings, congregations and baptized members.

From the above discussion, one can conclude that in EECMY, Evangelism is viewed as the primary activity and ministry of the church at least at the official level. It entails telling the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ to people who have never heard it so that they have a saving relationship with Jesus. In fact the ministry of evangelism in EECMY offered primarily outside of the four walls of the church. However, disciple making is the aspect that deserves improvement.

3.2.3. MOTIVATION FOR EVANGELISM IN EECMY

There are various motivating factors for Evangelism in EECMY. First, there is a sentiment of new identity as an agent of God's kingdom, which motivates evangelism.

"In my opinion, the church is the agent of God's kingdom on the world. That means the gospel must come to the world through the church. Hence, the motivating factor is the realization that the church has

⁹¹ Daniel, O.I. 12/11/2010

⁹² Evangelist 3, O.I. 18/10/2010

⁹³ Bayala, O.I. 16/11/2010

received and become part of God's mission which Jesus Christ began. It is this understanding and taking the duty seriously that motivates people."⁹⁴

Secondly, several Christian educations in the congregation are also helping members to understand their duty for evangelizing. According to Pastor Dawit, the pastor of the Awassa Tabor congregation, four cycles of trainings are given to each member to enhance evangelization. In these trainings, members come to understand that evangelism is their duty.⁹⁵ A similar view is also shared by others. According to Rev. Waqseyoum Idosa, EECMY have a training that helps members to have the deep understanding of God's call on their life.⁹⁶ Therefore, through these trainings, members come to realize their new identity as the agent of God's kingdom and feel responsible as the result of that.

A third motivation is the Love of Christ. Lalissa said that "understanding and the experience of Christ's love in the deep way is what birth forth passion to evangelize"⁹⁷. In this connection Rev Alemu also underlined that "People evangelize neither because they are paid nor in search of prestige but urged by the love of Christ. One that tasted the love of Christ cannot keep his mouth shut."⁹⁸ The experience of love of Christ has other face, which is the love and concern for the lost. This can be seen when Itefa said "when believers share their faith with unbelievers, it is the love gift to bring them from the gates of hell."⁹⁹

Another motivation is faith experience of an individual. The experience of the salvation and renewal gives members bold conviction for evangelistic work. For instance, according to Rev. Itefa Gobena, members' own faith in Jesus Christ and his salvation have given them the assurance of God's kingdom.¹⁰⁰ This assurance is what is motivating believers to share their faith with others. A rural evangelist testifying about the motivation of this assurance as,

"Once they were sinners, carrying all the guilt but now experiencing the overwhelming joy of forgiveness is what drives them to go out and share with others"¹⁰¹

Admittedly, the high level of commitment and the passion for evangelism in EECMY seems to be declining. The aggressive evangelism effort that went countering the communist regime

⁹⁴ Evangelists 1, O.I. 4/11/2010

⁹⁵ Yohannes O.I. 28/10/ 2010 Awassa Tabor Mekane Yesus congregation is one of the successful congregations in the entire EECMY known for fast growth and active in mission.

⁹⁶ Idossa O.I. 11/11/2010

⁹⁷ Daniel O.I. 12/11/2010

⁹⁸ Sheta O.I. 14/11/2010

⁹⁹ Gobena O.I. 27/10/2010

¹⁰⁰ Gobena O.I. 27/10/2010

¹⁰¹ Evangelist 1, O.I. 4/11/2010

is not in its place. The itinerant evangelism movement before and during the early establishment of the Church is losing its momentum giving way for institutionalization. This has made the church's growth to lag behind its history¹⁰².

In conclusion, the majority of the EECMY history shows a great zeal and energy for evangelization. The main motivations for evangelistic work are a sentiment of new identity as an agents of God's kingdom, training that helps members to have the deep understanding of God's call on their life, love of Christ and members' faith experiences. It is to say that they have strong conviction and generosity to share their experience and knowledge in Christ.

3.2.4. THE EVANGELISTIC MESSAGE

The message that EECMY members use during evangelism is not uniform. It depends on particular contexts, circumstances and the particular witness who is proclaiming the gospel. For instance, for Rev. Yonas Yigezu the message must be holistic, i.e., must address both the physical and spiritual needs of a person. However, Mr. Lalissa concerned with the recent development where more attention is paid to material wellbeing. Mr. Lalissa's viewpoint on message of evangelism can be summarized as:

In the past, the content of the message by which people evangelize was by preaching the liberating Christ. They preached the Christ that gives freedom from all powers. But now days, the message is related to economic benefits. The Christ that is preached is the Christ that makes you rich and wealthy. It is the Christ that gives you breakthrough. It is the Christ that gives you more opportunity and open doors. This is what seems to be more attractive for youth.¹⁰³

On the other hand, according to Rev. Alemu Sheta and Rev. Itefa Gobena, the evangelism message is as simple as "believe in Christ and be saved". Here is the classical example,

"When I was a small child herding the sheep, there was a man who is the first Christian in our village. It is a place around Dilla that is called Ticha. When he was going to the field holding his stick and saw in his hand singing. He is singing "Satana kade kristos amane" (renounce Satan and believe in Christ). Hearing this people say, what? What? What? What are you saying? "Renounce Satan and believe in Christ" he replies. "Who is Christ", they will ask. "Christ is the son of God who died on the cross to forgive your sins. Believing in him you will receive eternal life. You will be liberated from your bondage". While going to his field, he will convert three to four people on his way. When he comes from his field, he will do the same. People ask him and he will give them answer. He keeps singing but

¹⁰² Yigezu, O.I. 18/10/2010

¹⁰³ Daniel, O.I. 12/11/2010

one who is interested will ask questions. In doing this, he has helped hundreds of people to turn to the Lord. It is not complicated but it is simple message.”¹⁰⁴

In the rural setting, the main message for evangelism is Christ who liberates from demonic powers. As in most African countries, the rural population of Ethiopian society still practices traditional belief system consisted of sacrificial rituals for worshiping god. Many live under the fear of various sorts of spiritual forces. The people are afraid of curs, sickness and different misfortunes that these spiritual forces may bring to them.¹⁰⁵ In addition, there is a sharp contrast in the manner in which the worshippers receive benefit from these gods. To pray for need or to appease the traditional gods, the adherents of the faith are required to spend a lot of money to bring sacrifices. While in Christian faith healing and salvation is given to a person for free, sacrificial rituals in traditional religion are economically oppressive. Therefore, it is in such context that the proclamation of the liberating Christ is indeed the good news for such societies.

In our context, the great majority of people adhere to the traditional religion as expressed by Qalicha worship (Oromo traditional religion as administrated by the Qallu). Hence, the message we give them is to highlight the difference. The difference we highlight is between the unconditional Love of God and the “give and take” love of Qalicha. When they come to a Qalicha, the spirit may ask to slaughter sheep before giving them what they needed. But we say to them that Jesus has died for you and all the benefits are free gifts from him. We tell them God has a great love for you which is manifested in the sacrificial death of Christ. You don’t need to pay anything. This is totally free. The Qalicha will ask for payment but Christ demands nothing. The free love of God is what we tell them. Secondly, we highlight the power of Christ. We tell them that Christ is stronger than Satan.¹⁰⁶

The other message that is used in evangelizing is what is known as the “four spiritual laws”. The spiritual laws are popular around the Campus Crusade groups¹⁰⁷. Pastor Dawit says that,

“The main message has four steps. The first step is to remind every human being is a sinner. Second, the love of God for the sinner is proclaimed. Thirdly, God’s solution for human sin is Jesus Christ. Lastly, an individual is invited to believe and accept God’s offer of salvation which is Jesus Christ.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Sheta, O.I. 14/11/2010

¹⁰⁵ See the background information on Traditional Religion

¹⁰⁶ Evangelists 1, O.I. 04/11/2010

¹⁰⁷ Campus Crusade- they are called The Great Commission Ministries in Ethiopia. They are para-church organization that is working with all evangelical churches in Ethiopia in training members and ministers for evangelism activity.

¹⁰⁸ Yohannes, O.I. 28/10/2010

Testifying to the personal transformation or healing experience is another message of evangelism in many areas. Sometimes this message is as simple as saying “I was lost but now I am saved.” Examples of changed life that may well serve evangelism are,

“One who used to steal or get drunk and involve in debauchery will be liberated from all these. And people will stop fighting, bickering and quarreling. People who were known for fighting may become peacemakers. Those who use their money in worthless matters will come to use their money and become wealthy.”¹⁰⁹

As mentioned above, the content of the evangelism messages are contingent on context and understanding of a messenger. The understanding refers to messenger’s deep-rooted faith and experience of the believers, while context is to meet the felt needs of the people, whether it is spiritual or physical.

3.2.5. EVANGELISM IN ACTION IN EECMY

Two areas will be considered to show the evangelism activities in EECMY. The first is the evangelism activity that is carried out in organized manner whereas the other is the spontaneous effort by individuals.

3.2.5.1. ORGANIZATION

In EECMY, Evangelisms activities are carried-out in a collective effort or in an organized manner. The EECMY “*Evangelistic Outreach Section*” is the office that is responsible for evangelism activities. The section is under the department of “*Mission and Theology*” of EECMY. It has national office at the Central Office and Synod offices. The task of this office is to build capacity at the congregation level by giving training and imparting vision for evangelism. Some congregations have evangelists and an evangelism committee consisted of people with determination for gospel proclamation. Evangelists are congregation’s employee whose responsibility at least in principle is to go out and spread the gospel. The evangelism committees at the congregation are volunteers who evangelize on the regular basis in the neighborhood of the respective congregations. Such an organized effort aims also at mobilizing the entire congregation to engage in witnessing.

3.2.5.2. VOLUNTEERS

Several ministers of EECMY share the sentiment that in the EECMY evangelism is done primarily by ordinary members of the church in their daily life. It is an individual initiatives spontaneously prompted by their spiritual experiences. For example, according to Bakke,

¹⁰⁹ Evangelists 1, O.I. 04/11/2010

evangelism in EECMY is the ministry of all believers. He believed that is the reason why any particular reference to the office of evangelists was absent in the first constitution of EECMY.¹¹⁰ This is to say that from the beginning, evangelism is understood as the task of all believers.

Reverend Alemu Sheta also reiterates the same sentiment when he describes how evangelism is done by the members of EECMY,

“It is what is done in every neighborhood. It is through one to one evangelism where the one who knows the Lord will tell to his neighbor who doesn’t know the Lord. This happens in market places, in burial places, in all contexts where social interactions are made.”¹¹¹

Similarly, Reverend Megerssa repeated how evangelism is done by all believers and discussed how this helped EECMY to expand.

“The reason why the members are witnessing with passion is because of the reviving work of the Spirit. Teachers, merchants go out in to their daily life, pray and meet with people then evangelize them with the gospel. When they go to new places, they don’t keep their mouth shut. And when the small beginning grows, congregations may start.”¹¹²

In the process of proclaiming the gospel, the members are culturally sensitive while being bold with their conviction. The cultural sensitivity is manifested by the time they take to build relationship to get into the business. Their boldness comes from the Christ they represent and their faith in Christ as the ultimate solution for all problems. This can be best demonstrated by the description of one of the evangelists from the rural setting.

“But when we go out, we don’t tell people that what you believe is wrong. Because they may also say to us that “what you believe is not right”. We start by communicating with them in order to find where they are. We want to know about what is bothering them and difficult for them. It is after they disclose themselves that we jump in with the Gospel message. We tell them that the solution for your problem is Jesus.”¹¹³

Contrary to such established sentiment, Rev Waqseyoum seems to object the distinction between laity and clergy. He maintains that the volunteers are the labor fruits of the vocational ministers. But such an attitude can be questionable when one considers who is

¹¹⁰ Bakke, 1987, 189

¹¹¹ Sheta, O.I. 14/11/2010

¹¹² Guta O.I. 22/10/2010

¹¹³ Evangelist 2, O.I. 13/10/2010

nurturing the members. Even if the clergy has crucial role to play in the equipping members for witness, the majority of equipping is still done by volunteers.

There is also one crucial factor regarding the lay evangelizing movement in EECMY that deserve attention. The factor in mind is the recent development where the itinerant evangelism effort by members and evangelists is being replaced by professionalism particularly in cities. The professionalism in this connection is with regard to charismatic gifting. Few individuals, “the anointed ones” (who have supernatural charismatic gifts) monopolizes the ministry of the church to the extent that it cripples the motivation of other members. Hence, Itefa, observes this as “the development in the wrong direction for it causes the decline in passion for evangelism especially in cities.”¹¹⁴

In EECMY, laity, young men and women do the evangelism. The entire church is engaged in the witnessing. Evangelism is the responsibility of each member not of certain people. The ordinary members fulfill their God-given responsibility spontaneously without immediate mobilization by the established institution. It is the duty believers carry out in their daily life side by side with their vocation. The way they witness is through proclamation of the gospel. While they are proclaiming the gospel, they approach individuals with deeper conviction and sensitivity. Such proclamation by the whole church is one reason behind the growth. Nevertheless, the recent development toward professionalization and monopolization of church ministry has serious consequence of paralyzing the lay movement in evangelizing effort of EECMY.

3.2.6. POWER FOR EVANGELISM

In this section the view of EECMY members regarding the role Holy Spirit has will be presented. It is well acknowledged in EECMY about the impossibility of evangelism without the Holy Spirit. In EECMY, Holy Spirit is viewed as missionary God, who continually perform God’s mission that Christ has started. As the missionary God, His role is conceived as the one who is in charge of the entire mission. This is well articulated by one evangelist from rural setting.

“I used to serve in the countryside by evangelizing and that is where I learned the role of the Holy Spirit in mission. First, he prepared me for mission. He strengthens me and empowered me. He gave me his word. He also prepared the place where I should go. He prepared the people to whom I would tell the

¹¹⁴ Gobena O.I. 27/10/2010

gospel. He gave me boldness then I preached the word. And the word brought impact on those who have heard it.”¹¹⁵

Hence, EECMY ministers invoke Holy Spirit through prayer. Prayer as an expression of ultimate trust in which believers hope that God may intervene and work with them as they are doing the work of evangelism. Many evangelistic efforts at the congregation level are scheduled at the climax of the extended hours or days of prayer. The main purpose of the prayer is to ask Holy Spirit to use and work with church in calling sinners to faith.

Several ministers have their own unique experience with the Holy Spirit as they carry out their evangelistic duty. For instance, Mr. Lalissa said “I cannot do God’s work apart from the Holy Spirit. He is the actor and I am a partner with Him.” For Mr. Lalissa, evangelism is joining the Holy spirit in His mission of expanding the Kingdom of God”¹¹⁶.

Similarly, Reverend Megerssa Guta believes that Holy Spirit prepares by awakening and reviving members for witness, prior to evangelistic work.

“In every generation, Holy Spirit revives churches in many ways. Since 1960s there is big spiritual revival in our country. That has become a great blessing for us. The reason why the members are witnessing to the lost with passion is because of the reviving work of the Spirit”¹¹⁷

The evangelist in the city attributed the passion to share the gospel with others as the overflowing of Joy caused by the experience of Holy Spirit.

“The Holy Spirit has the most important role in Evangelism. He is the one who gives us power to preach, courage and boldness to proclaim. He is the one who revive us to witness. No one can witness without experiencing the joy of the spirit. It is hypocritical to share the joy of the gospel with others without myself experiencing it. Hence, I should be filled by joy that comes from being filled by the Holy Spirit. And it is the Holy Spirit who helps me to share this joy with others. As I said earlier, it is the Holy Spirit who opens people’s heart for the gospel. Hence, it is the Holy Spirit who does an enormous work in evangelizing.”¹¹⁸

Holy Spirit also strengthens the speaker and prepares the heart of the listeners. Along this line the role of Holy Spirit in evangelism is also seen as giving charismatic gifts and performs miraculous healings and exorcisms. Various servants of EECMY have different views of Holy Spirit’s charismatic gift. Being conscious of the distinct role of the Holy Spirit from men,

¹¹⁵ Evangelists 1, O.I. 4/11/2010

¹¹⁶ Daniel, O.I. 12/11/2010

¹¹⁷ Guta, O.I. 22/10/2010

¹¹⁸ Evangelist 3, 14/10/2010

Reverend Waqseyoum says “The human part is to speak, speak Gods word, will and love for humanity. But it is the role of the Holy Spirit to make use of the word and transform life”¹¹⁹

“The role of Holy Spirit is to make the seed of the word bear fruit. Without the help of Holy Spirit, the seed cannot bear fruit. Secondly, it is Holy Spirit that makes the work to persist.”¹²⁰

According to Reverend Waqseyoum Idosa, the charismatic gift is the reason why the Church is experiencing evangelistic success.

“Congregations are experiencing different gifts of grace and that have contributed enormously for evangelism. What I believe is that because the spirit of God has worked in the life of people have contributed highly so those individuals come to the church. For example, when a sick person or a demonized person come to the church and receive healing and deliverance, the healer and the deliverer is the Holy Spirit. And the honor is due to God alone. But when the healed person goes back to his village and people see his healing, the person’s life influences others.”¹²¹

Similarly, Rev. Alemu also gives high regard to charismatic gifts in the work and success of evangelism.

“The charismatic gifts, the power encounter through exorcism have been the powerful tool for Mekane Yesus’ evangelistic success. When God poured out his spirit on Mekane Yesus, there was a big struggle. There was a strong opposition to prevent Pentecostal experience to penetrate in to Mekane Yesus. There were many decisions that were made which are regrettable. When the history of Mekane Yesus is going to be written, she will face the verdict of history. Evangelist Mekonen Negera and Kes Belina Sarka were seen with contempt. Even Francis Stephanos who was the vice-president at that time was persecuted because he said the church should embrace the charismatic renewal instead of despising it. But before long, Charismatic ministry become the highlight of her ministry. At first, Mekane Yesus didn’t have it. Mekane Yesus embraced it and benefited from the fire and the revival that come to Ethiopia from Pentecostal churches such as Guenet and Muluwongel Churches. And this is one of the most important factors that contributed to the growth of the church both in the urban and rural settings.

Moreover, Holy Spirit’s miraculous gifts are critical for evangelism both in rural and urban setting. However, the effect is more significant in rural areas as the manifestations of miraculous gifts are equated with the revelation of God’s glory.

“In our area, before four years there was no church. All the inhabitants were either Orthodox believers or Qalicha worshippers. But when God begin to *reveal his glory by casting out demons and healing the sick*, people are coming to give their life to Christ. When we stretch our hands to Qalicha the spirit may fall

¹¹⁹ Idossa, O.I. 11/11/2010

¹²⁰ Evangelists 1, O.I. 4/11/2010

¹²¹ Idossa, O.I. 11/11/2010

down and leave the person. Then the shrine in which they worship Qalicha may be destroyed to be the place to erect the church building”¹²²

Others in the rural area suggest that miraculous gifts are a symbol of God authentication of the Christian message. It is God’s direct participation in the evangelizing effort by witnessing in action.

“The people who evangelize are not looking for miracles or they are not demanding miracle. But so that people in certain area believe in the gospel and be saved as the result of their belief, God works through signs”.¹²³

However, not everyone is enthusiastic about the role of miraculous gifts in EECMY’s evangelism. For example, Rev. Yonas have a different view. Even if he admits the role miracles have played during the New Testament era, he remains skeptic about today.

God has used these gifts while the church was on its initial stage of establishment and emergence. That means from Judaism to paganism and to Hellenistic world, miracle was necessary. This is the case because the pagan world necessitated approving the authenticity of the Christianity that was born in Judaist culture. Therefore many come to faith because of the sign and wonders. They have a role to play but they are never dependable because miracles and wonders can have various sources. Apart from the Holy Spirit sign and wonder can happen. It has a role but not dispensable”¹²⁴

Additionally, Pastor Dawit Yohannes also cautions against the focus on miracles that may replace Jesus. He stated that miraculous gifts should be viewed equally with every other gift from God which can help members to grow in Christ.

“Each and every gift that God has given to his church has a role to play in evangelism. These gifts have an impact on the people. The point of concern is that if people focus on these things, then they will fail to know Jesus Christ. It may be the case that people come to the church just searching for healing and deliverance. These can draw people to Christ but they cannot replace Christ. Mainly what people need is Christ. But these can simply open doors.”¹²⁵

Furthermore, there is widespread abuse of the miraculous gifts of Holy Spirit., Reverend Waqseyoum is critical of this abuse; particularly in the way gifts are practiced.

“If we compare the sign and wonder ministries of the past with today, today people are trying to show themselves and proud of what God is doing. The other difference is people are saying things in the name of God which God didn’t say and this is affecting people’s faith greatly. There times when healing are

¹²² Evangelists 2, O.I. 13/10/2010

¹²³ Evangelists 1, O.I. 4/11/2010

¹²⁴ Yigezu, O.I. 18/10/20

¹²⁵ Yohannes O.I. 28/10/2010

alleged to have occurred without healing taken place. These kinds of incidents have a potential to blur the focus on God and also challenge the believers faith in God. But if there is discernment, and use the gifts of miracle according to the scripture, it will open a great door for the gospel.”¹²⁶

In conclusion, the role of the Holy Spirit in evangelism is viewed as the main actor who is in charge of the entire enterprise. This entails the recognition of His activity prior to evangelism in reviving the witness, preparing the heart of the hearer and giving gifts to the preacher. Further, it includes recognizing His activity of touching the hearts of the hearers, empowering the speaker and authenticating the message by miracles during the evangelizing process. Furthermore, after the evangelizing process, Holy Spirit keeps on working in the life of those who have heard the gospel. He makes the word bear fruit and sustains believers in the face of difficulty. Such conviction and actual experience of Holy Spirit in EECMY has contributed to the evangelistic success that led to her growth. Nevertheless, there are critical voices registered against misuse of the gifts and problematic attitude toward the role of miraculous gifts in evangelism.

3.3. PASTORAL MINISTRIES

As it has been mentioned above, the authority of preaching the word is not limited to ordained ministers. In his book about Christian Ministries, Patterns and Functions within the EECMY, Johnny Bakke reported how priesthood of all believers is conceived in EECMY. He further noted how the call for ministry is emphasized more than training.¹²⁷ Mr. Emmanuel Abraham, who was leader of EECMY for two decades, gave a theological justification for this. The first argument for priesthood of all believers is from the nature of Church where it is conceived as the communion of people who believes in the Lord Jesus. Second, the equality of believers in standing before God (Gal 3:28) and in service to him (1Pet 2:5) demands the church ministry to be the business of all provided that the spiritual standing of a minister is recognized.¹²⁸ Hence in consistent with such belief, congregational ministries in EECMY is occupied by both salaried fulltime and tent making part-time ministers. This include those who have formal training or those who have not.

However, this does not mean that the hierarchal or patriarchal sentiments are absent in the EECMY. The hierarchical and managerial understanding of the pastoral ministry is available both on the congregation level and on higher level of the church structure (Synod or Central

¹²⁶ Idossa, O.I. 11/11/2010

¹²⁷ Bakke 1986, See his book for Detail

¹²⁸ Emmanuel 1995, 249-250

office). An evidence of dichotomy can be detected in recent development in EECMY. Recently, it has been decided that the highest offices of EECMY should be held by the clergy. The first three presidents were not ordained pastors whereas the last three are ordained pastors owing to the decision.

However, there are some members who question the validity of such “Pastorization” of EECMY. The argument they make is that a pastor is called for the congregational service by the congregation. They are called for shepherding not the administration. But the work of the appointees at the EECMY head offices and synod level are largely administrative. Therefore, for some it is pointless to set “pastorship” as a pre-requisite to the highest EECMY offices.

The pastors are referred to as “congregational leader”, “spiritual father”, and “shepherd” in EECMY congregations. Corresponding to the title, the role of pastoral ministry is an executive i.e. a manager who oversees the activities of congregation. Pastors are also ministers who nurture the members by the word of God. For example, pastor Dawit Yohannes described the typical role of the pastor of EECMY as:

“The pastor is the shepherd. He oversees his flock and follows up. He shows direction. With regarding to evangelism, the pastor should assess the unreached areas and the prospect of the target groups in regional or country level. He might not do it personally but may have it done through others. Then he should organize the manpower and logistics for it together with the Church leaders. Finally, he is entitled to send the evangelists to the outreach place. He then needs to follow up the ones who have been reached with gospel message. And he should devise the system by which these people will be cared for because he cannot do all by himself. The newcomers need to be taught the word of God. But how they are going to be taught, the system should be devised and put in place. Preparing the ministers, the teaching material and coordinating the entire process is the responsibility of the pastor.”¹²⁹

Reverend Megerssa Guta describes pastoral duty as caring, nurturing and equipping church members so that they become mature ministers. For him pastors,

“Besides training and teaching those who are converted, pastors baptize children, administer Holy Communion, administer wedding ceremony, lead liturgical worship, bury the dead, council members.”¹³⁰

There is an effort in EECMY that is attempting to tackle the pastoral challenges that the context posed before the Church. First, there is recognition of shortage of pastoral ministry. Pastors’ number does not match the growth of the church members. A pastor can have

¹²⁹ Yohannes, O.I. 28/10/2010

¹³⁰ Guta, O.I. 22/10/2010

authority over 8-10 congregations in EECMY, especially in the countryside¹³¹. Secondly, there is lack of qualification and adaptability.¹³² The Ethiopian society is changing fast in different ways. The establishment of higher institutions by government and private sector has given an opportunity to many Ethiopians to get higher education. This means that the great majority of the church members (the youth) are exposed to higher education's. But there are not parallel efforts to build capacity of church pastors. Therefore, some congregations have already begun to fall short of meeting the intellectual needs of their congregants.

¹³¹ Guta, O.I.22/10/2010

¹³² Yigezu, O.I. 18/10/2010

CHAPTER FOUR

4. SOCIO-POLITICAL CONCERN (HOLISTIC MINISTRY)

4.1. PREFACE

In the previous chapter, the EECMY's mission thinking with regard to evangelism is presented. This section presents the social implications of God's mission as it is perceived in EECMY.¹³³ This chapter will give the theological and missiological basis for the activities of the church's social involvement. Further, the attempt will be made to show how EECMY is addressing the pressing socio-economical and political concerns of Ethiopia since her establishment. The main question that will be discussed is how EECMY has understood her social responsibility and is responding to it in Ethiopian society.

The Social responsibility of the church is divided into social service and social action. The social services discusses about diaconal and development services, while social action discuss the quest for justice and political involvement. In every society, it is the context that determines the kind and nature of social service or social action of the Church. Hence, this chapter may assess what it means to exist as a church sent by Christ in Ethiopian context past and present. The presentation will be made through the analysis of information acquired from informants and the official documents from EECMY.

4.2. THE FAMOUS LETTER OF 1972¹³⁴

4.2.1. BACKGROUND

The 1972 document is a letter entitled "*On the Interrelation Between Proclamation of the Gospel and Human development*", written by EECMY Church officers on May 1972.

Several reasons can be given to justify the close examination of this letter. First, this document represents a framework by which the EECMY have been responding to the socio-economic concern of the Ethiopian societies. Rev. Waqseyoum Idossa considers the document as the publication of a "right direction for ministry" that the church took from early on.¹³⁵ Both Rev Alemu and Rev Yigezu said that this letter is the document in which "the church developed and publicized" the guideline for her social engagement.¹³⁶ Mr. Lalissa also

¹³³ See the definition of Mission in Chapter One, 1.8.

¹³⁴ See Appendix II

¹³⁵ Idossa, O.I. 11/11/2010

¹³⁶ Sheta, O.I. 14/11/2010 & Yigezu, O.I. 18/10/2010

believes that it is this document that provides the Church with theological justification for her Holistic Ministry.¹³⁷

Besides the value this letter has for shaping the ministry of EECMY, its popularity outside of Ethiopia can be one ground for close investigation. Risto A. Ahonen identified the importance of the letter in influencing the thinking among Lutheran World Federation (LWF). He further pointed out that the issues mentioned by the letter are still relevant as they were four decades ago.¹³⁸

However, seen from the circumstance that brought it to existence, the letter can hardly be considered as the publication of the theological reflection that is existed. According to the then President of EECMY, the intention of the letter was the presentation of economic problem backed with theological and missiological argument to give it weight. According to Mr. Emmanuel Abraham, the letter was crafted to reinforce the request for the assistances from LWF, to help different welfare organizations that the church needed to address the spiritual and socio-economic needs created by growth¹³⁹.

Seen from the impact it had on the ministry of EECMY in the subsequent years, big achievement was not registered. Dr. Johnny Bakke argued that the letter is the reaction of the third world church that found herself overrun by western donor agencies. He further noted that the crucial problems that are addressed by the letter were not resolved after the letter. Furthermore, the content of the letter was not translated in to Amharic and studied by different levels of the church structures. In conclusion, he underlined that the letter should not be viewed as the cause for major change in the way EECMY understood ministry.¹⁴⁰

Regardless of what brought it into existence or the result it produced, as an official statement from the church the letter reflects the attitude at least once existed in EECMY. It shows the unique theological understanding of the EECMY as the attempt was made to show the theological fallacy that undergirds the donor criteria. Even if the cause for the theological reflection was economical, the quality of the reflection cannot be dismissed on that ground. No theology is developed in vacuum. There are social, political and economic dimensions that cannot be ignored while doing theology. Hence, the analysis of the document is justified.

¹³⁷ Daniel, O.I. 12/11/2010

¹³⁸ Ahonen 2000, 241

¹³⁹ Abraham 1995, 273

¹⁴⁰ See Bakke, 1986, 223-237

4.2.2. ANALYSIS OF THE “THE LETTER OF 1972”

The letter has three sections. The first section shows how EECMY understands human being and his/her needs. This section pointed out the erroneous materialistic valuation of man, which led to fragmented understanding of human being and his/her needs. In such dichotomized understanding, only the material need of a person is served. Such attitude of human development was challenged and rejected. An integral human development where the material needs and the spiritual needs are seen together is proposed as an alternative and the correct way to see view human development. The concept of human depravity is maintained both from observation of human history and scriptural testimony from Romans 7:15-20. Seeing human being in this term legitimizes different understanding human development. Therefore, the determination of the assistance was requested to be made based on the needs on the ground to achieve sustainability. The letter stressed the role of congregations as the contact point with the community. In integral human development the congregations plays a key role of transforming the society by serving the total need of the whole person.

The second section is the place where EECMY voiced her view against the two western missiological developments. The title of the section is “the old and new imbalance”. The old imbalance means the missiological trend among the evangelical pietism that sees social service as an instrument for proclamation of the gospel. On the other hand, the new imbalance is the social responsibility that is motivated by the sense of guilt following colonization. It emphasizes social responsibilities such as community development, liberation from dehumanizing structure and involvement in nation building. Therefore, according to this section, proclamation of the gospel is a side issue and salvation is humanization. It is in this section that EECMY clearly tried to define her understanding of Christian service independent of the historical development in the west. Hence, for EECMY, “Christian service is neither “a means to an end” nor “an end in itself” but an integral part of total responsibility of the church. The division between witness and service, or between proclamation and development, which has been imposed on her is viewed as harmful to the church and ultimately result in a distorted Christianity”¹⁴¹.

In the third section, the letter presented the challenging situation in Ethiopia to sister Churches in the west in order to secure assistance. Alarmed by the development and challenged by the opportunities, EECMY conducted study of the growth and devised concrete steps that should be taken to cope with the opportunity. While requesting for the assistance from her partners,

¹⁴¹ Gudina 2003, 91

EECMY underlined that the criteria by which the aid is given should take seriously the African view and the situation on the ground. It should not be arbitrarily judged solely by the western criteria. The African view as it is described by EECMY can be seen when they say “we want to proclaim Christ because we believe it is our responsibility. We want to Proclaim Christ because our people are hungry for him”¹⁴².

4.2.3. CONCLUSION

In the “letter of 1972” EECMY publicized her prime responsibility to proclaim the gospel and involve in human development. This responsibility matches with the need on the ground. EECMY pointed out the need to integrating these two dimensions: spiritual and material, witness and proclamation in her service. Valid justification for this was made in light of the Bible, theology, African worldview and the context on the ground. The criticism of the western missiological trend and donor criteria showed her attempt to determine what it means to be the Church of Christ in Ethiopian context.

4.3. BASIS FOR SOCIAL SERVICE

The EECMY has that says “we serve the whole person to make him whole” has its fountain head in the famous letter of 1972. Since the whole person is both spiritual and material the ministry the church offers must match her holistic understanding of human being. The metaphor the past and present leaders use, to talk about the relationship between the proclamation of the gospel and human development of the church, supports the persistence of that understanding. For instance, Rev. Waqseyoum Idosa’s metaphor is the “two wings of the bird”¹⁴³ to illustrate the two function of the church. Also, Rev. Megerssa Guta uses a metaphor of “the two hands on his body”¹⁴⁴. Without pressing too much into details, the metaphors clearly show that the two dimensions of Church ministry are seen as equally important. However, according to Rev. Alemu Sheta, situation on the ground determine the relative importance of the functions.

“If one asks which one should be prioritized, the context on the ground should be what determines that”¹⁴⁵.

The first factor that made EECMY to involve in social service and social action is the Biblical mandate. According to Rev. Waqseyoum Idosa, on John 10:10b the will of Jesus for people to

¹⁴² Gudina 2003, 93-94

¹⁴³ Idossa, O.I. 11/11/2010

¹⁴⁴ Guta, O.I. 22/10/2010

¹⁴⁵ Sheta, O.I. 14/11/2010

have life in abundance (shalom) is indicated. He believes this has been guiding the church's effort to enhance the betterment of life standard, social justice and liberty. He also mentions that Jesus' earthly life is model and guideline for this ministry. In His ministry, Jesus addressed the spiritual and the physical needs of the people. Mr. Lalissa emphatically affirms the same thing saying:

“Theologically speaking it is following the mandate of Christ during his earthly ministry and model that we see in his ministry. Christ was politically active. Christ was socially active. Christ was spiritually active. He was addressing peoples need both spiritually and physically. Hence, Jesus is seen as the model for the churches ministry.”¹⁴⁶

Adopting Jesus' earthly life as a model, the church attempted to see people the way Christ sees them. As the result there is no distinction as to who is the beneficiary of the social service of the Church.

“The main reason why Mekane Yesus is giving help for all without distinction is the model of Jesus ministry. She is seeing people the way Christ is seeing them. Jesus shed his blood and died for all people. There is no racial, ethnical, gender distinction in this. It is obedience to Jesus' saying in Mathew 25 where he said you fed me when I was hungry, you give me water when I was hungry, and you clothed me when I was naked...”¹⁴⁷

The Christological model is both a caring love and an action birthed out of it. That is precisely why Rev Alemu said, “We are doing this driven by Christ's love and guided by Christ's example”¹⁴⁸

Besides, self consciousness, as the agents of God's kingdom and the understanding of life under the reign of God, is also a reason why EECMY is engaging in social action. The common passage mentioned for this is that “Christian is the salt of the earth and light of the world” Mathew 5. Accordingly, salvation is not viewed in an individual term alone but also viewed as having social implication. True disciples that are transformed by kingdom power can impact the world with their life. The impact transcends social fabrics of the society creating better society. A church member in urban setting says that,

“Christians influence others through living out the values of gospel in their daily vocation- practically by living a different life guided by the gospel and different from the norm of the world. This does bring solution and can be an effective way in which we can address the social concerns in our society.

¹⁴⁶ Daniel Lalissa, O. I. 12/11/2010

¹⁴⁷ Evangelist 2, O.I. 13/10/2010

¹⁴⁸ Sheta O.I. 14/12/2010

Practically, if Christian not only avoid corruption but serve as the light to evict corruption by shining the light of the gospel on it, then they fight economic oppression by living a holy life.”¹⁴⁹

The Legacy of Missionaries from Europe and America is also critical in shaping the social services of EECMY both in action and in attitude. In fact, western missionaries were involved in the development works from the beginning as the “The letter of 1972” clearly stated¹⁵⁰. Besides, the educational and health institutions that EECMY was using and the source of resources to carry out social activities are what she inherited from the Mission organizations. Rev. Alemu Shetta and Rev. Waqseyoum Idossa also testified that the social service of the church has its root in the work of Missionaries. Therefore, it is possible to suggest that missionaries have influenced EECMY’s culture of social service.

In addition, EECMY has inherited attitudes about social service from the founding missionary organizations. This includes the attitude of “false piety” that was allegedly was missionaries’. False piety is the attitude where social service is seen¹⁵¹ as the “means to an end”. Such instrumental view of social service sees evangelism as the primarily goal. And this attitude still exists in EECMY. While giving the basis for social service, an evangelist said that:

“The first reason is so that our gospel has a weight in our society. The social services and the good ministries that Mekane Yesus is carrying out can bring many people to faith. This is the main reason.”¹⁵²

4.4. SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN ACTION WITHIN EECMY

While translating the motto of serving the whole person in to practice, EECMY is involved in various socio-political issues in the context of Ethiopian society. This section includes the presentation of social service and social action as it is conceived in Ethiopian context. For the sake of presentation here the EECMY’s social service and social action may be divided into two levels: the national level (central office/synod office level) and the congregation level.

4.4.1. ACTIVITIES AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

4.4.1.1. EECMY DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL SERVICE COMMISSION

The EECMY-DASSC is the unit set up to carry out the Church’s ministry of the spiritual and physical wellbeing of Ethiopian society. The ministry of the EECMY-DASSC is quiet popular in the rural areas. The reason is that rural areas are where poor and marginalized

¹⁴⁹ Simegn, O.I. 3/11/2010

¹⁵⁰ Gudina, 2003, 89

¹⁵¹ See Gudina, 2003, 89

¹⁵² Evangelist 2, O.I. 13/10/2010

sector of the society predominates. The church instituted this commission in order to fulfill her holistic ministry, which is “meeting spiritual and physical needs of the people”¹⁵³.

As stated on its mission statement, EECMY DASSC aspires to see reconciled, just and prosperous society. In order to achieve this, the EECMY DASSC involved in diversified Development and Social Service projects in the areas of food security, natural resources management and environmental protection, HIV AIDS prevention and control, Gender issues and Emphasis on the marginalized group, Community-based education and health intervention¹⁵⁴. Recently, the EECMY DASSC has expanded the geographical distribution of these projects across the country.

Besides giving social services, the EECMY DASSC ministry has a contribution to positive reputation, lasting credibility and growth of EECMY. Rev. Megerssa Guta said that, “she is the church for the people, stood with the people, and working with the People. In his opinion the church has become the source of rest for the people. She is regarded highly and people do listen to her.”¹⁵⁵ Additionally, Rev Alemu Sheta reported that the “beneficiaries of the health services, educational services and emergency aid receives them as if they are directly coming from Christ”.¹⁵⁶ This shows the classical embodiment of the motto of serving the whole person addressing the physical and the spiritual need at the same time.

Nevertheless, there is a challenge of having both services of the EECMY (social and spiritual) in balance. While commenting on this matter Rev. Alemu said “there are some development works who say evangelism is the work of priests and not ours. What concern us are only the water project and health services”.¹⁵⁷ The classical example was reiterated by Rev Megerssa Guta to prove the same point. He remembered the tractor that was given for development work to one of the synods and has a bumper sticker, which says “not for evangelistic work”¹⁵⁸.

The other challenge is the imbalance in the wide ranges of benefits i.e., salary and car allowance. Development workers of the church receive lucrative benefits compared to the evangelists and pastors of the Church. The reason is that development projects are supported

¹⁵³ GC-EECMY Profile December 2007, 4

¹⁵⁴ GC-EECMY profile December 2007, 5

¹⁵⁵ Guta, O.I.22/10/2010

¹⁵⁶ Sheta, O.I. 14/11/2010

¹⁵⁷ Sheta, O.I. 14/11/2010

¹⁵⁸ Guta, O.I. 22/10/2010

by international governmental and non-governmental organization, while the evangelism works are supported primarily by local congregation.

In fact EECMY simply is serving as a middleman that is transmitting the finances that is raised totally in Europe to fund an earmarked projects. As a matter of fact, local congregations carry the commitment of evangelism alone not the social services. Therefore, one can question if after all the EECMY is committed to the holistic ministry, if not for money that is pouring in from abroad. Rev Alemu emphatically criticize this imbalance saying,

“When one thinks of financial sources for social services we tend to see across not within. The notion is that evangelism is our responsibility where development work is the domain of the government of the donor that has started it in the first place. *I haven’t seen the commitment that say we will handle the development work with the same standard as we are handling the evangelistic work.* This kind of attitude is not widespread. I think that is the weak side of Mekane Yesus if I may be self-critical”¹⁵⁹

In light of the present law of the land, few wonder if integrity of the EECMY is compromised with regard to the social service of the church. The law of the land demand all organizations engaged in social service to register as non-governmental organization (NGO). The EECMY DASSC is now registered as the NGO independent of the EECMY institutionally. This separate organization of EECMY DASSC from the church is viewed by some as “the church compromising her identity in the face of government policy”¹⁶⁰.

However, the leaderships of the church do not view separation as a problem. For example, Rev. Waqseyoum Idossa responded to the critics arguing that “as the citizens in this country, we believe that it is our duty to comply to the policy of government as long as it does not put in danger the evangelistic work.” This statement obviously may raise lots of questions. The way the church may respond to the government’s act toward the evangelistic service may be obviously different. The dichotomy between the evangelistic work and the social services seems to be evident. If the separate organization will sacrifice the holistic identity of the church, shouldn’t it equally be the point concern? That is why the kind of question that is raised by the younger generation is to the point.

We should honestly challenge one another by saying “are we holistic or not?” That is the real issue. Are we really holistic on the congregation level? Is our philosophy of ministry really reflecting that? Serving

¹⁵⁹ Sheta, O. I. 14/11/2010

¹⁶⁰ Daniel, O.I. 12/11/2010

the whole person is the motto of the Church. Are we really up to that motto? Are we really up to that standard?”¹⁶¹

4.4.1.2. ACTIVITIES RELATED TO SOCIAL ACTION

The mission thinking of EECMY can further be seen in the way the church was responding to the political situations in Ethiopia since her establishment. The nature of the churches political engagement is determined by the social strata in which the church finds itself. There have been three regimes since the institution of EECMY. In Ethiopian history, the reign of Haile Selassie represents the feudal Ethiopian where the land is owned by few feudal lords and large majority of the population were deprived. The EOTC, being national church, provided a theological legitimacy for the regime. Both the empire and the Amhara ethnic group legitimized the authoritarian political power and widespread socio-political repression.

During the Haile Selassie regime, the social action of EECMY had not exerted significant pressure on the Monarchy. First of all, the church was young as she was formed in 1959. Besides, the fact that Mr. Emmanuel Abraham, EECMY president (1963-1985), was a cabinet minister of Haile Selassie’s government has made pointed criticism of the regime impossible.¹⁶² Nevertheless, the role EECMY played in the movement that led to the revolution, which ended the repressive system can be detected. EECMY has played an unintentional role in addressing the political situation of the country through fueling some movements by providing it with ideology.¹⁶³ The up rise of the Gedeo peasants against the emperor’s army was motivated by evangelical conviction can be one example (Mr. Alemu Sheta).

“I remember the Gedeo war in 1960. The church is the one that made that war to explode. The people said we don’t want to carry the feudal system any longer. Enough is enough. God created us equally. Our children also have gone to school. Their eyes are open. Hence, there is no reason that we work as a tenant and you took the fruit of our labor. Then that five day war took place. The people confronted the soldiers of Haile Selassie and a lot of people died. The first war that shock his majesties reign was the war at Michile 1960s that was initiated by Christians.”¹⁶⁴

The EECMY’s intentional effort is to address the burning issue of land ownership. In the 8th General Assembly (GA) at Yirgalem in 1973 (GA 8-85-65), the church decided to bring the

¹⁶¹ Daniel, O.I.12/11/2010

¹⁶² Eide, 2001, 476

¹⁶³ For detail see Eide, 2000, 39, 87 (indirectly the churches organization and its manifold activities came to represent a criticism against the prevailing structure and condition in the autocratic society)

¹⁶⁴ Sheta, O.I. 14/11/2010 also see Tolo 1998, 274-276, he stressed how the evangelical believers were the leaders of the uprising.

crucial land reform policy to the attention of the parliament. Following the decision of the GA, the church wrote a letter to the parliament expressing concern, though the parliament did not respond. The church has also helped the landless, particularly, peasants of nomadic Gumuz tribes to settle in Dedessa Valley. The nomadic Gumuz tribe resides in Gambella regions of Ethiopia¹⁶⁵

The popular movement against the feudal system took unexpected twist in the end. The military forces high jacked the movement and established a totalitarian military government (Dergue) called Provisional Military Administrative council (PMAC). The period of Dergue (1974-1991), is distinguished by gross violation of civil right and utter political instability.¹⁶⁶ Widespread civil unrest and wars with neighboring countries, imprisonments, disappearances and killings several evangelical believers and church leaders characterized the era. Properties of church were also confiscated in the name nationalization.¹⁶⁷

The church started taking some measure to adapt to changing political landscape from the early on. Accordingly, the “Pastoral Letter of February 1975”¹⁶⁸ was written to guide the church with well informed and balanced comment regarding the new transition period in Ethiopian society¹⁶⁹. Rev Gudina Tumsa was the driving spiritual and intellectual force behind the effort.¹⁷⁰ The acceptance of the Memorandum by the 35th Executive Meeting (EC) and GA held in Najjoo in April 1976 reflects this clear readiness and determination of the church.¹⁷¹ While adjusting on one hand, the EECMY sent an official letter to the PMAC in May 1974. In the letter, the church indicated her support for the abolition of feudal system and establishment of secular states that guarantee freedom of religion¹⁷². Besides, Rev. Gudina Tumsa’s, general secretary of EECMY, showed a superior judgment and great leadership by creating a coalition of faith groups to engage and counter the new state’s ideology of scientific socialism.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁵ Eide 2000, 213ff

¹⁶⁶ Eshete 2009, 203-204

¹⁶⁷ For detail see Eshete 2009,203-230 and Eide 2000, 95-143,153-206

¹⁶⁸ Pastoral Letter of 1975 is a letter that was written by Emmanuel Abraham and Rev. Gudina Tumsa. Its title is The EECMY in Ethiopian revolution. And this letter represent the Churches attempt to come in to terms with political landscape of the country in order to clarify her own role and devise her rule of engagement with the new government.

¹⁶⁹ Eide 2000, 145

¹⁷⁰ Eide 2000, 145

¹⁷¹ Eide 2000, 146

¹⁷² Eide 2000, 147

¹⁷³ Eshete 2009, 224-230, Eide 2000, 148

For Rev. Gudina Tumsa, the church's response to political concerns in the society is deep rooted in the understanding of holistic theology. In his memorandum to Mr., Emanuel Abraham, EECMY president, in August 1975 he wrote:

“Holistic theology is an effort in rediscovering total human life. Apolitical life is not worthy of existence, un-involvement is a denial of the goodness of creation and of the reality of incarnation. We are not interested in creating medieval monasteries, in setting up ghettos (modern monasteries), but in being involved in the complex social life of our people as we find it daily, with full knowledge of our Christian responsibility”¹⁷⁴

It was such understanding of holistic theology that made Rev, Gudina Tumsa not to remain in silent compromise, in the face of brutal dictatorship. It was also what made the Reverend to refuse an effort by the government to recruit him. Unfortunately, the stance of the Reverend, made him the target of the government that easily threatened by contending opinion. Rev. Gudina Tumsa, General Secretary of EECMY, was murdered for nothing but his belief on July 28, 1979¹⁷⁵.

After the assassination of its General Secretary (Gudina Tumsa) the persecution from the communist regime did managed to compel EECMY to shift its approach. The church started what seems to be compromising her prophetic aspect of holistic theology. This does not mean that the church collaborated with the totalitarian government. However, she remained silent in the face of grave violations of civil rights. Rev Alemu Sheta said “the church was in intimidated and did not have any platform to voice her voice as the political environment was not accommodative.¹⁷⁶ The maximum the church could do was writing letters to appeal about the widespread persecution and confiscation of properties.¹⁷⁷ The only positive engagement the church was allowed is a reconciling role in the civil war that plagued in the northern Ethiopia.¹⁷⁸

Therefore, one can wonder if Holistic theology is after all of Rev. Gudina Tumsa, not of the church. How are we to understand if the theology of the church stopped with the death of one person? Rev. Alemu Sheta remembered the time when guests from Germany came and encouraged the leaders of the church to confront the government and its policy. They exhorted them to pay the necessary price. But, he and his friends responded saying “why do we die

¹⁷⁴ Gudina, 2003, 69

¹⁷⁵ Eide 2000, 178

¹⁷⁶ Sheta, O.I. 14/11/2010

¹⁷⁷ See Eide 2000, 181-182

¹⁷⁸ Guta O.I. 22/10/2010

when it is possible for us to live? Unless we are asked to renounce our faith in Christ, then we are not willing to die. We did not believe in confrontation.”¹⁷⁹ It can be noted that the view of Rev. Alemu Sheta is different from that of Rev. Gudina Tumsa. For Rev. Gudina Tumsa apolitical life is a denial of incarnation and not worth living, whereas for Rev. Alemu Sheta, social action is thought about only in non-hostile environment.

The third political era in which the EECMY practiced her social action is the reign of the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) Rule. This period covers from 1991 onwards. The EPRDF is an umbrella political organization made of the coalition of political parties namely: Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF), Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), Oromo People’s Democratic Organization (OPDP), and the Southern Ethiopia Peoples Democratic Movement (SEPDM). The coalition drafted a constitution in 1994 to establish a Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) consisted of regional states federated along the ethnic line.

There are two factors that shape the way EECMY exercise social action during the present regime. The first is the constitutional provision of the current government. According to article 11 of the 1994 constitution, the state is entirely secular and does not interfere in religious matter. The Article further explicitly declares the separation of religion and state, freedom of religion, religious equality and non-discrimination based on religion.¹⁸⁰

The second factor that shaped the social action of EECMY is the decision made on the 14th General Assembly. In the 14th GA, which took place in 1993, a resolution was passed to restrict the involvements of church ministers in politics. The resolution required the church to play a neutral role, without taking side with any rival political groups. The current president, Rev. Waqseyoum Idossa acknowledges the significance of this resolution. According to him, the resolution was made to prevent the divisive ethnic politics and federalism from affecting the unity of believers.

“The main reason for it is if the pastors and evangelists join one party or group they may hate the other party and its members. When that happened it may be difficult for church leaders to serve equally different nations and nationalities in different parts of Ethiopia. This kind of problem has been a difficulty

¹⁷⁹ Sheta, O.I. 14/11/2010

¹⁸⁰ Ethiopian Constitution 1994 http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Hornet/Ethiopian_Constitution.html May 2, 2011

in the past. Hence, the leaders, teachers and evangelists must reserve themselves from political involvement. There is no way that they should take sides.”¹⁸¹

Others also argued for the resolution saying that EECMY can only maintain her prophetic role only if she remains neutral. Besides, taking sides with political organization would hinder the ability of the church to serve all mankind, particularly those on opposite aisles.

However, others find the resolution at best controversial and at worst vague. According to these individuals, the resolution was made swiftly without proper study. It was drafted by two individuals in the church’s executive committee and rushed to GA for decision.¹⁸² The weakness of this decision can also be seen from the way neutrality is conceived. Who should be neutral and who should take sides in political environment is not clear. Further, in some cases neutrality is interpreted as abandonment and total disengagement from political issues and political systems. This is evident especially if one considers the impact resolution had on the attitude of the ordinary church members. For example, the rural evangelists admitted that “if a church member is a politician he will no longer considered as Christian and suffers from isolation. To be a politician and to be a Christian is two mutually exclusive affairs.”¹⁸³ The same understanding is also widespread among the urban EECMY members. According to a member from urban congregation, “the majority of youth and other church members in EECMY have a negative attitude toward Christian engagement in politics. Members must keep as far distance as possible from politics and government.”¹⁸⁴ In general, one can argue that the resolution has distracted the church from her motto of holistic service. Such abandonment of the political life of the Ethiopian societies has made EECMY to function below her obligation, standard and capability.

This does not mean, however, the church always turned a blind eye on atrocities. During the national elections of 2005 and 2010, the church has expressed serious concerns following the conflict situation between the ruling party and opposition figures.¹⁸⁵ By so doing the leaders claim the church has fulfilled her role of becoming voice to the voiceless.

¹⁸¹ Idossa, O.I. 11/11/2010

¹⁸² Sheta O.I. 14/11/2010

¹⁸³ Evangelist 1, O.I. 4/11/2010

¹⁸⁴ Simegn O.I. 3/11/2010

¹⁸⁵ GC- official letters both in 2005 and 2010

“Five years ago during election she played a role of voicing her concern. Afterwards also she has involved in reconciliation efforts. Even in the election of 2010, the church has sent out warning to government, opposition parties and the entire population.”¹⁸⁶

While doing so, the church neither charged anyone of wrongdoing nor took any side. She called for calm and peace. No attempt was made to address alleged election rig and subsequent loss of life. By all measure one can rightfully argue that these efforts do not match the sentiment one finds in pastoral letter (1975). The letter unequivocally mentioned about social justice, rule of law and respect for human rights. Therefore, some wonder if the effort the church made can add-up to becoming voicing for the voiceless as the leaders claim.

The 14th GA (1993) also established an office known as The Peace Office. This office guides the social action of the church under the new regime. It is established in response to the theological understanding of the church’s responsibility of peacemaking, and being salt and light of this world. Recently, the office has upgraded to match contemporary challenges in Ethiopia. In 2002, the EECMY Peace Office became the EECMY Peace Commission with a new vision of enabling members in peacemaking, social justice, respect for human rights and creation of a tolerant society founded on Christian principles. The mission of the commission is to build a lasting peace among the Ethiopian societies.¹⁸⁷

In Ethiopia, the ethnic-based federalism has brought sporadic ethnic conflicts often resulted in unfortunate human tragedies. The EECMY peace commission has involved in these conflicts and produced encouraging results. The commission has prepared and disseminated teaching materials, conducted training of trainers, established peace committees, conducted peace and reconciliation conferences, promoted peace and advocacy network and carried-out inter-religious consultation workshops. During these trainings and workshops, the concepts of peace building, conflict transformation, reconciliation, human rights, the principle of democracy and good governance were introduced. Rev. Waqseyoum Idosa summarized the activities of the commission as,

“Regarding peace, there is a lot of conflict in our country that is resulted from resources and others. When it comes to our attention we move around where the problem exists. We give basic trainings, organize discussions and peace conferences. For Example last time there was a big massacre among the Oromo and the Gumuz people group. And at that time we have made our voice heard by appealing to the respective government structure. Then we gave trainings on conflict resolution so that the two

¹⁸⁶ Yigezu O.I.18/10/2010

¹⁸⁷ GC-Memorandum of establishment of EECMY PCO,2002

communities will co-exist in love. Finally, together with the Oromia region and the Benishangul region we manage to secure reconciliation.”¹⁸⁸

Even if EECMY’s social action is framed by country’s constitution and 14th GA resolution, a new framework of thinking is emerging. According to this new understanding, political involvement is simply being an agent of God naturally lead to political involvement. It is a conviction by which believers take the responsibility to influence their society with Christian values. An evangelist when reflected on the new thinking said;

“Recently there is a change in attitude. We believe that if we involve in politics, we can bring impact by becoming examples. We can display our godly character and contribute to change in the direction of righteousness. Practically there are church members who have become woreda (district) leaders and PM”¹⁸⁹

Rev. Yonas believes members have already embraced this new framework of thinking. He said;

“In the past years the church did not allow members to participate in the politics. But now since members are participating into the politics, we believe that the church is involved in politics.”¹⁹⁰

Following, the shift in the attitude of members toward politics, the church has recently launched a new office known as Professional Christian Ministry. The purpose of this office is to create awareness of the responsibility Christian politicians have in the political sphere. It is to encourage Christian politicians to use their political influences in order to impact the political milieu with Christian values. Several members of the EECMY have become cabinet ministers, Parliamentarians, federal judges and other high offices in the government.¹⁹¹ For example, a Church member in Awassa became parliamentarian in the past election. Following the election, she came to Church elders to seek a prayer and Godly guidance. The elders prayed and blessed the parliamentarian and sent her reminding; “She represents the value of the EECMY in the parliament.”¹⁹²

The shift in attitude can further be evidenced in the way some of the church leaders grapple with the present context of Ethiopian society. Economic injustice is one crucial political issue according to Rev Yonas:

¹⁸⁸ Idossa O.I. 11/11/2010

¹⁸⁹ Evangelists 2, 13/10/2010

¹⁹⁰ Yigezu O.I. 18/10/2010

¹⁹¹ Idossa O.I. 11/11/2010

¹⁹² Simegn O.I.03/11/2010

“Now imagine where the world’s economy is and where is Ethiopia’s? Poverty has reached its highest peak where our country’ economy is growing in double digit. Is there an equal sharing of wealth and opportunity? How is the distribution? We believe the economists, anthropologists will emerge out of EECMY and they will impact the nation.”¹⁹³

In Ethiopia, the gap between rich and poor is growing. The level of poverty has increased. Wealth and opportunities are unevenly distributed. As the solution to these problems, the social action by EECMY is mentioned as critical input. It is believed that the solution lies in the hand of citizens that are transformed by the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. However the reflection is yet to rise to confronting the government for the injustice committed so far. The social action that challenges the government for economic reform where the resources will be evenly distributed is still farfetched.

4.4.2. ACTIVITIES AT THE CONGREGATIONAL LEVEL

Social services are being carried out at congregation level in EECMY. This is the level at which the grassroots contact is made between the church and society, through the ministry she provides to her members. Hence, social services at this level shed clear light upon what EECMY understands about the social implication of God’s mission.

At the congregation level, The EECMY has a diaconal ministry. Deacons are trained by the diaconal office of the Central office and synod offices. Their purpose is to encourage congregation members so that they help the poor and the disabled amongst themselves¹⁹⁴. They help the children of poor family go to school, assist constructing the house of whose houses are destroyed, provide food for the hungry and give money to the poor and needy.

Additionally, congregations are participating in the formal education of the society. They have kindergartens, elementary, junior secondary and high schools to provide the ministry.¹⁹⁵ However, few question whether these ministries can be regarded as social services. The reasons are: first, the schools charge tuition fee and part of the fee goes to support congregations’ evangelism work. That means the schools are there to support the evangelism work financially. Second, congregations consider the schools as platforms for the evangelism. Thirdly, the schools are often opened by well established urban congregations. This means that the schools are not meant to give social services. Had it been for the purpose of giving

¹⁹³ Yigezu, O.I. 18/10/2010

¹⁹⁴ Idossa O.I. 11/11/2010

¹⁹⁵ Idossa O.I. 11/11/2010

social service, the schools would have been established in the rural areas of the country like it was done by western missionaries.

Recently, in the 18th GA of the EECMY (2009), the church has made a policy decision to start a ministry known as “Congregational Development”. This ministry mobilizes the congregations to engage in social services and address the needs in their society. The main strategy is to train and create awareness of the congregations’ responsibility of supporting the social wellbeing. Besides, the ministry has a goal to develop the economic standing of congregation members and the larger community.

“It is a grassroots development. We are thinking of strategies to transfer from the individual development to community development. There is a theology of wealth making in order to share it. We want the members to make wealth not just to accumulate and share it”.¹⁹⁶

In conclusion, the social services and social action (development work, peace work or political engagement) of the church have no strong base at the congregation level. The congregations are occupied with serving primarily the spirit of the people. Therefore, the two aspects of God’s mission: serving the physical and the spiritual dimensions of a person is yet to be fully integrated into the congregational life of EECMY.

¹⁹⁶ Yigezu O.I. 18/10/2010

CHAPTER FIVE

5. INCULTURATION OF THE GOSPEL

5.1. PREFACE

The concern with inculturation of the gospel in to human culture gets its significance from the understanding of the role and the place culture has in human history in general and in God's mission in particular. To be part of God's mission is to reach people with the Gospel message in such a way that they understand the gospel message and are transformed by it (See the definition of Mission). That means the gospel must be communicated to the extent that it is received by human being and become personally their own and determine their whole life¹⁹⁷. This has to do with translating divine revelation given to us in Scripture in to different human condition so that people accept and changed by it. Culture has crucial role to play to this end. Culture as an essential component of one's identity is an important category to understand human condition and our world. Culture in mission as well provides both with the contextual framework to understand and communicate the gospel. The common historical revelation (the apostolic gospel) comes to a person through his or her own cultural understanding. Anyone who is diligent about the mission imperative then will take the cultural identities of different society very seriously. It is in this assumption that the way EECMY's attempted to help different societies to understand the gospel message from their cultural background will be explored. This has to do with proper understanding of the gospel message and the way culture is viewed.

The second area to investigate is how the gospel message communicated by EECMY. This communication can be seen by the extent to which self-theologization is in place.¹⁹⁸

According to Bosch, "all theology by its very nature is contextual and this is the paradigm shift in theological thinking"¹⁹⁹. Taking the point one step further, Bevans insisted that "it is an imperative for theology to be contextual".²⁰⁰ If all theology by its very nature is or should be contextual, the effort that has been made by EECMY to reach down to its cultural roots and be planted on the Ethiopian cultural context must be investigated. In other words, the

¹⁹⁷ Ahonen 2000, 156

¹⁹⁸ See Hiebert 1985, 196-224(self-theologization is the theology developed by the indigenous people taking in to account their own context(questions, cultural categories and worldview) very seriously supplemented by serious study of the Bible)

¹⁹⁹ Bosch 1991, 423

²⁰⁰ Bevans 2002, 3

degree as to which the theological reflections have been broken from the western contextual theology needs to be addressed.

It is in this context that the mission thinking of EECMY with regard to the relationship of Christian faith and culture will be explored. For the sake of clarity, important terms will be defined. Further, different views on the nature and the place of culture in the Christian mission according to EECMY members will be presented. Factors that have contributed to the formation of such attitudes will be discussed. Lastly, the Inculturation effort made by EECMY as it can be demonstrated in her activities will be presented. The two areas chosen to investigate her activities are from the perspectives of the use vernacular language for proclamation and the interaction of traditional religion with Christian faith.

5.2. DEFINING TERMS

Inculturation is the word used by catholic theologians to describe the intimate dialogue between culture and faith. Accordingly, “Inculturation is an intimate transformation of authentic cultural value through the integration in Christianity and the insertion of Christianity in various human cultures.”²⁰¹ In the effort of inculturation, the agents are local communities and the Holy Spirit.²⁰² It emphasizes truly on the local situation such as social, political, and economical. It is all embracing reality since culture is all embracing.²⁰³ One cannot Christianize the isolated elements and customs in the culture. This should also be balanced with the fact that the gospel is foreign to every culture or cannot become the property of any one culture.²⁰⁴

Culture is “the integrated system of ideas, feelings, and values and their associated patterns of behavior and products shared by group of people who organize and regulate what they think, feel and do.”²⁰⁵ It is a learned behavior but never static. It is an essential part of being human and generates a strong sense of belonging to a greater whole. Significant portion of culture is unconscious internalization of values.²⁰⁶ Components of culture include- systems of values, moral code and cultural customs, historical identity, unifying symbols, dressing code, distinctive music, common festivals and ceremonies.²⁰⁷ The basic assumptions about reality

²⁰¹ Yung 1997, 77

²⁰² Bosch 1991, 453 and Scherer and Bevans 1999, 6

²⁰³ Bosch 1991, 454

²⁰⁴ Hiebert 1985, 53-56 and Bosch 1991, 455

²⁰⁵ Hiebert 1985, 30

²⁰⁶ Hiebert 1985, 42

²⁰⁷ Ahonen 2000, 168-169

which lie behind the beliefs and behavior of a culture are called worldviews.²⁰⁸ World view provides cognitive foundation to build up on, gives emotional security, validates deepest cultural norms, integrates culture, and also monitors cultural change.²⁰⁹

5.3. VIEWS ON THE RELATIONSHIP OF GOSPEL AND CULTURE

This presentation is very crucial because the way one understands and appreciates the nature of culture and its place in a given society depends on the manner in which one integrates it in to the Christian faith. Generally speaking, the issue of culture is basic, important and challenging for EECMY²¹⁰. It is basic because it is concerned with the understanding of the gospel. It is important because helping people to understand the gospel is the primary call of the church. It is challenging because the church is yet to rise meaningfully to face these challenges. In the following passages cause for the challenges, the nature of the challenge and the efforts to overcome them will be presented.

Culture is viewed as what dictates the manner of life and belief of an individual or a society. According to Rev Megerssa, “culture is the way people live, the language and the way one sees reality both created and non-created.”²¹¹ Such an attitude seems to be shared by the former leaders of the Church as they considered the nationality issue in the country very seriously. For instance in October 1975, the Executive committee of EECMY, thoroughly discussed on the need of establishing a department for cultural and linguistic studies even prior to the establishment of similar department in Addis Abba University.

Culture is also viewed as the essential component that shapes the identity of an individual. And as the result it must be respected. An evangelist from the urban setting suggested that the cultural identity of a person should be given due respect because it has a positive contribution for effective communication of the gospel. The respect of the culture can be seen by “doing everything to learn the cultural background of the person that is targeted”²¹². Taking the matter a little further, some call for appropriate acknowledgement of diverse cultural identities.

“The church is not one cultured. There are a lot of cultures within the church. Of course one might say denominational culture to talk about the faith tradition and common religious practice. But as an Oromo

²⁰⁸ Hiebert 1985, 45

²⁰⁹ Hiebert 1985, 48

²¹⁰ Idossa, O.I. 11/11/2010

²¹¹ Guta, O.I. 22/10/2010

²¹² Evangelist 3, O.I. 14/10/2010

there is the culture that I bring along. And somebody who is from Tigre tribe or Sidama will bring his culture along. And all these cultures have their own expressions and that is the beauty of this church. That beauty should not be suppressed; rather it should be appreciated, cherished, well entertained and accommodated.”²¹³

In the above quotation, the main reason the church is called to embrace all cultural identities is for its aesthetic value. But the implication of acknowledging different cultural identities in the church has far-reaching consequences. It may require reexamining the churches self-consciousness as the church that belongs to all these ethnic identities. It will also call for serious and intentional integration of these cultures to the Christian faith and vice versa. It requires afresh evaluation of cultural values of these identities as theology is done and expressed.

While discussing about the relationship between culture and Christian faith, Rev Waqseyoum said that, culture can either be a hindrance or a vehicle to gospel message.”²¹⁴ Culture can be hindrance for the gospel because some aspects of the culture are mutually exclusive with the Christian faith. Hence what is obstacle for the gospel should be distinguished from what is not and be abandoned. When going to a new place with the gospel message, respecting the values of the target group and pointing out the perceived contradiction humbly is the manner that is adopted.²¹⁵

Culture is viewed as the vehicle for gospel message. Members who are familiar with the culture and language are shown to experience evangelistic success more than those who are not. In this connection, pastor Dawit said that, “using people who are familiar with the indigenous culture is the best strategy for evangelistic success”.²¹⁶ Further, the contextual melody and music are also suggested as serving a powerful evangelistic tool for it incorporates the identity issue.

“When we prepare programs with our own cultural features, people may say *this is ours* and they give due attention to it. There is a tendency that they accept it. There is also a tendency not to accept when they see something foreign. But when it is prepared in our country’s culture for example in the “Yaredawi zema” of orthodox style, they are well received by people. And these are attracting people and as the result they may come to faith.”²¹⁷

²¹³ Daniel, O.I. 12/11/2010

²¹⁴ Idossa, O.I. 11/11/2010

²¹⁵ Idossa, O.I. 11/11/2010

²¹⁶ Yohannes O.I. 28/10/2010

²¹⁷ Evangelist 3, O.I. 14/10/2010

The utilitarian (vehicle or hindrance) view of culture that predominates in EECMY is different from seeing it as all embracing aspect of human identity. Of course there may be some elements in all cultures that can be contradictory to the Christian faith. But interaction between culture and Christian faith should not be simply seen on a linear basis where culture is reduced to a vehicle or a hindrance to Christian message. The interaction between culture and gospel is not conceived as dialectical where the gospel perpetually transforms the culture and the culture simultaneously shape Christian expression of the Gospel. Bosch quoting Pedro Arrupe insisted that inculturation concern with the principle that animates directs and unifies the culture, transforming it and remaking it so as to bring about a “new creation”.²¹⁸

There is a sentiment that seems to view culture as mutually exclusive with the gospel. Culture is something that must be questioned or left behind after the reception of the gospel.

According to pastor Dawit,

“We know that every people group has their own culture. And prior to their reception of Christ, their culture is the main thing that they cling to. Therefore, to attack their culture while preaching the gospel is a wrong move. Therefore, we don’t mention the culture but we preach the gospel about the salvation of Christ. The teaching is biblical. In the bible we show them what is sin and not. Mostly when people read the bible and then see their culture, they come to raise a question about their culture. They may say “What can I do with this? I don’t think this goes in line with Bible”. Our response is that this is not what we decide it is rather what you should decide as a response to God. If you think this is worthless, you should just reject and leave it behind. We normally don’t focus on culture but on the gospel.”²¹⁹

Should people stop holding to their culture after receiving Christ? In the above quotation, Even if direct confrontation is to be avoided, there seems to be an implicit belief that the understanding of the gospel will lead to abandonment of the culture. And this seems to affirm the existence of “culture-free gospel” that we preach and expect people to accept it. There might be some expressions of culture that should be questioned and left behind if it is in contradiction with the gospel. But equating the culture with these contradictions is to be too simplistic about what culture is and its role in human life.

Such simplistic attitude toward the meaning and the role of cultures was encountered at the grassroots ministers in EECMY. During the field interview about the relationship of culture and the gospel, it was interesting to note how the grassroots evangelists interchangeably use culture and traditional religion. For them culture is one and the same with traditional religion.

²¹⁸ Bosch 1991, 455

²¹⁹ Yoahannes, O.I. 28/10/2010

Of course traditional religion is one expression of cultural identity. But reducing the meaning and the concept of culture to traditional religion can be problematic.

In the EECMY, there seems to be a notion that minimizes the role of culture in today's world. According to Itefa, the dynamic nature of the culture and the globalization process has made the study of anthropology for missiological goal an unnecessary and outdated practice.

“In my opinion, now we live in globalized world. When we want to contextualize the gospel, the globalization effort will bypass us. The strategy where certain people group is studied, and may be reached by the gospel is an old fashion in my opinion. Cultures have become conventional.”²²⁰

As technology expands and time is compressed, events that are happening in one part of the world reach the other part of the world fast to make the world a small village. But it should be noted that as globalizing process homogenizes the world, it also creates heightened sense of particular²²¹. This is the case because different cultures respond to the pressure of globalization in different ways.²²² This means that still in globalized world, the place of culture as an integral part of the society's self-consciousness cannot be minimized. In addition, the dynamism of culture calls for ongoing study and reflection that match the change. The change is neither the elimination nor the homogenization of culture but the constant transformation of culture. Further, the globalizing process creates people to live in multi-cultural context in a given geographical space. Hence, this places extra demand upon us to learn how to live in multi-cultural context and build bridges of understanding and relationship between different contexts.²²³

5.4. FACTORS THAT SHAPED THE VIEWS ON CULTURE

5.4.1. THE LEGACY OF FOUNDING MISSIONARIES

EECMY has not totally come out of the anthropological impoverishment that is caused by the founding missionaries. The western missionaries are blamed for lack of discernment in mixing European culture with the gospel message. Rev Alemu says that “the burial ceremony, the wedding culture, family life and social issues in the society were attempted to be

²²⁰ Gobena, O.I. 27/10/2010

²²¹ Schreiter 1997, 21

²²² See Schreiter 1997, 21-27 for detail discussion.

²²³ Hiebert 2009, 18

Europeanized. The cultural norms have been attempted to be shaped according to the teaching and preferences of Mr. and Mrs. X.”²²⁴

The pioneering western Missionaries are also to be blamed for indiscriminately having the negative attitude toward the indigenous culture. The sad reality is that missionary attitude persisted in the Church long time after they left. As the result of that some members of EECMY have develop a negative attitude toward their own culture.²²⁵

“Our people were forced to leave behind the good elements of their culture. The same sentiment is still there among our members even today. Believers are brain washed to the extent that anything cultural is evil. This is exemplified with regard to cultural costumes- For example, When a girl from Oromo tribe come wearing her traditional costume with all the traditional jewelry, people may say “in Jesus name” (as if they are rebuking Satan). What is the problem with the cultural costume? It is just a cloth and a cultural cloth. It has nothing to do with idolatry or any worship of Satan.”²²⁶

The missionary problem is both cultural and theological. The act of confusing the European culture with the gospel message had a harming effect to both the indigenous Christian identity and the nature gospel.

“Now, the sad reality is that the European culture and the gospel are mingled to the extent that one cannot tell one from the other. This is also damage to the gospel because its dynamic nature to work in all culture is diminished. This has also caused many Africans to think that the gospel is the property of the west.”²²⁷

Nevertheless, evaluation of missionaries should include their intention and the result of their fruit. First, “the benefit of being exposed to the Gospel outweighs the disturbance caused to the indigenous culture.”²²⁸ If one has to make the cost benefit analysis, the benefit by far surpasses the cost. Second, is it practically possible to totally give up one’s cultural identity while serving as a missionary? Further “is it even fair to judge retrospectively older missionaries with the anthropological insights and missiological trends that are available today?”²²⁹ Furthermore, can one detect radical change both in attitude and in practice in EECMY from the way missionaries have done in the past?

²²⁴ Sheta, O.I. 14/11/2010

²²⁵ Guta, O.I. 22/10/2010 & O.I. 11/11/2010

²²⁶ Idossa, O.I. 11/11/2010

²²⁷ Sheta O.I. 14/11/2010

²²⁸ Sheta O.I. 14/11/2010

²²⁹ Sheta O.I. 14/11/2010

5.4.2. INTERNAL FACTORS

The socio-political, historical and religious situation in Ethiopia is the other factor that shaped the views of EECMY members on culture. Since the establishment of the modern state of Ethiopia, different nations and nationalities were subjugated by the Amhara imperial force that exercised religious and cultural supremacy over the rest of nations and nationalities. The highly organized and systematic amharization process has contributed to weaken the social status and cultural confidence of different nationalities in Ethiopia. Since the revolution of 1974 that supremacy has been eroded. And after 1991 there is a relative change in the way different nations and nationalities are treated. But the country has not fully recovered from the attitude caused by the century old suppression. This historical fact has been one factor for the reason why different nationalities are not seeing in to their culture as a worthy resource and category for understanding the gospel message.

When the political climate in Ethiopia begun to change since 1991, it gave way to another form of extreme that tend to downplay anything cultural as political. This is another overreaction to those who aggressively overreacted to the historical suppression. When people who opted for the protection and expression of cultural identities in Christian faith present their case with political rhetoric, others overreacted to this and suspected anything cultural as a political move. This suspicion is also fueled by the ethnic politics of the day which bring to the surface cultural and ethnic sensitivity to the higher degree. It is in this context that some people question the manner in which assertion of one's cultural identity in reaction to the historical subjugation made. Rev Alemu is one of those to pointed out this extreme case.

“And some people who advocate for cultural identity protection speak with harsh words. It has really been difficult. The development is not done in such a way that conforms to the grassroots understanding. Rather the advocates of the culture are advancing their agenda in the attitude of retaliation.”²³⁰

The best example here with regard to EECMY is the 12 years conflict that is resulted from the use of vernacular language.²³¹ The problem started when the Oromo language speaking members requested for the time and place of worship in their own language at two congregations in Addis Ababa. The two congregations are the Gulele Bethel Mekane Yesus and Entoto Mekane Yesus congregations. Their request was rejected by leaders of the two congregations. The fair demand for vernacular language presented with the overt political and

²³⁰ Sheta, O.I. 14/11/2010

²³¹ For detail discussion see Fekadu Gurmessa, 2003

retaliatory tone which overshadowed the question. The aggressive request for the use of language ended up in shocking response of politicizing the use of mother tongue in EECMY.

“No one expected the language issue will be raised in Mekane Yesus. Already Mekane Yesus was extremely inclusive in terms of language. But it came from an unexpected front. When the issue comes the response was also unexpected. When you are shocked, you respond in the shocking manner. When the question was asked, the one who heard was shocked because it was shocking for him. The one who asked the question was also aggressive.”²³²

The overreaction to old religion can also be one factor for considering culture as demonic as seen above. Prior to their conversion, a great majority of EECMY members have had some contact with traditional religions. In traditional religions there is an acknowledgement of spiritual forces as having control over the day to day life of the people. The traditional religion worship conducted in performing rituals and sacrifices in order to appease the spiritual forces. If they are appeased, they will bless their life and if they are not they can bring harm to them. But when Christianity is introduced, these spiritual forces are interpreted as demons and Jesus is presented as liberator from these forces. Then to become Christian is to break all allegiance to the spiritual forces in order to worship and serve God. It is in this religious understanding that positive valuation of culture means going back to the old religion. Hence, the attitude that sees culture and Christian faith as mutually exclusive can be conceived as the narrow understanding of the nature of culture and the overreaction to their past religious background.

5.5. INCULTURATION IN ACTION

Different activities can be used to demonstrate the translation of the gospel message in to the culture. The key cultural issues that should be taken in to account includes leadership patterns, styles of worship, church polity, education and curriculum, different ethical issues, language studies and critical re-interpretation of traditional religion. Based on the limitedness of the information from my informants and for the sake of space, only the last two areas are the ones that will be addressed. The detail and closer look at one area itself might require this sort of paper. Further, the efforts that are in place in these two areas can serve as a sample to indicate the practice of inculturation of Christian faith into the culture.

²³² Yigezu O.I. 28/10/2010

5.5.1. VERNACULAR LANGUAGE

When one thinks of communicating the gospel in such a way that it is understood from one's own cultural background, obviously language becomes an important factor. According to Lamin Sanneh, "Mother tongue forms the core of the culture because individuals use it both for thinking and for expressing themselves. Theology is a translation, making faith comprehensible or the search for words, expressions and meaning for the basic question of existence."²³³ In this light, how is EECMY viewing the use of vernacular language by different societies who are in the domain of her service? How much is EECMY using vernacular languages in the preaching, publications and public communication? What are some activities that are in place to take the translation seriously?

5.5.1.1. BIBLE TRANSLATION AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Rev. Megerssa stressed the church's deep commitment to the ministry of translating the Bible.²³⁴ He said that, the church is committed to help people access the Bible in their own language. And since the language is one aspect of one's culture, using and maintaining people's culture in a written way may contribute to the enriching of the culture. For example, the work of Onesmos Nesib with Aster Gano has contributed a lot to keep the Oromo language in its place. Hence, the ministry of translating the Bible into vernacular has the value of getting the message to the people, developing their language. Their language can be developed by both enriching it with the written scripts and keeping the languages from extinction. As the translation of this commitment in to action, the ministry of Bible Translation has covered 21 different languages that have full or part of the Bible whereas for more than 10 languages the work is in progress.²³⁵

In addition to the Bible translation efforts, there is an intentional effort that is underway to study the languages of some societies in Ethiopia. Reverend Yonas says that "Now we are studying around 35 languages in Ethiopia together with 6 partners. We are studying both language and culture. The studies we conduct have two goals. The first is to develop the language and the culture. The second is to use the language and the culture as the vehicle to spread the gospel."²³⁶

²³³ Sanneh 1989, 4-6, 67-69 as quoted in Ahonen 2000, 169

²³⁴ Guta, O.I. 22/10/2010

²³⁵ Yigezu, O.I. 18/10/2010 and Gobena O.I. 27/10/2010

²³⁶ Yigezu, O.I. 18/10/2010

5.5.1.2. *VERNACULAR IN WORSHIP*

Here one explores in brief how the vernacular languages were used during the preaching, teaching, publication and public communication. The legacy from the founding missionaries is what shaped the culture of using mother tongue in EECMY worship services. Generally, the manner in which the pioneer missionaries operated was different from one place to the other. For instance, the Lutheran missionaries that came to the Western part of Ethiopia (SEM and GHM) used the vernacular Oromo language for preaching and teaching. This effort was supported by the Oromo Bible that was translated by Onesimos Nesib. The reality of hearing the gospel in their mother tongue has contributed for the planting and expansion of evangelical faith and EECMY on the Oromo land.²³⁷ It should be noted that the use of vernacular by pioneering Lutheran missionaries was in defiance of the imperial restriction and in contrast to the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church who was using Geez language for church services.

The Lutheran pioneer Missionaries who came to the Sothern part of Ethiopia (NLM and FELM) used Amharic language for instruction in the Bible and all sorts of communication. The common reasons mentioned by these groups are both the ill equipment of Joint Language School (JLS) for teaching other languages than Amharic and the restriction imposed by Ethiopian Government.²³⁸ JLS is the school where missionaries get language training prior to their assignment in different part of Ethiopia.

Following the missionary practice, the EECMY members used their vernacular language extensively for communicating the gospel message. Today one can find hundreds and thousands of songs, written in “afaan Oromo” Oromo language by members of EECMY from Oromo tribe. The sermons are delivered, teachings are offered and liturgy is officiated in the vernacular language.

Imprisoned by the missionary paradigm, in the southern part of Ethiopia Amharic is still the dominating language in communicating of Christian message. In agreement with this, Rev Itefa attested to the difficulty of breaking the old habit.

²³⁷ Mendedo 2007, 193

²³⁸ Mendedo 2007, 194-196 (there are official letters from the Imperial and communist regimes threatening and restricting the vernacular use for communication. These letters urge Missionaries to be aware that Amharic should be the language of communication in public and private setting)

“The problem is that the people who have been educated earlier, they were educated in Amharic. They haven’t recognized the problem of their own people. Since Amharic is already there, the ministers don’t want to shift to their mother tongue from Amharic.”²³⁹

Rev Alemu’s personal confession seems to agree with this. He said that, “honestly speaking, I would prefer to lead the worship services in Amharic than Gedeo language (my mother tongue). It will be difficult for me. My difficulty is my own difficulty but the people will really appreciate it and the message will penetrate effectively.”²⁴⁰ Of course one can see the difference in the urban setting and rural settings. In the urban setting Amharic is the medium while in rural settings there are translations ever since the work started.

In some areas the problem is far deeper than just copying and sustaining the missionary pattern. There is an evidence of identity crises that led people to give up vernacular languages. In some areas Amharic is considered as the “sacred language” and preferred for worship rather than their mother tongue. In one of the tribes in South Omo, “the youth in the church don’t feel heard if they pray in their mother tongue even if they have a bad command of Amharic.”²⁴¹

As the matter of principle “EECMY does support people to hear the word of God in their vernacular language. She has been giving ministry to the people in their own language. This was there since her inception and she is the cultural church.”²⁴² “At this stage, nobody will protest preaching the gospel to the people in their own language.”²⁴³ As the culmination of this belief and commitment, EECMY has devised a language policy. The resolution of the 93rd Executive Committee of EECMY in January 1995 regarding the use of language in EECMY was accepted by both the 4th EECMY Council in 1995 and the 15th EECMY General Assembly that was convened in January 1997 respectively to be the language policy of the Church.²⁴⁴ The background of the policy is the aim of EECMY to reach out to people with Gospel in their own language and cultural environments and the willingness to facilitate such conditions. Hence, the wording of the policy says that “in case of congregations comprising different nations and nationalities, it is resolved that the regular Sunday Morning Worship Services and the administration of the Holy Sacraments be conducted as usual for all members in common.” The policy further requires the EECMY Synods, Presbyteries and Work areas to facilitate the opening of services for those who demand to be served in their

²³⁹ Gobena O.I. 27/10/2010

²⁴⁰ Sheta O.I. 14/11/2010

²⁴¹ Bayala, O.I. 16/11/2010

²⁴² Gobena O.I. 27/10/2010

²⁴³ Sheta O.I. 14/11/2010

²⁴⁴ See minutes of 93rd Executive committee EC-93-25-95 (h) or 4th Council C-4-34-95 (A.7.5)-GC

own languages in consultation with their respective congregations. In this language policy the assertion is made that EECMY is eager and willing to use the vernacular language of different nations and nationalities that are in the sphere of her influence. The policy also recognizes the rights of different people groups to use their own language for worship and willing to respond to such demand.

Seen from the historical events that led to this policy decision, there is an indication of diverse attitudes concerning the use of vernacular among EECMY members. The difference in attitude is still there in the church. According to Rev Alemu, even if the language policy of the church is fair and good the practical implementation of it has been problematic.

“The problem is the issue of language usage in Mekane Yesus was too much politicized. (Amharic has been dominating us and from this time on ward we don’t need it. And now it is time to revenge it). It is this attitude that was problematic. It is a good policy. Every language is known, given and respected by God. And every people group has a right to their God given language. And it is the duty for the Church to give this ministry.”²⁴⁵

Besides crafting the language policy, EECMY is communicating the gospel message in six different languages in Ethiopia and beyond via Radio broadcast. Viewed from more than 80 different languages in Ethiopia, this might not seem to be significant. But the percentage these six people groups cover is more than 65% of the population of Ethiopia. That means there is a will to communicate the gospel in the vernacular based on the availability of funds.

5.5.2. TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS

In the broader context, how African pre-Christian religions are viewed has been a controversial issue among African Christian theologians for decades. Even if there is a disagreement on the degree of continuity between the African pre-Christian religion and Christianity, there is almost a consensus about the relevance of African Tradition Religion for Christian Mission in Africa. The African traditional religion provides a religious context upon which Christianity is planted. ATR is what form the religious identity and framework for different societies in Africa and Ethiopia. If the gospel is to be expressed in an authentic African terms, it has to have a serious and in-depth dialogue with different traditional religions and their structures.

Further, there is historical circumstance that makes this issue crucial. The current Ethiopian government state organization is federation along the ethnic line. And this has affected the

²⁴⁵ Sheta O.I. 14/11/2010

ethnic self-consciousness to revive among different ethnic groups. As the ethnic self-consciousness revives, different aspects of the culture have revived. The traditional religion as the category of cultural identity is reviving feeding on the political capital it is getting from ethnic sensitive political milieu in present Ethiopia. Therefore, the way EECMY is thinking about the reality and the revival of traditional religions in her mission endeavor deserves close look.

The existence and the reviving nature of traditional religion are seen as the big challenge that is posed before the church by EECMY. Those who see it as the challenge are seeing it as the big problem, deception, mutually exclusive with Christian life, and the way of life that needs to be defeated.

The Evangelist in the rural setting who is daily facing the impact of traditional religion says that,

“The cultural revival (traditional religion) that we are seeing in Ethiopia is tough and we are asking so many questions about it. This cultural aspect that is reviving is going to be uprooted only when people make Jesus their Lord. The cultural belief sounds a lot like God and deceives people. He is called only one god. But this god has no work for which he should be worshiped. And this has brought spiritual problems to our members. But if one totally surrendered his life to Christ, then he will not be under to the yoke of cultural belief. This cultural belief has strong force. But those who stand in the teaching of Christ persevered standing in the face of this powerful political current.”²⁴⁶

In light of the above quotation, EECMY members seem to have awareness about their religious context. They recognize the similarity between the “god” in traditional religion and the Christian God to the extent that people may fall into deception. The realization of the superiority in revelation of Christian God in his work and the scripture is also affirmed. But there seems to be no intentional effort to re-interpret or integrate any traditional beliefs in to Christian faith precisely for it is assumed to be as mutually exclusive to life in Christ.

In the rural settings there is a will to study the traditional religion closely for apologetic purposes. An evangelist said that, “While teaching our people not to be swallowed by this new movement (traditional religion), we are contemplating to go closer to them, learn from them and try to identify the problem in their belief system. We can’t change it by standing far from it. We have to get close to them and help.”²⁴⁷ Obviously, there are some elements of traditional religion that deserve apologetic response. But approaching the tradition religion

²⁴⁶ Evangelists 2, O.I. 13/10/2010

²⁴⁷ Evangelists 2, O.I. 13/10/2010

with the aim of finding its flaws is different from critically contextualizing it to Christian faith.

The elites of the church are also conscious about the context and are preparing to deal with it. They are conscious both about the existence and revitalizing nature of traditional religion. It is revitalizing by getting boost from nationalistic agenda. Some nations and nationalities are using it for political aim as it symbolizes one uniting factor in fragmenting society. Hence, there are efforts that are underway to develop capacity and understanding in order to devise strategy and methodology to approach it. The effort underway is primarily doing research and study papers at higher institutions of the church. These and other efforts are part of the preparation of the Church in order to make an informed decision.

The revitalization of traditional religions is not only seen as the challenge posed before the church but as an opportunity to be exploited. It is an opportunity because the religious consciousness that is surfaced may arouse fresh debate and search for God. This search for God can adequately be satisfied by the Christian message. That makes also Christian message relevant as it serves to fill the gap.²⁴⁸ But it can be a challenge if the church doesn't have the capacity to combat this challenge.

In light of the above discussion, the effort of EECMY to understand and articulate the gospel from Ethiopian cultural background is still the work in progress where much is left. Rev Yonas Yigezu emphatically admitted saying, "We haven't done much. We have to do a lot."²⁴⁹ Enhancing the work of helping people read the Bible in their own language by providing translations can be one area to be improved. There are still many tribes who don't have the Bible in their mother tongues. In addition, helping different nations and nationalities to worship in their own language by making liturgy available in their vernacular is the other. It should be noted that today there are only three languages that have liturgy in EECMY out of more than 50 different nations that are covered by her ministry. The liturgy of the church needs to be flexible not only in its melody but in its form, in accordance with the different musical and cultural issues of the concerned nations and nationalities.

It could be noted that there are efforts that are taken for granted and were not mentioned by the informants regarding the interaction of the gospel and the Ethiopian religious context. While discussing the interaction of Evangelical faith with Ethiopian cultural context, Eide

²⁴⁸ Daniel. O.I. 12/11/2010

²⁴⁹ Yigezu O.I. 18/10/2010

attributed that the translation of the Bible is what laid the foundation for an indigenous interpretation of the Gospel.²⁵⁰ Central concept of African traditional religion was brought out while translating the gospel in order to convey the relevant meaning.²⁵¹ Onesimos' use of "luba" concept from the traditional Oromo religion to refer to priest or pastor was noted by Bakke is one example.²⁵² The other example is the transferring of the concept of divinity in different traditional religions to Biblical concept of God during Bible translation (Waqqa in Oromo, Magano in Sidamo, Tosso in Wolayita, Wonto in Burji...etc).

The kind of Evangelical Christianity one finds in EECMY is that which has a "bigger universe"²⁵³ that accommodates what Hiebert called "the excluded middle"²⁵⁴ is in consistent with the framework ATR. The supernatural and the natural are held together without apparent contradiction and inconsistency. This can be one clear break from the western scientific world view where "the empirical world is dealt with merely in naturalistic terms."²⁵⁵

The message of the early preachers which focused on the Christ's victory over Satan and the wide spread practice of Charismatic Christianity is also relevant to the religious experience of different societies in Ethiopia.²⁵⁶ The African religious context provides with the framework where evil is recognized not only ideally but personally and concretely as inflicting people with sickness and misfortune. Hence, the exorcism ministry and healing from sickness are empirical proof for the better strength of Jesus Christ over and against Satan.

5.6. LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE

Looking forward, Lalissa suggested that Events of Multi-cultural expressionism should be prepared in order to inculcate the idea that diversity of culture is a blessing starting from Sunday school curriculum. What he meant by Multi-cultural expression is a deliberate appraisal of cultural difference as a beauty that should not be suppressed but appreciated, cherished, well entertained and accommodated.²⁵⁷

He further Proposes the need for developing "federation theology" that is compatible with the federation system in the political organization of the country. He maintained that "we all

²⁵⁰ Eide 2000, 71

²⁵¹ Eide 2000, 74

²⁵² Bakke 1987, 42, 127-128

²⁵³ Walls, public speech, Feb 16, 2011

²⁵⁴ Hiebert 1994, 196

²⁵⁵ Hiebert 1994, 196

²⁵⁶ See Forslund 1993, 144-145(for early sermons) & Eide 2000, 73 (charismatic renewal)

²⁵⁷ Daniel O.I. 12/11/2010

have unique differences even if we have a lot in common. These differences can serve as tributaries to the bigger whole that unites us in the body of Christ.”²⁵⁸

Lalissa’s suggestions have value both in shaping and changing the opinion on culture and in contributing to the effort of integrating the culture into the Christian faith. First, it is the development in the right direction for it may challenge and change the problematic attitudes toward culture that have been prevailed in EECMY. If the attitude of downplaying culture as evil, political, demonic and mutually exclusive with the gospel is replaced by intentional and deliberate positive appraisal of the culture, then this may contribute to the notion of rethinking the gospel in the culturally sensitive and relevant manner. Further, this is the spark of light in the direction of theologizing that takes the context very seriously. Such creativity and fresh theological reflection is what appears to be lacking in EECMY today.

In conclusion, even if a significant beginning is there with regard to the effort of using the vernacular language, one can fairly say that EECMY is still a young church that is trying to understand the gospel message from her own context. Serious effort regarding the Inculturation of the gospel in to different Ethiopian cultures is almost by and large the matter of the future. According to the above presentation the predominant opinion toward the culture is what stands out as the main factor for the lack of needed effort. Different groups seem to have too simplistic, narrow and negative attitude toward culture. Factors that have shaped the opinion of the people toward culture have been enlisted above. The missionary legacy that has persisted is one factor. Secondly, the “amharization” of the country by the former rulers of Ethiopia that have suppressed the ethnic and cultural identities of different nations and nationalities have contributed to weaken the authentic Christian expression from different cultural groups within Ethiopia. Further, opposition to the overreaction toward the “amharization” process is also one sentiment that negatively affected the view on culture. Furthermore, the overreaction to the old religion of the past is one factor that prevented positive dialogue between Christian faith and traditional religions. Lastly, lack of competent and unoccupied theologians in different ethnic groups and cultures might have caused the absence of theological reflection and its articulation at the desired level.

²⁵⁸ Daniel O.I. 12/11/2010

CHAPTER SIX

6. FAITHFULNESS TO CHRISTIAN TRADITION

6.1. PREFACE

In the previous chapters, what EECMY members have been thinking about their missionary mandate and their missionary task was presented. This includes the communication of the gospel of about the Kingdom of God. The 3rd Chapter dealt with the proclamation of the gospel while the 4th chapter dealt with the social implication of proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom of God. The previous chapter also treated the importance of communicating the gospel of the kingdom God in a culturally sensitive and relevant manner for ensuring effective understanding of the Gospel message.

Both the way the gospel message is understood and the manner in which it is articulated can be different from one context to the other. This is in consistent with the way some think about the nature of theology. In the last chapter, we have affirmed that the era of “the Christian theology” is giving way to the era of “Christian theologies” or any theology is only contextual theology.²⁵⁹ Paul Hiebert says that “the plurality of theologies are inevitable if we are to take history and culture seriously and if we accept that all theologies are but human interpretations of Biblical revelation within the particular context”²⁶⁰ Nevertheless, affirming the plurality of theology should not be interpreted as unrestricted relativism. Rather it is the way of seeing differences in theology as complementary and therefore, acceptable. As Hiebert said it eloquently some mutually contradictory theological positions cannot be accepted as if the difference doesn’t matter²⁶¹. The balance should be kept between affirming the contextual nature of theology and also affirming the universal and context-transcending dimensions of the gospel message.

The next logical question is what marks the boundary limit for the way one can legitimately talk about the gospel? In other words, what ascertains any formulation of a gospel message to be the Christian gospel message? The apostolic tradition and their faith that is shared by all Christian is the framework that control and continuously inform what it means to be Christian. Therefore, any contextual mission thinking must remain faithful to the Old Testament as it is

²⁵⁹ Bevans 2002, 3 & Bosch 1992, 452

²⁶⁰ Hiebert 1987, p109

²⁶¹ Hiebert 1987,p109

acknowledged by the apostles and the New Testament as it the recorded witness of the apostles. Further, contextual Christian mission thinking must also be able to speak to and listen from beyond its boundaries of time and space as the historic and universal nature of the church requires it. Hence, this chapter will present how far the mission thinking of EECMY is faithful to the Christian tradition at its formative stage and down the ages. Further, to what extent it is in an open dialogue with the theological developments from different parts and tradition of the world in the entire body of Christ will be explored.

6.2. BASIS FOR BELIEF AND PRACTICE

The EECMY constitution article 2/1-3 states that she affirms and believes the Bible as infallible word of God which is the source for faith and practice. The creeds (Apostolic, Nicene and Athanasius) and confessional documents (Augsburg Confession and Luther's Catechism) are also followed and affirmed as the correct derivations and explanations of the word of God.²⁶² The following presentation will demonstrate how this constitutional affirmation is played out in the view of EECMY members and her ministers. Closely related to this, how believers are related to the Bible in their daily life in EECMY may also be presented. Further, some factors that contributed to the development of such attitude may be discussed.

6.2.1. VIEWS ON THE BIBLE IN CHRISTIAN LIFE

In EECMY the importance of the Bible is affirmed for Christian life and ministry as it is the source for knowledge of God. Its inspiration by Holy Spirit is one reason that gives its importance for Christian life and ministry.

“The Bible has important place in Christian life and ministry. We cannot know God apart from the Holy Scriptures. The Holy Bible is written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Even if it is authored by men, they were inspired by Holy Spirit.”²⁶³

“If we want to know anything about Christ and God's kingdom the source is the Bible.”²⁶⁴

The Bible is conceived as giving knowledge about God both his nature and his eternal plan for humanity. Yonas Bayala, a church member from south Omo says that, “The Bible reveals

²⁶² my translation from EECMY Constitution 6th edition, 5th publication, 2005, 8

²⁶³ Evangelist 2, O.I. 13/10/2010

²⁶⁴ Evangelist 3, O.I. 14/10/2010

about God. It tells how big and loving God is. The Bible gives God's eternal plan for humankind."²⁶⁵

The Bible is essential source of information and knowledge for Christian living. It dictates Christian behavior in this world. As the guide for Christian life, the Bible "shows the way of salvation and also has the power to change life."²⁶⁶ Further, the Bible is what governs Christian life by showing how to live life here and now and giving hope of life to come.

"The bible is what governs Christian life. It shows how to live his life. It gives hope of eternal life. It is the source of knowledge for both physical word and spiritual world."²⁶⁷

The Bible is the source for the message of Christian ministry. While responding to role the Bible plays in his life, and evangelist says that, "The Bible is what we witness. It is what we live by. It is by it we bring people from darkness to light and from death to life. Hence, Bible has high and important place."²⁶⁸ The unshaken confidence in what the Biblical message can do to change the eternal condition of human being can not be missed in the above quotation.

In EECMY, the Bible is the determining factor for the Christian identity. A person's relationship with the Bible is an indication to his/her Christian identity. Rev. Yonas said that "to be Christian in Mekane Yesus is one who reads, study and obeys the Bible"²⁶⁹ An evangelist from rural setting also affirmed that "what makes a Christian, Christian is accepting the truth revealed in the Bible and living it out"²⁷⁰ The other evangelist added by saying that "the Bible is the irreplaceable standard for our relationship with God."²⁷¹ The common metaphor of referring to the Bible as the "food for the soul" that is widespread among my informants highlights the indispensable value of the Bible for Christian existence. The other metaphor by which the value of the Bible in Christian life is presented is when the relationship between believers and the Bible is compared with the relationship of fish and water. Affirming the importance of God's word for Christian existence, the evangelist says that, "like fish which can't survive outside of water, people cannot live without God's word".²⁷²

²⁶⁵ Bayala, O.I. 16/11/2010

²⁶⁶ Bayala, O.I. 16/11/2010

²⁶⁷ Evangelists 1, O.I. 4/11/2010

²⁶⁸ Evangelists 2, O.I. 13/10/2010

²⁶⁹ Yigezu, O.I. 18/10/2010

²⁷⁰ Evangelists 1, O.I. 4/11/2010

²⁷¹ Evangelists 1, O.I. 4/11/2010

²⁷² Evangelists 1, O.I. 4/11/2010

The other attitude in EECMY regarding the place of the Bible is considering the Bible as means of Christian Maturity. Rev. Yonas says that “So that they grow in their spiritual walk with God, we expect believers to read and study the Bible.” The metaphor of food and drink for the soul does seem to suggest not only the survival as Christian but also growth in one’s relationship with God. While stressing the necessity of the Bible for Christian maturity, the evangelist says that “as we need food for our body every day three times a day, we also need God’s word for our soul. Hence, the Bible has important place in Christian life.”²⁷³

As presented above, EECMY, both constitutionally and in practice upholds the importance of the Bible as the source of God’s self revelation, His plan of salvation, the source for Christian message, resource for Christian maturity and marker of Christian identity. The language of authority with regard to Bible is both taken for granted constitutionally and in life. Nevertheless, since the Bible is conceived as showing the way of life and dictating Christian behavior in the world, its authority seems to be unquestioned.

6.2.2. THE USE OF THE BIBLE

It is one thing to theoretically affirm the importance of the Bible for Christian life and ministry. But it is totally other thing to refer to the Bible in the manner that is consistent with such firm conviction. Hence, in the following paragraphs, how EECMY members and ministers use of the Bible in accordance with its acknowledged authority may be presented.

6.2.2.1. BIBLICISTIC READING

It is fitting to label the Bible reading culture of EECMY as more or less Biblicist. According to Rev Itefa, “EECMY is Biblicist. She believes that the Bible is the word of God. Most of our people read the Bible literally and apply it directly.”²⁷⁴ Reflection on his own personal experience and that of others he said that,

“For example, last time we had a prayer program. And before I go there I read the Bible. And the place I read challenged me. I didn’t need to refer to commentaries. Then when I arrived there, I asked them how they study the Bible. Their response was that they pray before they read the Bible. Then they read the Bible and meditate on it. Then they go to prayer with the message they got from it. Therefore, believers draw message from what they read. And they believe that this what the Holy Spirit revealed for them.”²⁷⁵

This way of reading the Bible is what Rene Padilla calls the intuitive reading where the main concern is with the relevance and personal appropriation of the message in one’s own

²⁷³ Evangelists 2, O.I. 13/10/2010

²⁷⁴ Gobena, O.I. 27/10/2010

²⁷⁵ Gobena, O.I. 27/10/2010

situation.²⁷⁶ In this Biblicist reading, there is the conviction that says “the Bible is the word of God and God speaks through it.”²⁷⁷ God’s speech is recognized by the help of the Holy Spirit. The purpose of reading the Bible in this way is the deliberate will to submit to the word of God and also get answers for their immediate questions.

This way of reading assumes that the Bible can be understood by common people.²⁷⁸ The need to explain the cultural issues in Semitic and Greco-Roman world seems to be not that necessary for the members of EECMY. The hermeneutical task that is needed to fill the gap between the cultures of the past with today seems to be not as necessary as it is in the west for example. The critical exegesis that seems to objectify and scrutinize the text of the scripture in order that it fits the analytical mind of the modernity is by and large unnecessary. Rather, the people easily see their life world in the scripture. Rather than being confused by the stories and images they see in the scripture, they tend to hear God’s voice. There is strong sense of getting message out of the text and in the stories they encounter in the scriptures even if the quality and the accuracy of the message remain questionable.

Even if the predominant practice among the ordinary church members is Biblicism, there is the place for hermeneutics among those who are exposed to the theological education. Especially the historical consideration of the text is what has received emphasis. Rev Yonasa says that, “hermeneutics has special place while we study the Bible. We ask why what was said was said in the past and what is it saying to us now.”²⁷⁹

6.2.2.2. INDIVIDUAL BIBLE READING

Christian Bible reading culture in EECMY is deep rooted in the conviction that is mentioned above where the way people use their Bible seems to indicate their condition as Christian. Hence, according to Rev Yigezu, several EECMY members read, study, memorize and obey the Bible. He further noted that, “Even those who don’t read and write memorize scripture passages. Even children before they begin to read, we make them memorize at least one scripture passages.”²⁸⁰ This can be shown from the observation of how some members can memorize several passages and can refer to different passages without using Bible concordances or Bible Dictionaries.

²⁷⁶ Stott, 1979, 85

²⁷⁷ Evangelist 3, O.I. 14/10/2020

²⁷⁸ Stott 1979, 85

²⁷⁹ Yigezu O.I. 18/10/2010

²⁸⁰ Yigezu O.I. 18/10/2010

While speaking about the basis for members close relationship with the Scripture, Rev Yonas attribute it to the Lutheran heritage. “As Lutheran we believe in the priesthood of all believers. One of the achievements of reformers is to take the Bible from the sphere of clergy in to the hands of laity.”²⁸¹ Lalissa also insists that “the Lutheran community is the community that has high Bible reading culture. Lutheranism is the movement that took the gospel from monopoly setting and handed it to ordinary people. “Bible for all not only for the pope” was the slogan.”²⁸²

In order to assist the members Bible reading culture, there are congregations that are encouraging its members through preparing devotional texts. Pastor Dawit said that,

“We prepare daily devotional texts. That is to help everyone to read the Bible and cross check if he is reading the Bible on the daily basis. In this way the aim is to help everyone to read the Bible on the daily basis. I don’t believe that everyone is doing it. As the church this is how we are trying to do.”²⁸³

Contrary to the Bible reading culture stated here, there are some who recognized the alarming decline in the reading culture.

“There are about 5.3 million members in this church. How many of them own their own Bible? Whenever I travel to the rural areas of the country, the sad reality is that people own mobile phone but not the Bible. The challenge is that the Bible is not in the hands of people. The youth don’t have bible in their hand. They are living the whole week by what they hear from the text of the songs and the sermon from the preacher”.²⁸⁴

The declining trend can be a challenge that EECMY will be facing in the future because the Bible may lose its centrality in the life of her members. Lalissa further said, “I will feel terrified if I forgot my mobile phone at home. But I don’t feel terrified if I fail to read my Bible. Where did we miss this value? This is the great test and challenge that remains with this generation.”²⁸⁵

6.2.2.3. BIBLE IN CHURCH MINISTRY

The ministry of the word at different church services is very important in the life of EECMY. One factor may be the fact that oral communication is still the main communication medium in the country. Rather than getting information by means of reading, people get information through oral rhetoric. Secondly, the ministry of the word in the church services is rather wide

²⁸¹ Yigezu O.I. 18/10/2010

²⁸² Daniel O.I. 12/11/2010

²⁸³ Yohannes O.I. 30/10/2010

²⁸⁴ Daniel, O.I. 12/11/2010

²⁸⁵ Daniel, O.I. 12/11/2010

spread. At least two or three times in the week there are spiritual programs in the congregation where the word of God is preached. Further, the youth generations that are glued to the newer technologies are reached by the word of God only when they come to the services. Hence, the ministry of the word at EECMY pulpits is critical avenue the church has for impacting and imparting her members. The question is what is going on the pulpits of EECMY particularly regarding the use of the Holy Scriptures?

Even if the centrality of the Bible can be shown from the practice of reading and exposing scriptures passages in every church service, serious questions can be raised regarding its quality. Lalissa for instance admitted the widespread defaults on the pulpit and called for its restoration. He said that,

“Our pulpits have their own defaults and the message is not clear. The messages that are appealing are the kind of the messages that focus on economic breakthrough particularly in the last 15 years. There are few sermons that declare the greatness of God’s grace. There are few that have targeted spiritual realities. It is focused more on the financial well being of an individual. We see decline in the pulpit quality of the church. The pulpit ministry is one area that required restoration.”²⁸⁶

The evangelist’s observation also is in line with Lalissa. He affirmed how the messages from the pulpit is shallow focusing in breakthroughs and “you will be blessed and successful”. The time allocated for the preaching of God’s word in the Church worship services is shrinking leaving ample time for singing and prayer.²⁸⁷

6.2.2.4. GROUP BIBLE STUDY

One way people use the Bible in EECMY is through studying it as a group. The group Bible study is the platform where 5-10 church members come together once a week to read the Bible and share their thoughts with one another. The group Bible study, which also is referred to as cell group, is formed both at the local congregation level and at the University Students Fellowship. The Bible study is conducted by making use of Bible study material (the guiding questionnaire) where “members are encouraged to use the simple principles of interpretation of the Bible.”²⁸⁸ The Bible study material that are distributed to the people will help the people to know certain passage in depth as they study it with other fellow Christians.²⁸⁹ Even if the primary reason for the group Bible study is to help people have more knowledge of the Bible, it also serves as the mechanism to follow up members.

²⁸⁶ Daniel O.I. 12/11/2010

²⁸⁷ Evangelists 1, O.I. 4/11/2010

²⁸⁸ Yigezu, O.I. 18/10/2010

²⁸⁹ Yohannes O.I. 30/10/2010

Like it is the case with private study and pulpit ministry, the group Bible study in EECMY is experiencing difficulties. Lalissa revealed the declining level of the group Bible study at the congregation level and called for serious attention.²⁹⁰

6.3. CONFSSIONAL CREEDS

The other sources of the essential teachings of Christianity that are accepted by many churches are the Apostolic Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasius Creed. In addition to these, the unaltered Augsburg Confession and the Luther's Catechism are confessions that concern to EECMY in connection with her Lutheran identity. The question is how are these documents viewed and used in EECMY?

By some these documents are recognized as historical documents developed in reaction to historical developments, Biblical in content and as the result have the subordinate role as the source of faith.

“Even if the main source for the teaching of or faith comes from the Bible as Lutheran church we adhere to different creeds and confessions. We know these confessions are developed in certain historical context. We know that the content of these creeds are Biblical. It demonstrates how the church fathers stood for and defended it in light of the Scriptures. Therefore, according to Mekane Yesus these are supporters as the source of faith.”²⁹¹

Further, these confessions are viewed as tools to help the members know clearly the content of their faith. They are included in the curriculum of confirmation class.²⁹² They are also viewed as the summary of the main message of the Bible and as the result they help one to understand the core messages of the Bible and be protected against false teachings.²⁹³

Even if the authoritative status of creeds and confessions is stated clearly in the constitution, their practical use in the members' life is another story. Revered Megerssa said that, especially if you ask the church member the meaning of Augsburg confession, the great majority may say “what is it”? The main reason for such ignorance is the teaching system that is in place. For it is weak and wanting.²⁹⁴ The suggestion of Rev Megerssa was confirmed during the interview process as one church member from the urban setting has literary nothing to say about confessional documents.

²⁹⁰ Daniel O.I. 12/11/2010

²⁹¹ Yohannes O.I. 30/10/2010

²⁹² Evangelist 3 O.I. 14/10/2010

²⁹³ Evangelist 2 O.I. 13/10/2010

²⁹⁴ Guta O.I. 22/10/2010

6.4. CATHOLICITY- ECUMENICAL COOPERATION

To be an Ecumenical is to be part the movement that seeks to discover how churches from different geographical, cultural, liturgical and confessional backgrounds demonstrate their unity in Christ so that the world might believe.²⁹⁵ Christian way of thinking about mission needs to be in an open dialogue with the body of Christ from different traditions. One point of view from which the mission thinking of EECMY may be investigated is from this angle. In this connection, the basis of ecumenical cooperation, its goal and how its nature of cooperation is viewed by members of EECMY may be presented.

6.4.1. BASIS AND GOAL

In his paper presented to the 10th General Assembly of EECMY met January 24-31 of 1978, Rev Gudina stated the basis for EECMY's ecumenical cooperation. He presented that the realization of oneness of the Church of Christ and the inescapable responsibility to make all effort so that Jesus' priestly prayer (John 17:11, 21) fulfilled, is what stands as the ground.²⁹⁶ Correspondingly, Rev Yigezu also stressed the ecclesiological self understanding of EECMY and her relationship with others as the basis for her cooperation with other Christians. In this sense the basis for unity is God's mission.

“We cooperate or partner around one and the same mission. The rationale for this is our ecclesiological thinking. We believe that the body of Christ is one. The ministry is one. The mission is also one. We are simply part of that mission. Therefore, we partner with those all who are working for the expansion of God's kingdom.”²⁹⁷

An Evangelist from the rural setting said that the basis of cooperation is the evangelical conviction and the ministry that results from it. He said that “our fellowship with other Evangelical Churches in Ethiopia is in the fact that we are evangelicals and preach the gospel”²⁹⁸. Pastor Dawit also suggest that the belief in Christ as the only means of salvation and the commonality in being witness to the same gospel is the reason for working together.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁵ Moreau 2000, 303

²⁹⁶ Gudina 2003,14

²⁹⁷ Yigezu O.I. 18/10/2010

²⁹⁸ Evangelist 2, O.I. 13/10/2010

²⁹⁹ Yohannes, O.I. 30/10/2010

According to Rev Gudina, the goal of the ecumenical movement is to bear “a united witness to the saving power of Christ as we unequivocally work for the unity of the church of God”³⁰⁰

6.4.2. WITH EVANGELICAL CHURCHES

The history of EECMY is closely related to the ecumenical movement in Ethiopia. During the WWII and the Italian occupation, the evangelical believers were gathered together for consultation and cooperation on different theological and ethical issues such as polygamy and church state relationship.³⁰¹ Further, the merger of EECMY with the Bethel Presbyterian Church in 1974 is also mentioned by Rev Gudina as another indication for her ecumenical identity. The initiation and the formation of the council for cooperation of churches in Ethiopia (1974) that was formed under the leadership of Rev Gudina Tumsa also another indication that shows the churches commitment toward ecumenical fellowship. During the 17 years of Communist government, different Pentecostal and Baptist churches were closed as part of the intimidation and persecution of evangelical believers. During this period EECMY embraced with open arms believers from different confession and tradition. In addition to the good relationship that is developed and maintained over the years, these believers have put a lasting impact on the charismatic nature of EECMY.

The formation of Evangelical Churches Fellowship of Ethiopia (ECFE) in 1991 can also be one indication of keen interest in ecumenical cooperation of EECMY. EECMY was one of the founding members of the ECFE. The Ethiopian Graduate School of Theology (EGST), which was started in 1998, is also one platform for higher level theological reflection for Evangelical churches in Ethiopia. EECMY is the co-owner with Kale Heywot Church and Evangelical Churches Fellowship of Ethiopia (ECFE). This can furthermore indicate the ecumenical efforts of EECMY by which the evangelical churches in Ethiopia reflect theologically together at higher level on contextual concerns. Being the member of the Bible Society of Ethiopia, the society formed from different Christian groups in Ethiopia, EECMY has been engaged in Bible translation projects. This society also can be viewed as one aspect of ecumenical movement in Ethiopia.

6.4.3. NATURE OF COOPERATION

EECMY has a cooperating relationship with Evangelical churches in Ethiopia. This Fellowship has both national and regional offices that aim at maintaining cooperative relationship among evangelical believers. These churches cooperate with one another while

³⁰⁰ Gudina 2003, 18

³⁰¹ Gudina 2003, 17

acknowledging their doctrinal or liturgical differences. The nature of cooperation is for common interests and activities in their shared responsibility. This includes the use of the same burial place, preparing conferences together cooperating to support the government or the society.³⁰²

“There are common factors by which we cooperated and there are distinctive that each one of us has. Our distinction is doctrinal and we teach and preach doctrines in our churches private platform. We don’t mention doctrinal and divisive issues when we are on common forum. We in Mekane Yesus, pay careful attention to our pulpit ministry. We tend to use only someone who is from Mekane Yesus.”³⁰³

However, there are some who warn against the confusion between cooperation on the practical matters and unity. Rev Megerssa stated the existence of the confusion in the attitude of some members regarding the nature of cooperation between EECMY and other evangelical churches. He stressed the need for clarification between oneness and cooperation. Further, he pointed out the need to state the distinctive of Lutheran teaching of EECMY that are in discord with some Baptists and Pentecostal doctrines especially when it comes to Holy Sacraments.

“Our distinctive teaching about holy baptism and Holy Communion is not clear for our members. When we are in Evangelical Churches Fellowship of Ethiopia, some think that we are one and the same with other evangelical churches. Many say we are one and there is no distinction between us.”³⁰⁴

6.4.4. ETHIOPIAN ORTHODOX TEWAHEDO CHURCH (EOTC)

EECMY have ecumenical cooperation with Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. According to Lalissa, the common membership to the ecumenical councils both on the continental level and global level and the common theological tenets they share (Trinity and Baptism) are the basis for the cooperation. He pointed out the corridors where the two churches differ while affirming the practical necessity of supporting and encouraging EOTC. The two churches should be working together and striving for co-existence because the emerging religious challenge (Islam) they both are facing in Ethiopia is by far worse.³⁰⁵

Compared to other Evangelical Churches in Ethiopia, EECMY has different attitude toward EOTC believers. The two churches have communality of faith in Trinity and Baptism. Nevertheless, there is no cooperation with EOTC or Catholic Church at the regional and

³⁰² Evangelists 2, O.I. 13/10/2010

³⁰³ Evangelists 2, O.I. 13/10/2010

³⁰⁴ Guta, O.I. 22/10/2010

³⁰⁵ Daniel O.I. 12/11/2010

congregational level.³⁰⁶ The only cooperation is at the national level where the leadership of these churches share forum for religious leaders of Ethiopia.

One area where the ecumenical relationship between EECMY and EOTC may be in strain is the way an orthodox convert is viewed. Targeting the EOTC member with evangelizing message is widespread among EECMY members. The reasoning given for it and the desired goal may be different from person to person. There are some who evangelize EOTC members to make them Evangelical believers.³⁰⁷ There are some who think EOTC members should be exposed to the truth (knowing Christ and living under his Lordship) while remaining in their home Church and become agents of reformation from within.

“Our aim is so that they know the truth. It is so that they know Christ and live that life out in their own church. We want them to set an example and be the witnesses in their churches. But mostly this kind of people struggle. It may be difficult for them to remain in their church after knowing the truth. Before long, their changed life can be recognized and then they can be excommunicated. After that they will come to us and we will not reject them. But our target is not to take them out but to help them be there and be agents of reformation in that church”³⁰⁸

There are also those who think EOTC members are targeted so that they may come to faith in Christ and lead a changed life.³⁰⁹

6.4.5. INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

The other factor that may shed light on the identity of EECMY is her standing in relationship to other Christian organization locally and globally. A congregation who latter become the founders of EECMY became a member of the Lutheran world Federation in 1957. Following the decision of the 7th council, the church joined the All-African Council of Churches (AACC) in 1974 and also became the member of World Council of Churches in January 1979.³¹⁰ Her membership on the continent and global church councils makes her the only evangelical church in Ethiopia which is ecumenical in that sense. This also gives her one additional platform to be in an open dialogue with the developments in the Church of Christ from different parts of the world.

³⁰⁶ Yohannes, O.I. 30/10/2010

³⁰⁷ Yigezu O.I. 18/10/2010

³⁰⁸ Yohannes, O.I. 30/10/2010

³⁰⁹ Gobena O.I. 27/10/2010

³¹⁰ Abraham 1995, 278

6.5. THE UNIQUENESS OF CHRIST AS THE MEANS OF SALVATION

One crucial indication for any system of teaching to be Christian and apostolic is if it affirms the apostolic witness regarding the unique status of Jesus as the sole means of salvation. The apostolicity of EECMY will be investigated against this. When the uniqueness of Christ is affirmed, the fate of people with other living faith comes to haunt. Hence, it is worthwhile to mention the representative view in EECMY regarding the situation of people with other living faith.

Rev Itefa said that EECMY does not only respect people with the other living faith but also is playing a constructive role in bringing mutual understanding among different religions in Ethiopia.³¹¹ The Ethiopian society that has been the home for Christians and Muslims for century seems to support the presence of mutual respect and coexistence. In some areas the intermarriage between Christians and Muslims is not uncommon. That means there are some Muslims or Christian who have blood relatives and closest friends.

Having affirmed the respect due for other living religions and their adherents, it is crystal clear that with regard to salvation they have no value. Faith in Christ is the only way of salvation and that is the ground for her evangelistic efforts. Rev Itefa said that,

“Mekane Yesus believes that salvation is only through faith in Jesus Christ. But as a human religion, these religions must be respected and the adherents to those religions should also be respected. Nevertheless, if these religions have salvific value, why does she preach the gospel in the first place? If salvation is universal, then her evangelization is self-contradiction.”³¹²

For pastor Dawit as well the teaching of the Bible seems to be unambiguous on this matter. He said that the Bible clearly speaks that salvation is only by and through Christ. In Acts 4:12, it says that there is no salvation apart from the name of the Lord. And Jesus has said that he is the only way and life and truth and no one can come to the father except through me John 14:6. Hence, if salvation is through Christ, just saying I have believed in the creator cannot justify a person. Of course God is the creator. But for salvation one must come to know Jesus Christ.³¹³

Evangelists from both urban and rural settings took the matter further. They said that one can be saved only if he/she has direct, personal and active relationship (knowing, believing and

³¹¹ Gobena O.I. 27/10/2010

³¹² Gobena O.I. 27/10/2010

³¹³ Yohannes O.I. 30/10/2010

following) with Christ. However, regarding those who have never been exposed to the gospel message they choose to be agnostic (“that is in God’s hand and it is hard to comment”).³¹⁴

Seen from the above presentation, it is fair to conclude that in EECMY the uniqueness of Christ as the way of salvation is accepted beyond any doubt. As an Evangelical Church it has exclusivist view with regard to salvation of other world religion. This exclusivist position does not mean there is no respect for other religion and their adherents. But the kind of respect is not to uncritically attach to them the merit that they inherently don’t possess namely offering salvation.

6.6. CHAPTER CONCLUSION

Finally, it is possible to conclude that EECMY is an evangelical Church as it is clear from her designation. As evangelical church she has the theological conviction that emphasizes the central importance and authority of the Scriptures for Christian faith and practice. The lost state of human beings without Christ is affirmed beyond any doubt. The uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the only Saviour and Lord is the prevailing conviction.

Even if the centrality of the Bible is fully acknowledged in theory, serious concern should be registered regarding the practical use of the Bible in EECMY. This includes both the decline in frequency of referring to the authoritative message and the wide spread violation to the text as evidenced in Biblicistic interpretation and prosperity gospel that invaded the pulpit ministry.

Being the Lutheran Church, justification by faith alone and the necessity of a personal faith and sanctification coupled with the sacramental understanding of Baptism and Holy Communion is one mark of EECMY. In addition to her Lutheran and Evangelical confession, EECMY is charismatic in worship and practice. To be Charismatic here is to be part of the movement that emphasize the anointing of Holy Spirit that resulted in repentance, confession and manifestation of charismatic gifts.³¹⁵

EECMY is also ecumenical church that adheres to the ancient ecumenical documents and in cooperating relationship with Christians from different communities. The primary reason for fellowshiping with other Evangelical Church in Ethiopia is practical necessity. However, the platforms of cooperation have achieved more than that. They have facilitated the stage where

³¹⁴ Evangelist 3, O.I. 14/10/2010

³¹⁵ Moreau 2000, 173 & Corrie 2007, 45

they shape one another for instance in worship and the use of gifts. When it comes to Ethiopian Orthodox Church, there is no room for theological dialogue. Of course there is recognition from EECMY side about the existence of unity in faith. But from the EOTC side there seems to be no well reflected unity of faith with EECMY members that is recognized and sought to demonstrate. The practical use of the ecumenical documents in the life and ministry of the Church is not that significant.

CHAPTER SEVEN

7. BRIEF EVALUATION OF EECMY'S MISSION THINKING

7.1. CHAPTER PREFACE

The previous four chapters were dedicated to the presentation of the mission thinking of Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus seen from four different yet interrelated perspectives. This chapter will focus on the normative evaluation of the mission thinking that was uncovered in the past chapters. The findings of the previous chapters will not be repeated here but will be taken as the background for the evaluation to be done in this chapter. For the sake of time and space, the nature of the evaluation is going to be very brief on each topic. The criteria for evaluation are fidelity to Christian tradition (Scripture and theology) and to which the extent it addresses the contextual concerns. The contextual mission thinking here is assumed to be that which is faithful to Christian tradition while responding to the contextual questions.

7.2. EVANGELISM AND PASTORAL MINISTRIES OF EECMY

One reason for the unprecedented numeric growth of EECMY is the engagement in active evangelism. The active evangelism activity of EECMY has a healthy motivation. First, EECMY members are motivated for evangelism by their new found identity as the citizens of God's kingdom. The fact that they are taking their new identity and duty seriously in response to God's command deserves applause because it is consistent with God's mission through his church (see chapter 3, 1.2.3). This is the conscious participation in the "mission of God within history"³¹⁶ that is based on correct self-understanding as the people of God who are called to His service under His command. The Great Commission (Mathew 28:19-20) is the commission to the disciples (those who have accepted the kingdom of God) so that they make the nations the Disciples of Christ. Paul also indicates the duty he has toward the will of God in several passages of the Scripture (1 Cor 9:16; Gal 1:17; Rom 1:14).

Another factor that is worth appreciated is the obedient response that is based on deep understanding and experience of the boundless love of Christ. The sense of gratitude that is translated into duty is a Biblically valid motivation for Christian mission. Paul, the great missionary attributed the basis for his mission activity to the overwhelming experience of the love God he received through Christ (2 Cor 5:11-14; Gal 2:20; Rom 5:5; Rom 15:15).

³¹⁶ The cape Town Commitment 2011, 28

The recognition of the ultimate importance and indispensability of the Holy Spirit for mission that one finds in EECMY is both founded on the scripture and relevant to the African worldview (*see chapter 3, 1.2.6.*). Bosch in his book suggests that Holy Spirit is what initiates mission. In Acts 2, the witness at the Pentecost is the direct consequence of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. He further suggested that it is the Holy Spirit who guides the mission practice throughout the book of Acts (8:29; 10:44-48; 13:2; 16:6, 9). Furthermore, it is the Holy Spirit who is the power for mission by empowering and giving boldness to the witnesses (Luke 4:14; Act 10:38; Luke 24:49; Act 1:8)³¹⁷

The Gift of the spirit that enables believers with different gifts to perform healing and miracles is relevant to the African cosmology. Here the spirit world is well acknowledged and the universe is densely populated with different spiritual forces. The Christian mission in such context must have ways to deal with different spiritual forces. It should also replace the spiritual experience and categories of an old religion with the Biblical experience of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in believers' life and in the ministry of the Church. This is what is taking place in EECMY and as a result it is worth recognition. Nevertheless, the disproportionate emphasis on different gifts in and of themselves can be a concerning trend. Making miracles the subject rather than serving as a witness to Christ is another reason to be cautious. The professionalization of gifting remains the reason for concern because it will inevitably affect the evangelistic passion of the whole church.

The active evangelism situation in EECMY can further be shown from how the task of Evangelist is carried out. In EECMY the gospel is proclaimed by the whole church. Many believers are evangelizing in the market place and in their daily life. First, in John 20:21 Jesus said that "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you". This means that the church in its universal and local expression must view herself as the community sent to the world and actually engage in evangelising the world with the gospel message. The Trinitarian understanding of mission where God the father sends his son and Holy Spirit in order to establish his kingdom put the churches mission activity into the right perspective. In this perspective the mission of the church is seen as participating in the sending of God.³¹⁸ Second, the twin demand to conversion and to be the witness for Christ that is in the call for discipleship is one Biblical basis for the whole church to be involved in evangelization (Mathew 4:18, 28:19-20; 2Pet 2:9; 1 Thess 1:6-8).

³¹⁷ Bosch 1991, 113-114

³¹⁸ Bosch 1991, 390

Coming to the content of the gospel message in EECMY there are both strengths and weakness that can be observed (See chapter 3, 1.2.4). One strength is the theoretically affirmation that says that the gospel message has to be contextual and holistic. This belief is that which attempt to see the intimate harmony between the physical needs and spiritual needs. This means that the gospel message should promise reconciliation to God which is comprehensive salvation. In comprehensive view of salvation, the gospel message is expected to address “the total need of the people, that which involve individuals as well as society, soul and body, present and future.”³¹⁹ Such Holistic gospel is what was modeled by Jesus’ ministry where he proclaimed the kingdom of God both in word and in action. This includes calling sinners for repentance and faith and demonstrating the kingdom benefits in the form of healing the sick and demonized, feeding the hungry, advocating for and identifying with the marginalized (poor, women, widows, sinners). For Jesus, the coming of the kingdom is not only the abstract reign of God that necessitates repentance and faith but it is also the coming of the concrete gift of salvation, healing and freedom from demonic power and social transformation (Mathew 9:35; Luke 11:20; Luke 4:16-19). Hence, any proclamation of God’s kingdom should not be short of this holistic perspective.

Another strong side is the use of personal testimony and lived out faith during evangelism. This way of evangelizing is both Biblically based and contextually acute. In John 4, it is through the personal testimony of the Samaritan woman that many in that town come to believe in Christ. Her message was, “He told me everything I ever did (John 4:39). In 1 John 1:1-4 as well, the apostle emphasizes how the gospel they are proclaiming is what they have concretely experienced. Their gospel is not only a certain proof arrived at through logical argumentation. But it is the fact of life that is experienced by individuals in their personal life with God. Such practice is also consistent with the culture that lives in concrete reality. According to Ahonen, in the west, the church must justify what it believes and why its message is worth believing.³²⁰ Perhaps in African societies Christians are required to show their faith in Christ not in theoretical argumentation but in demonstrating their faith in their lives in the concrete manner. This demand is strong as the medium is going to be the message

³¹⁹ Bosch 1991, 399

³²⁰ Ahonen 2000, 22

itself³²¹. This is confirmed by one informant who said that “our people are keen at reading people’s life since they are illiterate and cannot read books”³²²

There is a point of concern that should be registered regarding the content of the gospel message, since it appears to be both Biblically inadequate and contextually ill equipped. The gospel message that is disproportionately driven by the felt needs of the societies may have a tendency to fail to present the whole gospel message. The gospel message that should be proclaimed, involves what God has done in Christ to intervene in human history in the person and ministry of Jesus.³²³ The human predicament that is standing under the judgment of the just God³²⁴ and God’s solution for it as it is revealed in the law and the gospel should be unveiled. Even if the gospel is the good news to every culture it should be noted that it is the proclamation of God’s work in history. This dimension of the gospel message is what human beings even can’t imagine needing it. Further, the blessing of the gospel (liberation from sin, sickness and demonic forces) should not be emphasized at the expense of the ground for such blessings. In other words, “people may come to Christ so that their needs may be met but they stay with him when they find him to be the truth.”³²⁵

It is becoming vitally important for EECMY to clearly state the gospel message since the context is requiring it. The Ethiopian society is becoming more and more educated and trained to entertain realities in abstract terms. In addition, the expansion of higher level education will result in the introduction of different secular ideologies. These ideologies may pose a challenge and compete for the minds of Ethiopian peoples. Hence, this competition by itself necessitates the clear articulation of the gospel message (1Pet 3:15).

Regarding the pastoral ministry in EECMY the existence of sound Biblical view of pastoral mandate and the awareness level that exists regarding the pastoral challenge posed by the context is a positive development. One can also find a willingness to tackle it. To this end, there is a concrete plan in place to start classes at the graduate level on practical theology at Mekane Yesus Seminary.³²⁶ But the misplaced emphasis on the office of the pastor has its own downside for the mission of the Church. The disproportionate emphasis on this office can be seen when one considers the big difference in material benefit between pastor and

³²¹ Bosch 1991, 415

³²² Bayala, O.I. 16/11/2010

³²³ Bosch 1991, 411

³²⁴ The Cape Town Commitment 2011, 6

³²⁵ The Cape Town Commitment 2011, 34

³²⁶ GC- Guta, Feb 8, 2011

evangelist. This can be one reason for the decline in the evangelistic passion as evangelists' motivation will incline toward becoming pastors. This does not only make the office of an evangelist to be the step toward clergy, but it can be the breeding ground for all kinds of power struggle and church conflict in different congregations.

7.3. EECMY'S RESPONSE TO SOCIO-POLITICAL CONCERNS

The presentation of chapter 4 was an attempt to answer why and how EECMY is involved in social action and social services. The evaluation will also follow the same pattern. When the basis of social involvement of EECMY is investigated, it is shown to be Biblically based and well tuned to the missiological developments. The will of God for abundant life (John 10:10b), the Christological model that is shown in addressing both the physical and the spiritual need of the people, the life of discipleship that require the transformation of personal and social responsibilities (Mathew 5:13-16) and the holistic understanding of human condition as both physical and spiritual are the factors that are biblically sound and up-to-date with missiological assumptions elsewhere.

However, these factors were not widely mentioned by the informants. None of the informants mentioned more than one of these factors at a time. That shows the need for clear reflection and articulating of the theological and missiological basis for social involvements in EECMY. In addition, there are some components missing that are needed to be included when reflecting in this area. First, the concept of God as the creator of human beings should be included as the basis because it brings to light the dignity of human kind. Such understanding both legitimizes and shapes the churches political involvement in Ethiopian context where there is still gross violation of human rights. The view of God as judge and the call of the church to share in his concern for justice, reconciliation and liberation must be underlined since it can serve as the basis both for prophetic identity and prophetic action.

Secondly, even if there is both an awareness of Christian social responsibility and the practice of engagement in it by EECMY, the definition of what is being done or why is insufficient. The relationship between the two dimensions of church ministry namely proclamation and service is in need of clarification. Admittedly, there is a keen awareness regarding the prime importance of these two mandates (aspects) of the church ministries.³²⁷ But the way these two are related to one another in the ministry of the Church is not clearly spelled out neither in

³²⁷ Lausanne Covenant 1974, Paragraph 4

theory nor in practice as it can be seen in the Grand Rapids report.³²⁸ This means that the overarching theme that joins the two aspects needs to be defined.

EECMY is well organized to deal with the widespread problems that the Ethiopian context presents. As the church that is established and wide spread among the poor and marginalized societies, the call to engage in social services seems to be natural starting from the missionary era. The effort that takes the contextual problem seriously and respond to it deserve appreciation. Nevertheless, such engagements can be questionable if they lack appropriate foundation. The activities lack appropriate foundation if they are simply driven by contextual problems. If the need of the context is addressed by project money raised elsewhere, question about valid basis can be raised. If the activity lacks direct connection with evangelism, it can be considered merely as an act of development organization. And it is difficult to qualify these activities as the mission of the Church.³²⁹ Therefore, there should be a clear move from addressing the “felt needs” to addressing the “deeper needs” which is people’s relationship with God.³³⁰

Further the dichotomy between the two aspects of church ministry and the imbalance between the spiritual needs and the physical needs may be detected both in the organization and in day to day life of the Church. The clear difference in the institutional structure, personnel distribution and financial allocation between evangelism and service at the congregation level is a clear indication of both imbalance and dichotomy. This can furthermore be noted while the manner of social responsibility by an individual member is envisioned. Time and again, the transformed life of an individual believer is considered as the primary way in which the social responsibility of the church is carried out. Such belief is valid only if one presupposes that at the congregation level individual members are well nurtured with a solid understanding of their social responsibility particularly social action. Seen from the restriction laid up on vocational ministers of the church from all political involvement, it is not difficult to see how the discipleship and nurturing at the congregation level is deficient with regard to equipping members with social responsibility, in particular political involvement.

The restriction of the clergy from political involvement has not only made the church leaders to be politically ill equipped, but it has contributed to the development of negative attitude towards politics and politicians. This has facilitated a situation where the church willfully

³²⁸ The Grand Rapids Report 1982, paragraph 4

³²⁹ See the definition of Mission, Chapter one, 1.8

³³⁰ The Grand Rapids Report 1982, 19-27

withdrew from the platform of service to the society. The alleged neutrality that the restriction wants to maintain can also be challenged. The way in which neutrality is conceived is vague. One can understand that the church (institutionally) should be neutral by not becoming a political party or closely associated with one or different political parties. But if the neutrality is about the political issues then how is it possible to become politically neutral and be the prophetic voice at the same time? When the church becomes the voice to the voiceless, there is an element of solidarity with the oppressed and by default become on the opposing side of the oppressor. In other words, is there a difference between prophetic voice and political statement in political environment? Does to remain neutral mean to stop preaching about justice and political issues? How much is left of the gospel if it is abstracted from the notion of justice, equality and human rights (the sacredness of life)? These are some of the serious issues that demand clarification.

The political engagements of EECMY based on unclear premise of neutrality have worked in confused political involvements. Even if there was an indication of hopeful beginning regarding the awareness level about social action in 1970s, the recent development is in need of clarification. The prophetic voicing mentioned are the institutional letters that were written during the 2005 and 2010 elections. In these letters, prophetically no one is condemned. No bold action was shown to demonstrate solidarity with victims and people who suffered. The fundamental political issues such as justice, equality and human rights were systematically avoided. These letters don't represent the critical voices that were needed at these critical junctures in the Ethiopian recent history. Rather, they indicate a church that needs to question and sufficiently clarify her role with regard to social action in today's Ethiopian political context.

7.4. INCULTURATION OF THE GOSPEL INTO THE CULTURE

The evaluation of how EECMY is thinking with regard to the Inculturation of the Gospel into the culture may be conducted both from the viewpoint of attitude and activities. The attitude includes how the cultures of different Ethiopian societies are viewed in relation to the gospel. The recognition of culture as the category that shapes people's identity and the need to respect and acknowledge it in the mission of the church is what should be applauded.

Several factors can be listed here as a development in the right direction. The church is deeply committed to making the Bible accessible to different societies in Ethiopia in their own language. The language development process that is underway is an important strength. The

church has more or less encouraged the use of mother tongue for worship since her inception. The language policy that recognizes the God-given right of different people groups to use their own language for worship deserves appreciation. There is strong awareness and serious preparation regarding the traditional religion and its revival. This can be one indication of the Church that is attempting to come into terms with the development in the context. There are critical voices that are willing to learn from the errors of the past. There are also others who are willing to look into the future with creative theological reflection. There is a proposed “multi-cultural expressionism” that aims at avoiding mono-cultural approach and take cultural difference seriously. This can serve as a correction to the trend that downplays the role of culture in the society. The suggested “federation theology” that takes the political context seriously can bear witness to the Church attempting to think contextually.

However, there are two important areas that deserve serious attention and correction. First, the way culture and its relationship with the Gospel are viewed is problematic. The importance of the culture both to understand the society and for doing theology and mission in a given society seems to be inadequately appreciated. Culture is not being seen as the all embracing aspect of human identity. Hence, the relationship between culture and gospel is seen as one way or linear. In this framework, culture is at best reduced to the value it has for transmitting “culture-free” gospel or at worst seen as mutually exclusive with the gospel. Following such belief, the indigenization effort seems to be limited to have the church in the local setting having indigenous forms. Consistent with the missionary paradigm, the attempt is to faithfully translate western culture and western creed into indigenous terms.³³¹ The practice of Inculturation, where the gospel is both understood from the cultural background and articulated using the cultural categories is still needs a lot of work. The efforts that are in place to overcome the anthropological poverty that is caused by the founding western missionaries to EECMY members is yet to be demonstrated in the future.

The apparent silence of informants with regard to the justification for contextualization is rather a serious area of concern. The wide spread activities of indigenization of the gospel in the form of translations and the use of mother tongue in worship seems to be the practice that is inherited from missionaries without proper reflection. Even if the culture of different societies is assumed to be respected, the theological basis for it is not stated. For instance, the idea of cultural pluralism as the theological expression of God’s good creation does not seem

³³¹ Scherer & Bevans 1999, 2

to be shaping the inculturation effort.³³² As the consequence of fall, the inherent “weakness of any culture to capture the total message of the gospel”³³³ is not mentioned as the ground to question any cultural imperialism in mission.

Incarnation as the paradigm for the missiological imperative and model (John 21:20), as God’s act of self-disclosure (Heb 1:1-4), and as “translation of Divinity in to humanity”³³⁴ (John 1:14), have not been conceived as the source and confidence for the translatability of the gospel in to different cultural identities. Therefore, “Christian diversity as the necessary product of incarnation” needs to be recovered.³³⁵ Andrew Walls pointed out that The Great Commission in Mathew 28:20 is the commission to make the nations the disciples of Jesus. The meaning of the word “nation”, he said, should not be understood as “nation states”. Rather it means the people group who has common “national distinctive, shared consciousness, shared tradition, shared mental process and patters of relationship”. Such understanding of the Great Commission will obviously transform the way culture is viewed in Mission.

Paul’s example where the basis of his missionary practice in Acts 17 is expressed in his motto in 1 Cor 9:19-25 should be included as the foundation. Here Paul was conscious about the place of cultural identity as the clue to facilitate a missionary platform. He also took the cultural and religious context seriously, and gave up his freedom in the process. Furthermore, the example of Inculturation that is found down the ages in the history of the church has not been incorporated as the basis for making an informed justification.

7.5. FAITHFULNESS TO CHRISTIAN TRADITION

The last section of this chapter deals with pointing out some of the strengths and weaknesses that are unveiled during the presentation of the 6th chapter. The widespread recognition of the Bible as an important source for God’s revelation, His plan of salvation, guide to Christian behavior and content for Christian message is one strength as it is consistent with Biblical self-witness and the theology of Church. The assumption that takes obedience to the Bible as the marker of Christian identity is also deep rooted in the Biblical tradition of discipleship (Mathew 28:20- teaching them to *obey* everything I commanded you; John 8:31; Mathew 7:21).

³³² Scherer & Bevans 1999, 1

³³³ Walls 1996, 3-7

³³⁴ Walls 1996, 27

³³⁵ Walls 1996, 48-51

Regarding the view of the Scripture, there are some issues that deserve attention. Even if the central importance of the Bible is well sustained by different groups in EECMY, both constitutionally and in practice the authority of the Scripture is not clearly stated. Viewing the Bible as the useful source for matters of faith is different from affirming its authority as the rule of faith and practice.³³⁶ Further, the argument that justifies the authority of the Bible is not adequately established.

Something positive can also be said about how the Bible is used by EECMY members. The wide spread familiarity with the Biblical texts to the extent that many quote from memory deserves appreciation. The Biblicistic reading of the scripture that presupposes common people can understand and get message out of the Biblical text is consistent with the nature of the Bible. Such existential readings of the scripture where believers come to the Bible with questions and make decisions in light of the answer they get from the Bible shows the importance the Bible has as the guide for Christian life. This also gives an indication to how the entire church is involved in the theologizing effort.

Nevertheless, this way of reading the Bible is susceptible for erroneous interpretation which can be the source of all kinds of false teachings. If allowed to continue, false teachings can endanger the church's faithfulness to Christian tradition. One example is the wide spread preaching of "prosperity gospel" on the pulpit of EECMY. Considering this problem only as a decline in the quality of pulpit ministry can be an understatement of the matter that has a serious consequence. The Cape Town Commitment strongly rejects it and described it as the "false gospel" that is incompatible with the balanced Biblical Christianity.³³⁷ The version of prosperity gospel on EECMY pulpits has at least three serious errors. First, the message of the gospel has misplaced focus. The gospel of the kingdom of God (that declares what God has done in the person of Jesus Christ, his death, and resurrection) is minimized making the focus on what believers are about to receive materially. Second, the view on Christian relationship to God is misguided. Instead of focusing on what God has done as the firm foundation for the relationship with God, the sermons seduce believers to unsatisfying material cravings. Christian commitment is not motivated by love and gratitude for what God has already done but by material greed (what believers may receive in the future). Thirdly, it suffers from an idolatrous view of God. The sovereignty of God in his wishes and wills is transformed by magical principles by which believers can manipulate and get whatever they want out of God.

³³⁶ Lausanne Covenant 1974, Article 2

³³⁷ The Cape Town Commitment, 2010, 64

God in this system is not the sovereign Creator and ruler of the universe who is independent of human beings. Rather he is an object that can be manipulated by believers. This god is far from the Christian God as revealed in the Scripture and worshiped by Christians down the ages. Hence, this is one area where the danger of unfaithfulness to Christian tradition may be detected and a clear warning is due.

From the firm belief in different creedal and confessional documents that is shown both on the constitution and in practice, faithfulness to Christian tradition can be attributed to EECMY. But the lack of adequate knowledge regarding their content and deficiency in competence regarding articulating it is one area that demands improvement.

Faithfulness to Apostolic tradition can be shown in the way the church view herself in relation to the entire body of Christ. The belief in the one universal church of Christ and the practical cooperation with it is theologically sound. The belief of some EECMY members in *oneness* of the Church that received *one call* to witness to *one and the same Christ* in the *one mission* of God is utterly apostolic (John 17:18; 20:21; Matt. 28:19,20; Acts 1:8; 20:27; Eph. 1:9,10; 3:9-11; Eph. 4:3,4; John 13:35; Phil. 1:27).

Faithfulness to Christian tradition also includes confessing what Christians through ages have been confessing namely the uniqueness of Christ as the means of salvation. Hence, the apostolic affirmation about Jesus Christ as the only way of salvation is maintained beyond any doubt by EECMY members from the top to the bottom or from the bottom up (Gal. 1:6-9; I Tim. 2:5,6; Acts 4:12; John 3:16-19; John 14:6).

7.6. CHAPTER CONCLUSION

EECMY is the Church that is young historically speaking but experiencing robust in both numeric growth and its impact on Ethiopian society. 51 years ago when the church was established there were about 20, 000 members. According to the latest statistics (December 2010) the current members are 5,576,156.³³⁸ Admittedly, it might be difficult to establish a cause and effect relation between the experience of the numeric growth and the mission thinking of the Church. Nevertheless, the mission thinking EECMY has a significant role for shaping the evangelistic activity of the church. Hence, it is possible to assume that the mission thinking of the church has a part to play for the numeric growth. As a church sent by Christ to different Ethiopian societies, she has been involved in different activities touching the lives of

³³⁸ Appendix III

millions with her holistic services. The way she has been addressing the contextual concerns in the Ethiopian society gives witness to the church that has promising beginning.

Nevertheless, there are areas that are concerning for any one that is responsible. The decline in spiritual quality that is demonstrated in the fading out of Bible reading culture, wide spread of prosperity gospel and the declining level of Christian commitment will effect the wrong turn in the history of this Church. The inadequate preparation regarding the theological and missiological formulation that matches the developments in Ethiopia and beyond is also another area that is in need of improvement.

CHAPTER EIGHT

8. CONCLUSION

8.1. SUMMARY

This thesis has presented and critically evaluated how the mission mandate was conceived and carried out by EECMY. In the first chapter which is also the introduction of the thesis, EECMY as the subject was introduced briefly. The need for investigation of EECMY's mission thinking was also justified. The objective of the thesis was indicated to be the systematic presentation (chapter 3-6) and the normative evaluation (chapter 7) of EECMY mission understanding. The criteria for evaluation of the thinking are also included. The introduction further introduced the research questions that were answered in the presentation of chapters 3-6.

In the introduction the method used to organize the research was accounted for. In this line, the "Reflection on Practice" as the missiological research was assumed. Reflection on Practice takes the mission practice as the starting point rather than imposing worked-out theoretical framework by which the mission thinking may be investigated. Proper justification for this method was presented. In the broad field of Missiology, this thesis is concerned with mission history where the history covers the period from 1959-2010. The historical approach taken was not chronological but synchronic focusing on different themes. The method used to gather information was qualitative interview and participant observer. Some letters and official documents from EECMY were collected during field study and treated as primary sources. The introduction also includes the working definition of Mission in this thesis and a brief list of literatures that precedes this research on the subject of EECMY.

One perspective from which the EECMY mission thinking is investigated is the way it is responding to the contextual concerns. Hence, the second chapter was dedicated to provide a general overview of the contextual information. This includes historical issues, political, and religious contexts of Ethiopian society. The presentation of chapter 2 was brief because relevant details were included in the presentation of the Mission thinking of EECMY (chapters 3-6).

In chapters 3-6 the EECMY's thinking regarding her missionary mandate and duty both in attitude and in practice was presented. This included the way Evangelistic and pastoral

mandate and duty was perceived and carried out (chapter 3). In loving obedience to God and being empowered by the Holy Spirit, EECMY members witness to Christ in their everyday life. However, the content of the evangelistic message was found to be in need of clarity. Chapter 4 dealt with how EECMY understood and responded to the social responsibility which the Ethiopian context presents. EECMY members are shown to serve the society through various sorts of ministries prompted by their love and obedience to Christ. Nevertheless, the social services and social actions of the church are in need of clear foundation and justification that may guide future social engagements. The 5th chapter is about how the gospel message is understood and communicated from the Ethiopian cultural context. Small scale effort can be noted regarding Bible translation and helping people understand the gospel from their own cultural setting. However, the existence of problematic attitude toward culture and the absence of worked-out “theology of culture” is serious a concern. The 6th chapter is dedicated to check whether the mission thinking of EECMY is faithful to the Christian tradition present and past. EECMY is found to be both an Apostolic and Catholic Church. As an apostolic church, she is found to be faithful to the apostolic witness (Holy Scripture) and apostolic confession (the uniqueness of Christ as the only way of salvation). The Biblicist reading that caused erroneous interpretation of the Bible coupled with ignorance with regard to the content of confessional documents were observed as doors where unfaithfulness can slip in. EECMY’s catholic identity is shown in her belief in the oneness of God’s mission and His church that is carrying out His mission.

In chapter 7, a normative evaluation of the EECMY’s mission thinking was presented. The normative evaluation was done from two perspectives. The first was to evaluate whether the EECMY thinking was is shown to be faithful to the Scriptural witness. This includes whether the thinking is based on well justified sound teaching of the Bible. The second point of view for evaluation was whether the mission thinking of EECMY was able to address or respond to the contextual concerns in the Ethiopian context.

8.2. CONCLUDING REMARKS

A few concluding remarks are in order so that the implication of this thesis is accounted for. The first implication is for the missiological study. EECMY is showed to be a church in an active missionary situation. Active missionary situation includes being both mission field and mission base. Being a mission field, there is active evangelism where Spirit empowered witnesses are in mission action every day and everywhere. The church is also in active service touching various societies of Ethiopia. The recent development in EECMY where

unprecedented zeal to go beyond Ethiopian border is examined, there is an indication of the church that is also becoming the mission base. For the sake of reflection on the mission situation, close investigation and articulation of the mission thinking that undergirds such an active mission situation is an essential contribution for Missiology. And this thesis can give a starting point to that end.

Secondly, the finding of this thesis is hoped to supplement the ongoing discussion within EECMY. One area that needs to be pointed out is the need for critical reflection for the sake of self-understanding. As part of the process of self-understanding, being in an active missionary situation is not enough. There is a need to be clear about why EECMY is doing what she is doing. And there is a need to be clear about the motivation for these activities. It should also be checked whether the centrality of the gospel is attained both in attitude and in practice. EECMY needs to justify this for her own and others. This thesis has provided some indicators which probably may deserve close investigation for reflection that may help self-understanding.

Following self-understanding, EECMY needs to clearly articulate contextual mission theology loud and clear. The contextual mission theology, if it is articulated well can be what will be embodied in the International Mission Society of the Church. This is a great tool for her mission endeavor. Zealous messengers, who cannot justify their messages and their task of witness, are doomed to fail. Further, well articulated mission theology can serve as the basis for mobilizing mission friends within EECMY. It can give a curriculum and guidelines for training prospective missionaries. Furthermore, it can also serve as the basis for cooperation with churches and mission partners all over the world. Lastly, an articulated mission theology is the legacy that this generation can leave behind to future generation. It can be the contribution this church will have for the entire body of Christ. And this thesis has provided in brief the first stage in the process of developing and articulating the contextual mission theology of EECMY.

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<u>NAME</u>	<u>PLACE</u>	<u>DATE</u>
Rev. Sheta, Alemu	Addis Ababa	November 14, 2010
Rev. Gobena, Itefa	Addis Ababa	October 27, 2010
Mr. Daniel, Lalissa	Addis Ababa	November 12, 2010
Rev Megerssa Guta	Addis Abeba	October 22, 2010
Rev. Yigezu, Yonas	Addis Ababa	October 18, 2010
Rev. Idossa, Waqseyoum	Addis Ababa	November 11, 2010
Evangelist 3 ³³⁹	Addis Ababa	October 14, 2010
Member 1 (Bayala)	Addis Ababa	November 16, 2010
Evangelists 1 ³⁴⁰	Awassa	November 4, 2010
Evangelists 2 ³⁴¹	Addis Ababa	October 13, 2010
Pastor, Dawit Yohannes ³⁴²	Addis Ababa	October 28, 2010
Simegn (Member 2)	Awassa	November 3, 2010

³³⁹ An Evangelist from Addis Ababa

³⁴⁰ They were four evangelists from four different synods of EECMY (SWS, Northern, Bethel, Borana)

³⁴¹ They were three evangelists serving in the rural setting in central Ethiopia synod.

³⁴² Serving as the Pastor in Awassa

APPENDIX I STATISTICS SHOWING GROWTH

Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus Five Years (2005-2009) over all Baptized membership growth indicators Chart (A)

Synods	Years covered in the chart						Growth in % (2009) per year	Five Years Growth In each Synod	
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009		Total figures	Average per year
Abay Dabus Synod		-	-	-	-	110640	New Synod	-	-
Amaro Synod		-	-	85713	86389	96040	10.04	10327	5164
Birbir Dilla Synod	205543	210149	218509	219499	219499	220498	0.45	13956	2792
Beggi Gidami Synod (A.Work)	43512	45012	45012	44073	44073	44804	1.63	1292	259
*Central Ethiopia Synod	200181	220942	256480	278376	281370	281370	0.0	81189	16238
Central Gibe Synod	124349	132322	151081	175628	181644	188094	3.43	63745	12749
*Central Synod	541345	586386	621688	670753	689157	763085	9.69	221740	44348
East Gambella Bethel Synod	60359	60359	61087	62798	62798	87445	*28.19	27086	5418
Gimbi Jorgo Synod	251200	254820	259079	264260	265681	302684	11.54	51484	10297
Illubabour Bethel Synod	306120	312240	315362	321669	337754	337754	0.0	31634	6327
North Central Ethiopia Synod	3948	3985	4812	4941	4941	5549	11.00	1601	321
South Central Ethiopia Synod	439715	468715	526574	492972	492972	505980	2.6	66265	13253
South Central Synod	542360	553207	580142	609796	628481	629561	0.17	87701	17441
*South Ethiopia Synod	245006	252974	322171	322171	372903	437689	14.8	192683	38537
South Synod	123529	123529	129569	130138	137896	143751	4.07	20222	4045
*South West Bethel Synod	123529	219205	239029	242335	246124	290733	*15.34	122595	24519
South West Synod	189989	193643	208361	216290	226045	243046	7.00	53057	10612
Wabee Batu Synod	33414	35501	37691	39884	41111	41111	0.0	7697	1540
Western Gamb. Bethel Synod	67964	67964	68198	70518	70518	75193	6.21	7229	1456
Western Synod	288479	303359	320169	311456	311456	200917	grew into 2	-87562	Went to ADS
Western Wollega Bethel Synod	228091	235474	256581	261784	267470	275029	2.74	46938	9388
Galan Abaya Parish	43512	42350	42350	42350	42350	42350	0.0	-1262	Report Problem
North Ethiopia Work Area (Go)	253	253	303	303	303	303	0.0	50	10
North Ethiopia Work Area (T)	865	865	1491	1450	1450	1804	*19.62	939	188
Grand Total in each year	4033413	4323254	4665739	4869157	5012486	5,337,187	6.46	1,303,777	267336

Note: Only six synods that are with stars reported regularly

Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus communicant members' growth in Five Years (2005-2009) Chart (B)

	Years covered in the chart					Five Years Growth In each Synod	
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	figures	Average p/year
Abay Dabus Synod	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Amaro Synod	-	-	41695	349	1504	43548	14516
Birbir Dilla Synod	5388	3237	11823	370	?	20818	4164
Beggi Gidami Synod (A.Work)	6759	-	-4765	-	829	2823	565
*Central Ethiopia Synod	13946	9881	16736	12000	?	52563	10513
Central Gibe Synod	1405	15036	5894	4409	2780	29524	5905
*Central Synod	12014	20459	13143	10066	55682	11135	4348
East Gambella Bethel Synod	-	3622	?	?	21246	24868	4974
Gimbi Jorgo Synod	2936	5017	2429	1133	2094	13609	2722
Illubabour Bethel Synod	3519	1794	3626	11246	?	20185	4037
North Central Ethiopia Synod	196	398	7	?	270	871	175
South Central Ethiopia Synod	6845	18049	-28794	?	5082	1182	235
South Central Synod	-	37248	14144	44554	392	96338	19268
*South Ethiopia Synod	5454	27779	?	-	-	33233	6647
South Synod	-	11129	373	569	4720	16791	3359
*South West Bethel Synod	-	14357	2000	3390	-	19747	3950
South West Synod	7617	9406	4698	1981	10760	34462	6893
Wabee Batu Synod	2292	2408	373	448	?	5521	1105
Western Gamb. Bethel Synod	-	-	?	?	27365	27365	5473
Western Synod	6323	8560	9265	4615	?	28763	5753
Western Wollega Bethel Synod	2000	4973	4796	5346	2420	19535	3907
Galan Abaya Parish	-	-	-	?	4155	-1162	Report problem
North Ethiopia Work Area (Go)	-	23	-	-	-	23	5
North Ethiopia Work Area (T)	-	750	86	86	136	1058	212
Grand Total in each year	68491	125608	97529	103806	91443	1246409	249282

Note: Only six synods that are with stars reported regularly

Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus Five Years (2005-2009) over all growth in congregations' Chart C

Names of synods/Work Areas	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	Difference in (+/-)	Average per year
Abay Dabus Synod		-	-	-	-	-		
Amaro Synod		-	-	131	145	147	16	5.3
Birbir Dilla Synod	177	188	205	208	227	207	30	6.0
Beggi Gidami Synod (Then A. Work)	72	75	82	82	82	90	18	3.6
Central Ethiopia Synod	255	279	301	301	315	315	60	12.0
Central Gibe Synod	83	98	128	143	155	173	90	18.0
Central Synod	259	270	307	318	341	349	90	18.0
East Gambella Bethel Synod	135	137	137	137	146	150	15	3.0
Gimbi Jorgo Synod	255	258	260	260	266	326	71	14.0
Illubabour Bethel Synod	280	280	332	332	370	372	90	18.0
North Central Ethiopia Synod	13	13	13	13	13	15	2	0.4
South Central Ethiopia Synod	1172	1174	1272	1137	1176	1235	63	12.6
*South Central Synod	386	402	509	534	500	534	148	29.6
*South Ethiopia Synod	632	640	717	717	758	801	169	33.8
South Synod	248	250	250	250	250	261	13	2.6
South West Bethel Synod	156	156	156	178	178	213	22	4.4
South West Synod	460	460	453	467	475	478	18	3.6
Wabee Batu Synod	64*	64*	67	68	73	73	9	1.8
Western Gambella Bethel Synod	141	142	142	142	142	129	(-) 12	-2.4
Western Synod	324	342	389	393	406	312	(-) 12	-2.4
*Western Wollega Bethel Synod	237	236	293	332	332	450	213	42.6
Galan Abaya Parish	41	42	42	42	43	44	2	0.4
North Ethiopia Work Area (Gonder)	5	5	5	5	5	5	-	-
North Ethiopia Work Area (Tigray)	3	3	3	3	3	3	-	-
Grand Total in each year	5514	5633	6063	6193	6451	6806	1292	258.4

Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus Five Years (2005-2009) over all growth in preaching places Chart D

Names of synods/Work Areas	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	Difference in (+/-)	Promoted to congregations
Abay Dabus Synod	-	-	-	-	-		-	-
Amaro Synod	-n	-	-	-	9	13	+4	16
Birbir Dilla Synod	8	15	18	19	19	379	Ranks 1st +371	30
Beggi Gidami Synod (Then A. Work)	28	29	29	17	17	14	-14	18
Central Ethiopia Synod	198	208	206	228	230	230	+32	60
Central Gibe Synod	44	55	56	63	58	66	+22	90
Central Synod	125	150	142	131	108	175	(Ranks 2nd) +50	90
East Gambella Bethel Synod	135	135	135	135	135	32	-103	15
Gimbi Jorgo Synod	18	16	20	16	19	19	+1	71
Illubabour Bethel Synod	298	274	250	255	338	338	(Ranks 3rd) +40	90
North Central Ethiopia Synod	33	33	33	30	30	27	-6	2
South Central Ethiopia Synod	207	145	180	180	185	197	-10	63
South Central Synod	208	208	194	204	200	204	4	3rd highest promotion 148
South Ethiopia Synod	335	335	251	251	260	200	135	2nd highest promotion 169
South Synod	201	201	188	196	190	188	-13	13
South West Bethel Synod	230	208	208	208	208	208	-22	22
South West Synod	299	312	324	423	268	283	-16	18
Wabee Batu Synod	97	99	99	105	110	110	13	9
*Western Gambella Bethel Synod	238	238	238	238	238	30	-208	-
Western Synod	49	40	45	43	42	51	2	2
*Western Wollega Bethel Synod	95	95	157	70	115	12	-83	1st highest promotion 213
Galan Abaya Parish	13	13	15	15	14	14	1	2
North Ethiopia Work Area (Gonder)	5	5	5	5	5	5	0	-
North Ethiopia Work Area (Tigray)	18	18	3	3	3	3	-15	-
Grand Total in each year	2832	2832	2796	2735	2811	2818	-14	

Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus Five Years (2005-2009) over all growth in the numbers of pastors' Chart E

Names of synods/Work Areas	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	Difference in 3-5 years (+/-)	Average per year	Ratio of member/pastor
Abay Dabus Synod		-	-	-	-	-	New Synod	-	
Amaro Synod		-	-	5	5	12	7	3.5	1:8004
Birbir Dilla Synod	51	106	73	74	82	82	31	6.2	1:2689
Beggi Gidami Synod (15	15	15	15	15	30	15	15	1:1494
Central Ethiopia Synod	115	137	190	214	214	214	99	19.8	1:1315
Central Gibe Synod	86	85	86	86	140	138	52	10.2	1:1363
Central Synod	158	162	206	213	268	267	109	21.8	1:2858
East Gambella Bethel Synod	10	10	3	31	32	35	25	5.0	1:2499
Gimbi Jorgo Synod	53	51	54	54	54	57	4	0.8	1:5314
Illubabour Bethel Synod	153	181	207	207	237	237	84	16.8	1:1426
North Central Ethiopia Synod	6	6	6	6	6	7	1	0.2	1:792
South Central Ethiopia Synod	71	79	82	78	112	120	49	9.8	1:4217
South Central Synod	234	234	438	315	308	280	46	9.2	1:2249
South Ethiopia Synod	37	37	52	52	55	56	19	3.8	1:7816
South Synod	29	29	24	24	24	24	-5	-1.0	1:5990
South West Bethel Synod	17	75	79	80	104	104	87	17.4	1:2796
South West Synod	54	72	77	80	88	85	31	6.2	1:2860
Wabee Batu Synod	5	19	26	15	13	13	8	1.6	1:3163
Western Gambella Bethel Synod	49	49	49	44	44	44	-5	-1.0	1:1709
Western Synod	67	71	76	81	81	69	2	0.4	1:2912
Western Wollega Bethel Synod	75	95	95	138	138	182	107	21.4	1:1512
Galan Abaya Parish	-	-	-	-		3	?	?	?
North Ethiopia Work Area (Gonder)	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1:303
North Ethiopia Work Area (Tigray)	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1:1804
Grand Total in each year	1287	1515	1842	1814	2028	2215	774	155	

Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus Five Years (2005-2009) over all growth in the numbers of Evangelists Chart F

Names of synods/Work Areas	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	Evangelists/ Members Ratio	total Difference (+/-)	Average in each year
Abay Dabus Synod	-	-	-	-	-	?		-	
Amaro Synod	-	-	-	10	10	28	1:3430	18	9
Birbir Dilla Synod	35	19	15	28	35	59	1:3737	24	4.8
Beggi Gidami Synod	28	17	22	22	22	284	1:157	256	51.2
Central Ethiopia Synod	180	185	171	200	200	200	1:1407	20	4
Central Gibe Synod	40	50	90	109	82	211	1:893	171	34.2
Central Synod	350	367	376	351	594	594	1:1285	244	48.8
East Gambella Bethel Synod	2	2	2	2	2	62	1:1411	60	12
Gimbi Jorgo Synod	47	45	45	48	43	1916	1:158	1869	373
Illubabour Bethel Synod	34	86	86	86	370	370	1:913	336	67.2
North Central Ethiopia Synod	17	16	16	9	9	13	1:426	-4	-0.8
South Central Ethiopia Synod	86	102	158	136	136	400	1:1265	314	62.8
South Central Synod	344	344	274	524	43	486	1:1296	142	28.4
South Ethiopia Synod	43	43	150	150	151	151	1:2899	108	21.6
South Synod	43	45	45	47	49	49	1:2934	6	1.2
South West Bethel Synod	20	20	37	37	375	375	1:336	355	71
South West Synod	125	135	153	153	158	580	1:419	455	91
Wabee Batu Synod	95	117	27	19	206	106	1:388	11	2.2
Western Gambella Bethel Synod	13	13	13	13	13	160	1:470	147	29.4
Western Synod	74	79	85	101	109	1929	1:104	1855	371
Western Wollega Bethel Synod	48	86	89	86	86	737	1:373	689	137.8
Galan Abaya Parish	10	10	10	10	14	14	1:3025	4	0.8
North Ethiopia Work Area (Gonder)	2	2	2	2	4	4	1:76	-	-
North Ethiopia Work Area (Tigray)	5	5	5	4	-	4	1:451	-1	0.02
Grand Total in each year	1436	*1788	1876	2144	2611	2732	1:1954	1292	258.4

Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus Five Years (2005-2009) over all growth in the numbers of volunteers' Chart G

Names of synods/Work Areas	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	Total difference in (+/-)	Average in each year	comments
Abay Dabus Synod	-	-	-	-	-	847	-	-	
Amaro Synod	-	-	-	-	10663	10663	-	-	
Birbir Dilla Synod	13160	16438	16532	14887	9803	9700	-3460	-692	
Beggi Gidami Synod (Then A. Work)	1800	9026	9044	9044	9044	9218	+7418	+1488.6	Ranks 2nd
Central Ethiopia Synod	16105	16302	12590	14326	14326	14326	-1779	-355.8	
Central Gibe Synod	15905	17231	21560	25824	25441	28518	+12013	+2402.6	Ranks 1st
Central Synod	49136	43562	44076	28886	10939	28518	-20618	-4123.6	
East Gambella Bethel Synod	1238	1238	456	608	608	608	-630	-126	
Gimbi Jorgo Synod	41263	37182	37182	39428	41340	39424	-1839	-367.8	
Illubabour Bethel Synod	19188	22467	22520	22968	29134	24134	+4946	+989.2	Ranks 3rd
North Central Ethiopia Synod	683	788	829	1049	1049	1079	+396	+79.2	
South Central Ethiopia Synod	55626	55412	56025	51329	51329	51329	-4297	-859.4	
South Central Synod	25053	25053	32358	28306	29188	29188	+4135	+827	
South Ethiopia Synod	5700	5700	8244	8244	135	650	-5050	-1010	
South Synod	21455	21455	21455	21455	4206	4206	-17249	-3449.8	
South West Bethel Synod	10707	11697	11697	11697	341	341	-10366	-2073.2	
South West Synod	27036	28090	26249	26213	31021	31021	+3985	+797	
Wabee Batu Synod	2263	2275	2443	2588	2948	2948	+685	+137	
Western Gambella Bethel Synod	945	945	945	410	410	1205	+260	+52	
Western Synod	4540	6381	4614	8693	5109	1994	-2596	-519	
Western Wollega Bethel Synod	13360	13358	35280	35515	6364	6364	-6996	-1399.2	
Galan Abaya Parish	1040	1040	1040	1040	1040	1040	0	0	
North Ethiopia Work Area (Gonder)	37	37	37	37	37	37	0	0	
North Ethiopia Work Area (Tigray)	52	52	52	4	4	4	-48	-9.6	
Grand Total in each year	326292	335729	365230	352553	279479	319955	-6337	-1267.4	

APPENDIX II THE LETTER OF 1972

Document 7:

The Pastoral Letter (1975)

Through His Spirit, the Lord Jesus Christ calls for repentance and announces the coming of the Kingdom of God. It is this Kingdom which we must seek above all else. In order to liberate man from the power of sin, selfishness, death and the evil one, Jesus Christ died upon the Cross.

God is the God of all creation, the God of history. He has called into being a people to serve Him in the world. He liberates this people from oppression, brings them into the judgement, defeat and exile and restores them time and again. God's final judgement and victory will only come after a time of distress and upheaval.

The people of God have been called to discipleship, pilgrimage, even suffering in this world, because true life is found only through suffering and death. The Church is challenged to find itself by giving itself for the true liberation of the whole man. In this, its witness to the Gospel of Christ and its service to man, it teaches that salvation as wrought by Christ must be experienced in this life, but that fullness of life is to be realized at the Second Coming of our Lord and Saviour.

Addis Ababa, February 1975

Source: EECMY, 35th Executive Committee Meeting, EC Minutes EC-35-27

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DOCUMENT 8

On the Interrelation between Proclamation of the Gospel and Human Development

by the Church Officers of the ECMY

Introductory Note: Complaints had been raised by the ECMY against the lop-sided availability of funds for development projects (as over against the evangelism work of the church), and against the criteria set from abroad by missions and donor agencies with regard to requests for and use of funds from the missions and donor agencies. As much of the money was being channelled through the Lutheran World Federation (in particular, the Departments of Church Cooperation and World Service), it was suggested that the ECMY set forth in detail its point of view and address its concerns in a letter to the LWF. Strong input in what was produced came from the thought and reflections of Gudina Tumsa. The Officers of the ECMY agreed with Gudina, who was appointed chairman of a three-man drafting committee for the ECMY's response: Rev. Olaf Seaveras of the Norwegian Lutheran Mission (Associate General Secretary of the ECMY at the time) was asked to do the actual writing, with input also from Rev. Manfred Lundgren of the Swedish Evangelical Mission. The Letter of the ECMY Officers, dated variously in May 1972, and sent to the LWF, with signed copies to the various missions and donor agencies, has come to be seen not only as central to Gudina Tumsa's thinking, but as a marker also of ECMY and African theological thought. This Letter (sometimes referred to as a "Memorandum" or "Document") of the ECMY Officers to the LWF initiated an ecumenical discussion at an "Ethiopia Consultation" in Austria (November 4, 1972) and at a jointly sponsored WCC/Division of Church Cooperation consultation on LWF/Division of World Mission and Evangelism and "Education in Mission" at Hothorpe Hall in England (November 17-20, 1972). (See also the Introductory Note on Document 10, below.) (PEH)

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In January 1971, the 7th General Assembly of the Evangelical Church Mékane Yesus passed a resolution requesting the Lutheran World Federation to approach the Donor Agencies in Germany and other countries with a view to reconsidering their criteria for aid and include direct support for congregational work, leadership training and church buildings.

This action was prompted, on the one hand, by the fact that the Church realised her own inability to cope with the fast-growing congregational work and the opportunities for evangelistic outreach in this country. On the other hand, the Church had become more and more concerned about the prevailing imbalance in the assistance given to the Church by its overseas partners. It is true that the Church had become more and more aware of her obligation to serve our fellow men and society by engaging herself in community and social development projects. The Church could not responsibly let the opportunities to get funds for development projects go by without making the fullest possible use of them. Over a number of years, the Church has therefore considered it her responsibility and privilege to work out project requests which would meet the criteria decided by the Donor Agencies. It is also with great gratitude that the Church acknowledges the generosity on the part of the Donor Agencies in granting funds for so many development projects presented by the ECMY.

At the same time, the Church, in faithfulness to her Lord, realised her obligation to proclaim the Gospel to the ever-growing crowds expecting more than bread. The Church cannot possibly remain silent where a genuine spiritual need is prevailing and people in thousands are flocking to newly established churches, and in places where there are no churches, to hear the GOOD NEWS. Finding that her own resources are insufficient both in personnel and funds, the Church has called on a number of Churches and Mission Organisations in the West to come and help. In spite of the encouraging response received, the Church is not able to cope with the situation.

In turning to her Overseas partners and sister Churches in the West for assistance in the work which has been regarded as the prime responsibility of the Church both in the field of development and proclamation of the Faith, it has become evident over the last few years that the Churches and Agencies in the West are readily prepared to assist in material development, while there seems to be little interest in helping the Church meet her primary obligation to proclaim the Gospel. From the African point of view, it is hard to understand this division and the dichotomy created in the West and reflected in the criteria for assistance laid down by the Donor Agencies.

The ECMY therefore felt that it was her responsibility as well as her duty to call the attention of the Lutheran World Federation to this, in our opinion, most vital issue. In consequence, the president of the ECMY, H.E. Emmanuel Abraham, addressed a letter to the General Secretary of the LWF, Dr. André Appel, on March 9, 1971, enclosing the above-mentioned resolution of the 7th General Assembly of the ECMY.

It is with satisfaction that the ECMY has come to understand that the concern of the Church, expressed in the Assembly resolution, has been taken seriously by the LWF and that consideration is being given to it. We are sufficiently encouraged by this to reiterate the request outlined in the resolution and in the letter from the President, as well as to give the request more substance by presenting a brief supporting document explaining in more detail the reasons for our concern. In doing this we should like to refer to three issues:

1. Our understanding of man and his needs
2. The old and new imbalance in assistance from the West
3. The present situation in Ethiopia and its challenge to the Church.

Our Understanding of Man and His Needs

It is generally known and admitted that we live in a divided and terribly unjust world, where some people have more than enough and others do not have enough even to survive. We talk today about "rich" and "poor" nations, about "developed" and "underdeveloped" or "developing" societies and even of the "Third World." In doing this we are using only generally adopted socio-economic measurements to determine which society is rich or poor, developed or underdeveloped. The standard of human life and that of society is normally evaluated in terms of economic growth and material wealth, or in technology and production. Based on this materialistic Western concept of development and in an effort to find a remedy, at least two things seem to have been largely overlooked, namely:

- a) That there are values in life beyond those of modern technology and economic betterment, without which man's development will never be meaningful and lasting.
- b) That man is not only the suffering creature who needs help, but that he is also the most important development agent.

In our view a one-sided material development is not only self-deceiving, in the sense that man needs more than that, but it is also a threat to the very values which make life meaningful, if carried out without due attention to a simultaneous provision to meet spiritual needs.

We know that we need more of modern technology. We need more equipment and know-how to use it. We need to learn more effective methods to replace the primitive ones in agriculture and other production. We have still to learn and gain much from the Western world, from the experiences and discoveries they have made in various fields, and we hope that the Western Churches and Agencies will continue to share with us their wealth of knowledge, skill and funds.

However, when we in effect are told, by virtue of criteria unilaterally decided by the Donor Agencies, what we need and what we do not need, what is good for us and what is not good, then we feel uncomfortable and become concerned about our own future.

Looking at the so-called developed societies we realise that in the midst of their affluence man is still suffering from all kinds of evil. The values which make life meaningful seem to be in danger of being lost in these societies. It seems to us that what is happening in the affluent part of the world today points to the fact that technology and economic growth, beyond the ability of people to control and responsibly use, is leading to development in reverse, where man has to suffer new evils. The present ecological or environmental crisis in the form of physical and moral pollution indicates the danger of this one-dimensional development.

We therefore see the development of the inner man as a pre-requisite for a healthy and lasting development of our society. Unless our people are helped to the spiritual freedom and maturity which enables them responsibly to handle material development, we are afraid that what was intended to be a means of enhancing the well-being of man can have the opposite effect and create new forms of evil to destroy him.

We believe that an integral human development, where the spiritual and material needs are seen together, is the only right approach to the development question in our society. The WCC Central Committee also pointed to this when it was stated in the meeting in Addis Ababa in January, 1971, that from the Christian point of view development should be understood as a process of liberation by which individuals and societies realise their human possibilities in accordance with God's purpose. Charles Elliott in his book, "The Development Debate", goes as far as to say that "humanism closed in on itself and not open to the values of the spirit and to God who is their source could achieve apparent success. True, man can organise the world apart from God, but without God he can organise it, in the end, only against man. An exclusive humanism is an inhuman humanism.

There is no true humanism but that which is open to the Absolute and is conscious of a vocation which gives human life its true meaning. Far from being the ultimate measure of all things man can only realise himself by reaching beyond himself. As Pascal has said so well: 'Man infinitely surpasses man.' The spiritual is thus easily linked to the secular vision, indeed the two merge."

Throughout man's civilised history he has been plagued by the dilemma that even though he may know what is good and right and even want to do the right things, yet he fails to achieve it. It has therefore rightly been said that "Our problem is not primarily to know what is good. Our problem is to find something which will make a man do good when he knows the good." (Dr. Alvin N. Rogness, Lutheran Standard, Feb. 1, 1972). St. Paul spoke of this in Romans 7,15-20. There is, however, for many today a struggle to accept this rather depraved view of man. Man is still seen as the most noble of all creatures, with a power within him to be guided by his higher intellect. Man is capable of reasoned response. If he knows what is right he will do it. "Knowledge is virtue" is the motto of this appealing humanism. Can history support such a view of man? Obviously not. Though certain flagrant abuses of justice have been removed from the affairs of man, unjust practices like racism, oppression and corruption continue wherever man is found. Thus man's basic need is not simply to be informed of what is good and right. Man's primary need is to be set free from his own self-centred greed. Here is where the Gospel of Lord Jesus Christ comes in as the liberating power.

The other aspect, which in our opinion has been overlooked and for which there is very little room within the present framework of the criteria of the Donor Agencies, is the question of man as an agent in the development process. The basic question which is asked is: How many will benefit from this project? The community which the project is supposed to serve is seen more as an object than as an agent for betterment. This basic approach has resulted in two problems.

- a) Too narrow and well defined projects which require professional experts, and which in turn are bound to be remote from those who should be involved.
- b) Too few possibilities of long-term support by way of broad training at the grass-root level.

In order to get the ordinary man involved with a view to becoming an agent in the development process, provision must be made to work with unimportant groups over long periods of time. Within the Church structure this brings us down to the congregational level where in our view this potential is available. In the SODEPAX report from the Drebergen Consultation in March, 1970, it is pointed out that the Church provides a unique possibility to carry out development ideas. It says: "Each pastor working in a rural community could potentially be a change agent in favour of development; each Christian women's or youth group could be a centre for the diffusion of innovations. Equally important, because of its grass-root penetration the Church could provide one avenue for the democratisation of development by allowing scope for participation and expression by the local rural population." Here again the artificial division between Church work and development is an obstacle in the attempt of the Church to develop the manpower potential it has within its congregational structure.

We submit that a fresh approach to development aid through Church channels would be to consider man and his needs as a totality. This would mean that the present artificial division between spiritual and physical needs would be done away with, and provision would be made for an integral development of man in order to enable him to play his role as an agent in the development process. In our view, the most urgent and the most important investment needed at the present time in the ECMY is in manpower development, and here we see no division between congregational work and development projects. They must go together, because the Creator made man that way.

We also maintain very strongly that it is the need that should determine where assistance should be given, and not criteria laid down by the Donor Agencies which reflect trends in the Western societies and Churches. It is the need in a given local situation that should be the guiding principle for assistance, and therefore there ought to be more flexibility in order to meet extraordinary opportunities in an African Church which does not necessarily share all the views of Western Churches and Agencies.

Old and New Imbalance in Assistance

The old emphasis in the mission of the Church had been on the verbal proclamation of the Gospel. All other activities in the educational, medical or technical fields were regarded as being of secondary importance, or even as "means to an end" namely, avenues by which the message would reach people. In the promotion of the Mission work, social responsibilities, or help towards material betterment of the living conditions among the people, were usually mentioned only as side-issues of expressions of Christian charity.

The new emphasis is on social action, community development, liberation from dehumanising structures, and involvement in nation-building. Proclamation of the Gospel has become a side-issue, which should be referred to those who may have a special concern for the spiritual welfare of people. The two should be kept apart. It has been said that Christian service is "an end in itself". These two extreme positions are equally harmful to the local Churches in Developing Countries, which see it as their obligation to serve the whole man. It has been suggested that "false piety" is responsible for the old imbalance in assistance, and "a sense of guilt" is responsible for the new imbalance in the assistance to the work of the Church. It seems as though the prevailing view in the West assumes that the Evangelical Missions have not in the past paid due attention to the material and physical needs of man, and that they

were only concerned about the salvation of souls, doing very little to bring about change in society, that they called themselves, "evangelicals" and declared wherever they went that they were there to evangelise non-Christians. By this attitude of a false piety they created an image of Mission work as being only or at best mainly verbal proclamation of the Gospel.

This however is not the true picture. The Western Churches and the Western world at large had been misinformed by the Missions themselves. Although they spent a larger portion of their total resources on social activities, the Missions never reported it, or reported it in a distorted form, due to false humility and false piety. It would seem that they operated on the principle "your left hand should not know what your right hand is doing." We must therefore hold the Missions themselves largely responsible for the situation which has developed, and the misunderstanding that has resulted in the break-down of the relationships between development and proclamation, or between witness and service, which from the Biblical and theological point of view are inseparable. Here is, in our opinion, a field where a proper study of the Foreign Mission era could bring about a new understanding of the integral development approach which in fact was a significant part of Mission work, although it was not admitted, nor rightly understood, by all involved.

The false piety we have mentioned did not only result in distorted information about Mission work, but also in a distorted understanding of social activities as "means to an end". The Gospel was not understood as the Good News for the whole man, and salvation was given a narrow individual interpretation, which was foreign to our understanding of the God-Man relationship. God is concerned about the whole man, and this concern is demonstrated in the Gospel. The imbalance in assistance created by some Missionary attitudes has been harmful to the Church in its consequences.

The new extreme position taken by more recently formed Donor Agencies has drawn a line between Mission and Development which

is completely artificial. The new emphasis is reflected in the criteria laid down for the distribution of funds.

It has been suggested that the prevailing understanding that the Church had largely failed to carry out its mandate in the world, resulted in a feeling of shame and guilt, which resulted in a reaction to make up for this "failure". When the motto, "we must minister to the whole man," was adopted, it was implied that the Church had not been ministering to the whole man in the past. There was dismay and a feeling of guilt that gripped the Church when about twenty years ago the injustice and exploitation of colonialism began to come to the surface. Somehow, the Church felt that she had to defend her actions in those "colonised" countries. The Church was faced with the questions and often the accusations: "Has the Church been an instrument of oppression? Has the Church been so busy saving souls that the physical and political needs of man were ignored? Has this not led to an indoctrination of passive subservience as the ideal Christian conduct, which left colonialism almost unopposed?"

As the Church rocked under the impact of such guilt (this was always implied as a sin of omission) the cry went up, "Ministry to the whole man." As the emerging Nation States began to exercise control over the influences that they admitted into their countries, the Church was forced suddenly to make explicit in all her activities that which had always been implicit. Certainly the Church had always emphasised medical work, education and other community improvements, but in the early sixties it was necessary to make all such work all the more visible to accommodate the new nationalism and refurbish the "Mission" image in the sending countries. This led to undependable (from the theological stance) division of ministry and witness. The "real" ministry of the Church was seen as service, and this service as an end in itself. The ulterior motives of conversion, evangelistic outreach and spiritual nurture should be done away with. These matters should be dealt with separately and in a different context.

This overreaction to the Church's failure to engage in social and economic matters in the past, and the sense of guilt on the part of the wealthy Western Churches, led to a new imbalance in assistance to the younger Churches. All this happened in the West, but why should this historical and theological development in the West be the only determining factor in the aid relationship between the older and the younger Churches? The National Churchman in Africa today is unencumbered by an "image" which has to be maintained for the benefit of a guilt-ridden constituency "back home." He is free to interpret the commands of his Lord in the context of his brother's situation (which he shares intimately) without having to apologise for the power of the Gospel.

Thus it was providential and foreordained that we, the National Churchmen today, should begin to question the hesitancy and the equivocation in the proclamation of the Gospel that we witness in some of the Agencies which support our work.

When the EGMV felt the time had come to call the attention of the LWF to this issue, she did it with the conviction that something could be done to bring assistance into balance. It is our firm belief that Christian service is neither "a means to and" nor "an end in itself", but an integral part of the total responsibility of the Church. The division between witness and service, or between proclamation and development, which has been imposed on us, is, in our view, harmful to the Church, and will ultimately result in a distorted Christianity.

Having made this our concern clear, we hear some people say: "Why should we change the criteria because of wrongs done in the past?" Others say: "The present arrangement is only a division of labour. One cannot do everything, and therefore this division must be there for practical reasons." In our opinion, such remarks are only meant to avoid this issue, which is the artificial division of things which belong together.

The Present Situation and Its Challenge to the Church

Among the many remarkable things that happen in Africa today, the rapid growth of the Christian Church is probably one of the most surprising. The phenomenal expansion of Christianity across Africa in the last few decades is simply frightening for the responsible Church leaders. Dr. David Barrett¹ in his thorough analysis of the situation has, on the basis of available statistics, suggested that within the next thirty years the centre of gravity of the Christian world will have shifted southwards from Europe and North America to the developing continents of Africa and South America. He points out that while the Western Churches will have doubled their membership in the twentieth century, the younger Churches will have multiplied seventeen times. If we take this development seriously, it puts a tremendous responsibility on the whole Christian world. If the historically young Churches will represent the "centre of gravity" in the Christian world in three decades, they must be prepared.

Dr. Barrett points out some of the consequences of the present expansion of the Christian Church in Africa and one of them is an urgent and massive help in order to prevent a widespread breakdown of the Church. So far, very little planning has been done both among Roman Catholics and Protestants. The growth-rate indicates that "the construction of four times more physical plant, such as Church buildings, religious education for children, mass production of Christian literature, literacy programs and so on are urgently needed."

What is happening in this respect in our Continent at large is also happening in the ECMY. The problems which Dr. Barrett has pointed out for Africa as a whole are also our problem today. We are alarmed by the development and challenged by the opportunities to such a degree that we must share our concern with the sister Churches in the West which, we believe, have both the desire and the means to help us. Here we should like to quote some parts of the

¹ International Review of Missions, Vol. LIX, No. 233, January, 1970.

ECMY General Secretary, the Rev. Gudina Tuntsai's Report [see Document 11, below] at the LWF/CCC Meeting in Tokyo last year [1971].

Alarmed by the high growth-rate, the General Assembly decided in 1969 that a plan whereby the Church could be able to know where she stands be worked out. During the two-year period from 1969 to 1970 the necessary data were collected for assessment. In the process of working out a plan it became clear that in the past three years from 1968-1970 the average growth was calculated to be 15%. Membership growth in 1970 alone was 27%. However, if we stick to the more moderate growth figure of 15% the membership of the ECMY will be about doubled by the end of 1975, which means that the ECMY will then have a membership of about 285,000.

To meet this expansion about 137 pastors must be trained during this period, as well as about 1,000 evangelists. Realising the urgency of making use of the present opportunities in Ethiopia, our 7th General Assembly passed a resolution requesting the LWF to approach the Donor Agencies in Europe and the USA with a view to reconsidering their criteria for aid, and include direct support for congregational work and leadership training, so that the ECMY would be able to cope with the rapid growth taking place at present. The earnest wish of the ECMY is that this request be passed on to the member Churches of the LWF to be communicated to the congregations in order that they may know our problems and desires, and it is our sincere and earnest hope that the LWF will do its utmost - in the first place in passing and making known our concern to the Churches and secondly that the LWF may influence the present Donor Agencies to review their criteria for allocation of assistance, thereby giving due consideration to our evangelistic outreach plan.

Our hope is that sister Churches do not judge our needs solely on their own criteria and on the conditions that they have stipulated. We want to proclaim Christ because we believe it is our responsibility. We want to proclaim Christ because our people are hungering for Him.

We trust that in this document we have made the reasons for our concern clear, and that the current theological and missiological trends in the West will not be the sole determining factors for aid, but that African views will be taken more seriously and considered against the background of the present situation.

Addis Ababa, May 9, 1972

Source: the 358th Church Officers' Meeting, Minutes CO-72-63



LWF Consultation on Proclamation and Human Development, Nairobi, Kenya (1974); Rev. Gudina Tumsa in conversation with Dr. Ulrich Duchrow, Director, LWF Dept. of Studies

Report at the Ethiopia Consultation

Hannover, Germany, November 22-23, 1973

by Rev. Gudina Tumsa

Introductory Note: An Ethiopia Consultation was called to meet in Hannover, Germany, to discuss the issue of the disagreement between the administration of the Hermannsburg Mission (die Missionsanstalt Hermannsburg/MAH) and the Central Office of the Mekane Yesus Church over the nature of the ECMY and the relation of the missions/overseas donors to the ECMY and/or the respective ECMY synods. Gudina Tumsa as General Secretary was asked by the Church Officers to present the position of the ECMY to the Consultation, his presentation being in the form of this **oral Report** (subsequently transcribed from tape, and edited now for publication). The MAH had signed a General Agreement with the Western Synod (under the expiring presidency of the late Rev. Daffa Janno) regulating the relationships between the Mission and the Synod, and the General Manager of the Mission (Mr. Weige) had defended the right of the Mission to do so by appealing to the "federal" character of the ECMY. In doing so, he called forth resistance from the Church Officers and the vigorous rebuttal of the General Secretary, and Gudina's defence of the unity and integrity of the ECMY as a National Church. At issue was also the interpretation of the integration of Church and Mission which was officially completed in 1971.

This Report is reproduced here, not to resurrect a past controversy, but to bring out the thinking of Rev. Gudina Tumsa, who puts forth his understanding of the nature and structure of the ECMY in that particular historical setting. He also used the opportunity to put before this forum the official position of the ECMY as set forth in the ECMY Letter, "On Proclamation of the Gospel and Human Development" (1972; see Document 8, above), criticising the attitudes of Western missions and donors. It echoes, in part, what GT had also previously stated in his "Report on Church Growth in Ethiopia" (Tokyo, 1971; see Document 11, below). (PEH)

APPENDIX III MEMBERSHIP STATISTICS FOR 2010

THE ETHIOPIAN EVANGELICAL CHURCH MEKANE YESUS

MEMBERSHIP STATISTICS FOR 2010

Serial No.	Synods	Established Congregations		Outreach & Preaching Places		Pastors/employee /Volunteers		Evangelists employees &volunteers		Other Volunteers		Membership		Change	
		2009	2010	2009	2010	2009	2010	2009	2010	2009	2010	2009	2010	2009	2010
1	ADS	125	126	16	14	-	28	513	28	847	3637	110640	126484	15844	30444
2	AS*	147	147	33	33	12	12	28	28	10,663	??	96040	96040	9651	9651
3	BDS*	207	209	379	9	82	79	55	875	9700	21256	219499	221715	119942	1217
4	BGS*	90	94	14	18	30	29	19	21	9218		44804	45600	430	796
5	CES	315	372	230	492	214	300	200	357	14,326	17990	281370	302704	-	21334
6	CGS*	173	179	66	72	138	137	147	314	28518	29473	188094	199485	6450	11391
7	CS*	349	365	175	188	267	259	398	400	28518	44500	763085	805167	73928	41782
8	EGBS	150	150	32	36	35	35	15	700	608	200	87445	87445	24647	24647
9	GJS*	326	327	19	16	57	70	47	1991	39424	16516	302684	302684	37003	37003**
10	IBS	372	442	338	357	235	274	156	248	24134	21798	337754	356646	11900	6992
11	NCES *	15	15	27	30	7	7	13	12	1079		5549	6004	608	455
12	SCES*	1235	1299	197	201	120	151	400	425	51,329	2	505980	516101	13008	10121
13	SCS *	534	350	204	209	280	186	486	381	29188	32556	629561	651828	1080	22267
14	SES*	801	801	200	200	56	56	151	151	650	650	437689	437689	64786	64786
15	SS*	261	264	188	192	24	25	49	61	4206	5634	143751	150817	5855	7066
16	SWBS	213	213*	208	208*	104	179	142	173		12621	246124	290733	44609	44609
17	SWS*	478	499	283	367	85	118	196	771	31461	37621	243046	283829	17001	40783
18	WBS	73	75	110	200	15	13	22	103	2948	3280	41111	46112	500	5001
19	WGBS*	129	127	30	95	44	46	150	127	1205	3063	75193	77733	4675	25240
20	WS*	312	316	51	58	69	98	112	115	1994	7727	200917	209879	1101	8962
21	WWBS*	450	460	12	490	182	182	147	156	6364	5250	275029	283100	7559	8071
22	GAP	44	44	15	19	3	?	14	14	1,040	1040	42350	42350	404	404
23	AACAOC		15	?	?			34		53	2560		13593	-	13593
24	NEWA-G	5	5	5	5	1	1	5	5	37	37	303	303	-	-
25	NEWA-T*	3	3	3	3	1	1	4	4	4	4	1804	1804	354	354
26	Returnees congreg.	-	88	-	66	-	38	-	102	-	-	-	20311	-	-
	Total	6807	6985	2835	3578	2061	2361	3469	7615	319955	267415	5,279,822	5,576,156	268437	296334

Key to the abbreviations

ADS Abay Dabus Synod	SWBS	South West Bethel Synod
AS Amaro Synod	SWS	South West Synod
BDS Birbir-Dilla Synod	WBS	Wabe Batu Synod Synod
BGS Begi-Gidami Synod	WWBS	Western Wollega Bethel Synod
GAP Gallana Abaya Parishes (4)	WS	Western Synod
NEWA-T North Ethiopia Work Area (Tigray)		
CES Central Ethiopia Synod	DASSC	Development and Social Service Commotion
CGS Central Gibe Synod	MYS	Mekane Yesus Seminary
CS Central Synod Commission	AACAOC	Addis Ababa Congregations Administrative and Organizing
EGBS Eastern Gambella Bethel Synod		
WWGBS Western Gambella Bethel		
GJS Gimbi-Jorgo Synod		
IBS Illubabor Bethel Synod		
NCES North Central Ethiopia Synod (Wollo)		
SCES South Central Ethiopia Synod		
SCS South Central Synod.		
SES South Ethiopia Synod		
SS South Synod		