



NORWEGIAN  
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

# **Working for Empowerment or Working for the Powerful?**

**A qualitative study of how the leaders of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church  
Mekane Yesus understand the Church' vision Holistic Ministry and how this  
relates to the diaconal ministry of Norwegian Church and Mission  
organisations in Ethiopia.**

**Mirjam Syltebø Endalew**

**Supervisor:**

Professor Gunnar Heiene

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## Abbreviations:

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ACT: Action by Churches Together.

CoS: Church of Sweden.

DASSC: Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus Development and Social Services Commission.

EECMY: Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus.

EECMY-DASSC: Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus Development and Social Services Commission.

ELCA: Evangelical Lutheran Church of America.

EPRDF: Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front.

GHM: German Hermannsburg Mission.

LWF: Lutheran World Federation.

NCA: Norwegian Church Aid.

NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation.

NLM: Norwegian Lutheran Mission.

NMS: Norwegian Mission Society.

OLF: Oromo Liberation Front.

SEM: Swedish Evangelical Mission.

TPLF: Tigray People Liberation Front.

UN: United Nations.





# 1. Introduction:

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## 1.1. Motivation:

Having lived six years in Ethiopia working in diaconal ministry, first in the Norwegian Missionary Society (NMS) and later in the Norwegian Lutheran Mission (NLM), I commenced my studies towards a Master's degree in Diakonia autumn 2013. In November the same year, I attended a seminar addressing the issue of power relations in international diakonia (see Larsen and Jørgensen, 2014) and the idea behind this study was born. With experience from two different organisations that work in partnership with the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY), I was curious to learn more about how the differences I have observed between the organisations impact on the EECMYs experience of partnership with the organisations. Considering the Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) has a different profile from the other organisations while it is also working in partnership with the EECMY, it seemed a good idea to include also NCA in the study. Even though my prior knowledge about NCA Ethiopia was limited, the organisation is not foreign as I spent two years of my childhood in South-Sudan while my parents worked in NCA there.

## 1.2. Introductory presentation of the topic:

The term international diakonia describes the activities of church and mission organisations that aim to prevent and relieve human suffering internationally (Nordstokke, 2009). From early modern mission history we learn that when European missionaries arrived in the southern parts of the world they did not only bring the Bible, they also brought modern education and medicine. The modern mission movement has been criticized for making use of these resources and the power of money with the agenda of promoting the gospel (Bosch, 2011). Many western church and mission organisations have responded to this criticism by emphasising that proclamation and diakonia are separate ministries, where proclamation meets spiritual needs and diakonia meets physical needs (Myers, 2011). Furthermore, missionaries have been criticized for cultural imperialism and suppression of the indigenous culture, and development donors are criticized for using aid to change the South into an image of the North. The introduction of the term partnership can be interpreted as a defence against this that emphasises that development is a process of working together

(Larsen and Jørgensen, 2014). With growing awareness about the negative effects of modernity, the emphasis of development theories is now on human aspects of development, democracy and human rights issues (Payne and Phillips, 2010). The role of religion in development has gained recognition based on identified benefits of religious actors like networks, ability to influence, experience of addressing ethical questions and service provision. Development actors have been criticized for making use of these instrumental benefits of religions, while religions identity and spiritual dimensions often have been ignored (Haynes, 2007).

With the vision Holistic Ministry, the EECMY is characterised by spiritual revival and extensive diaconal ministry, built on the foundation laid by Lutheran mission organisations (EECMY, 2012). The Church receives large amounts of financial support from abroad and has many international partners. At the same time, she has taken bold steps that bear witness of an independent identity. As a church in a country counted among the world's least developed, the EECMY offers insight into the experiences and perspectives of the South. Perspectives that mission and development agencies have been criticised of suppressing. The aim of this study is to discover and give voice to the experiences, perspectives and theology of the EECMY.

### 1.3. Question and research questions:

The question the study aims to answer is **How do the leaders of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus understand the Church' vision Holistic Ministry and how does this relate to the diaconal ministry of Norwegian church and mission organisations in Ethiopia?**

With the document "Diakonia in Context" (LWF, 2009) the Lutheran World Federation has prepared a valuable contribution to the understanding of diaconal ministry. The document does not operate with a strict definition of the term, but identifies two underlying assumptions for diakonia. Firstly, diakonia is a theological term that points to what it means to be church. Secondly, diakonia is action that responds to the sufferings of the created world (LWF, 2009:8). Holistic Ministry is the vision of the EECMY. According to the EECMY strategic plan, the term means serving the whole person without dichotomising between spiritual and physical needs (EECMY, 2012: 7). A central purpose of this study is to further

explore the meaning of these terms and the relation between them. With this purpose, three research questions have been identified.

The first research question is **How do the leaders of the EECMY understand holistic ministry?** As holistic ministry is the vision of the EECMY, and the leaders of the EECMY are the ones who use the term, the way the leaders of the EECMY understand and use the term is key to the meaning of the term.

The second research question is **How do the leaders of the EECMY understand the role of the Norwegian Lutheran Mission, Norwegian Mission Society and Norwegian Church Aid in holistic ministry?** These organisations are the biggest Norwegian partners of the EECMY. Looking at the ministry of these organisations through the eyes of the leaders of the EECMY offers insight into how the southern collaborate experience the partnership with these organisations and opportunities for comparison between the term holistic ministry and these organisations practical diaconal ministry. This builds on the above-mentioned assumption that diakonia is action and its meaning is therefore best discovered in practical experiences.

The third research question is **How do the leaders of the EECMY relate to justice and gender equality?** Diaconal ministry is participation in a transformational process that denounces all suppressing powers towards increased justice (LWF, 2009). Suppression takes place at many levels in Ethiopia, and human rights and gender equality are burning issues. Looking at how the EECMY and the Norwegian organisations relate to justice and gender equality is an assessment of their truthfulness to the identity of diakonia.

#### 1.4. Methodology and material:

Qualitative methodology emphasise people's interpretations of the social world (Bryman, 2012: 36), and is suitable for studies that aim to discover peoples understanding and experiences, like this one. The empirical material presented in this study refers to qualitative face-to-face interviews with seven of the leaders of the EECMY. Issues and questions around methodological choices is discussed in detail in chapter 4.

The description of the background and context is based on previous research, documents from the EECMY and the Norwegian organisations, and some internet resources. From my

employment history, I knew the NLM and NMS fairly well, while my knowledge about NCA was limited. To gain a deeper understanding about NCA, I met with NCA's area team-leader for Ethiopia Kari Øyen in December 2014.

Most of the previous research referred to is at doctorate level. The research of Gustav Aren (1999) is on the early history of the evangelical movement in Ethiopia. Olav Sæverås (1974) describes the process behind the foundation of the EECMY and the interaction between the Church and the mission partners in the early years of the church. *Revolution and Religion* by Øyvind Eide (1996) offers deep insights into the challenges faced by the Ethiopian people and the EECMY during the Ethiopian revolution and seeks to explain the motivation behind the persecution. Gemechu Olana (2006) takes a critical look at the social and political involvement of the EECMY.

In a study of the EECMY and the term holistic ministry, the church's previous general secretary Gudina Tumsa is central. The Gudina Tumsa Foundation has published Gudina Tumsa's essential writings (Tumsa, 2007), and lectures from missiological seminars held in honour of his legacy. In addition to the theology of Gudina Tumsa, the documents *Mission in Context* (2004) and *Diakonia in Context* (2009) from the Lutheran World Federation serve as a theoretical framework for the study. As a transformational process, international diakonia also relates to development theory. The presentation of development theory refers to Payne and Phillips (2010) overview of the main issues in modern development history, and Jeffrey Haynes (2007) discussion on the relation between religion and development.

### 1.5. Outline of the thesis:

As diakonia is response to the world situation, the first step in a diaconal study is to understand the context in which the study takes place. Chapter 2 provides background information about contextual factors with particular relevance for this study. The first part of the chapter describes the political, religious and social context of Ethiopia. In the second part, a summary of the history of the EECMY and the theology of Gudina Tumsa is given. The third part of the chapter looks at how the three Norwegian organisations present their mission and vision, and introduces their work in Ethiopia.

Chapter 3 presents the theoretical framework of the study. As diakonia is both a theological concept and response to experiences, the study refers to the LWFs understanding of mission and diakonia as a theological frame, and development theory as a reference from the field of social sciences, in addition to the theology of Gudina Tumsa that is presented in chapter 2.

In chapter 4, methodological questions are discussed. The chapter describes how the empirical material was collected, methodological choices made, and consequences for the validity and reliability of the findings. The empirical findings of the interviews with the leaders of the EECMY are presented in chapter 5. The findings are divided in two parts. The first part of the chapter presents findings that relate to partnership and the second part presents findings related to the understanding of holistic ministry including issues of justice and gender equality.

Chapter 6 contains a discussion of the research questions in light of the empirical findings, the background and the theoretical framework. The study is summarised in chapter 7 with an outlook at challenges raised by the findings and questions discussed in the study.

## 2. Background:

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### 2.1. Ethiopia:

Ethiopia consists of over 80 different ethnic groups that all speak their own language and have their own distinct religious and cultural traditions. Centre-periphery is a suggested model to help understand the religious, social and political development in Ethiopia (Eide, 1996: 2).

#### 2.1.1. Political background:

Ethiopians are proud to say their country has never been colonised. The historic domination by the Amhara language and culture originating from the northern kingdom of Abyssinia, led by the Emperor in close connection with the patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, has however been compared to the suppression by the colonial powers in the neighbouring countries (Olana, 2006: 17). The reign of Emperor Haile Selassie ended with the Ethiopian revolution in 1974. The revolution had broad support in the people through farmers, students and teachers unions, in addition to the military forces. The Armed Forces and the police established the Co-ordinating Committee of the Armed Force, Police and Territorial Army later named Derg that removed the government and the officials. Derg became the moving force of the revolution and developed into a Marxist military dictatorship that gradually tightened its grip on the people and controlled the country with power and blood. Churches were closed and religious leaders arrested and killed (Olana, 2006: 70-74). The research of Eide suggests that the persecution may have been motivated by observations of how the gospel and the evangelical movement contributed to empowerment of people and building of political awareness in the districts (Eide, 1996: 320).

In 1991, an alliance of different opposition groups, where the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) were the strongest, succeeded in overthrowing the Marxist regime and established a transitional government. EPRDF is a political party that was established in 1990 from prisoners freed by the Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF). After a turn of events that is still surrounded with sensitivity and controversy, OLF decided to withdraw from the government. According to OLF, this was because of threats and persecutions of OLF members. EPRDF is still in power in Ethiopia and elections are held every 5 years. The government is accused of being

dominated by TPLF and of violation of human rights. There have been reports of violent responses to demonstrations and political opposition, particularly in connection to the 2005 election. Human rights issues remain controversial, and Ethiopians have been granted political asylum in Europe and the USA during the period of the EPRDF government. Today OLF is defined as an illegal terrorist organisation in Ethiopia (OLF website).

While many perceive Amharic to be the main national language, the majority of the Ethiopian population belong to the Oromo people group. In an attempt to resolve this controversy, the Oromo language is now the administrative language and the language taught in primary schools in the national regional state of Oromia.

In 2010, the Ethiopian government issued a law restricting internationally funded NGOs involvement in advocacy and freedom to address human rights issues in Ethiopia (EECMY-DASSC, 2011: 55).

#### 2.1.2. Religious background:

Christianity has a long history in Ethiopia. Already in the New Testament, we read about the baptism of the Ethiopian official (Acts 8). Christianity became the official religion of the Axumite Kingdom in the fourth century (Ethiopian Orthodox Church website). The connection between religious and political power has been particularly strong in Ethiopia. According to Eide (1996: 1), the study of religion is essential to understand the dynamics of Ethiopian society. For many years, Ethiopians in higher positions considered membership in the Orthodox Church an integrated part of loyalty to the nation (Sæverås, 1974: 31-32).

While the Ethiopian Orthodox Church dominates the central areas of Ethiopia, the traditional belief of people in the rural southern and western parts of the country are different primal religions. This is still the case in some of the most isolated areas. In eastern parts of Ethiopia, dominated by the Oromo and Somali people, the majority belong to Islam. In the last century, evangelical Christianity has seen an explosive growth in many parts of the country (EECMY, 2012).

From time to time, there have been reports of religious-motivated violence in Ethiopia, with killings of Christians and burning of churches. In the global picture, these incidences are relatively minor. Some explain the absence of terrorism attacks in Ethiopia in the strength of the county's intelligence service.

### 2.1.3. Social conditions:

On the 2014 UN human development index, Ethiopia is nr 173 out of 187 ranked countries (UNDP website). Internationally, Ethiopia has often been associated with poverty, drought and hunger. Famine occurs in geographical pockets that are particularly vulnerable because of climatic conditions and poor infrastructure. Over the last decade, Ethiopia has experienced strong financial growth averaging 10.9% annually (Worldbank website).

Poverty hits women and girls particularly hard. This is also the case in Ethiopia, where women and girls suffer from all kinds of discrimination and disadvantage (UNwomen website). The Oromo and Amharic languages have many sayings, and use of metaphors are common. Some of the sayings give solid evidence of the discrimination against women and girls. For some examples of sayings from the Oromo language, see the attachment.

## 2.2. The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus:

The EECMY has approximately 7 million members, more than 10 000 congregations and preaching places and is organised in 24 synods. 2625 pastors, 5761 evangelist and 286 539 volunteers serve the congregations (EECMY, 2012: 8). In January 2015, 68 of the pastors were women. The development work is organized in a separate legal body, the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus Development and Social Services Commission (EECMY-DASSC), usually referred to as DASSC.

There is no room within the frame of this study to give a full presentation of the complexity of the EECMY. The EECMY Strategic Plan 2013-2017 (EECMY, 2012) gives an overview of what the leaders of the EECMY consider the main challenges presently facing the church. The following describes the historical aspects most relevant to this study.

### 2.2.1. Historical background of the EECMY:

When the first evangelical missionaries came to Ethiopia from Sweden, the intention was not to establish an evangelical church, but to revitalize the Orthodox Church (Sæverås, 1974: 15-17). Ethiopians themselves played key roles in the early evangelical work in the country (Aren 1999: 19-58, 287-323). Evangelical congregations were only established after evangelical Christians underwent persecution and were excluded from communion in the Orthodox Church (Sæverås, 1974: 15-26). Western-based missions initiated evangelical work



in different parts of the country, including substantial diaconal work in the form of health and educational institutions. The work was fruitful and the evangelical movement grew quickly (Sæverås, 1974).

From 1944, Ethiopian Evangelical Christians from different parts of the country gathered for a yearly conference with the purpose of forming a national evangelical church (Sæverås, 1974: 41-75). Contact with the LWF contributed to strengthening the Lutheran confessional identity. The church constitution was prepared with support from the Lutheran missions, and the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus was formally founded on January 21, 1959 (Sæverås, 1974: 76-108).

The missions saw it as a goal for the church to be independent, but the work of the missions was complex and the young church was not equipped to take the full responsibility for everything. The missions and the church formally integrated 10 years later. In Sæverås' (1974: 109-163) description of the process towards the 1969 agreement on integration of church and mission, much of the discussion appears to evolve around practical and organisational matters. The central underlying question is however, what it means to be church, in relation to mission, in relation to diakonia and in relation to the government. In the years that followed, seeking to answer these questions became of the uttermost importance for the young church, in search of the identity and meaning of being church in the context of Ethiopia.

#### 2.2.2. The theology of Gudina Tumsa:

The EECMY has defined her mission as “serving the whole person” or holistic ministry. This vision defines the identity of the church and describes how the church understands her mission. The term is rooted in the theological understanding of Gudina Tumsa.

Gudina Tumsa served as the Executive General Secretary of the EECMY from 1966 until he was killed at the hands of the Derg in 1979. As the leader of the church during her early years and at the beginning of the Ethiopian revolution, Gudina Tumsa is probably the most influential person in the history of the church. Through his personal commitment and his theological thinking, his legacy offers a unique contribution to the identity of the EECMY. All the informants in this study refer to him with great honour and respect.

“On the Interrelation between Proclamation of the Gospel and Human Development” is the most famous document that carries the name of Gudina Tumsa. The document was sent to the LWF with copies to various partners of the church and is often referred to as the EECMY letter of 1972. A committee consisting of Olav Sæverås and Manfred Lundgren in addition to Gudina Tumsa prepared the letter. In the introduction, the letter describes the situation where thousands are coming to church in hunger to hear the gospel, while the church, due to lack of financial resources and manpower, is not able to fill the need. At the same time, the letter acknowledges churches’ obligation to serve the community and expresses gratitude for generous financial support of development projects. The concern of the letter is to address the discrepancy between the need and the support largely due to the criteria set by the donors for the use of the fund. The western concept of development is criticised for ignoring the role of values other than modern technology and financial growth as sources of meaning and the role of human beings as development agents. Donor agencies are accused of depriving the recipients of their right to define what is good, by defining the criteria for support themselves. The letter points to how development in the west has not necessarily improved people’s experience of a meaningful life. From the EECMYs point of view, holistic development is “a process of liberation by which individuals and societies realise their human possibilities in accordance with God’s purpose” (Tumsa, 2007: 89). The letter suggests that a person’s primary need is liberation from his self-centeredness, and points to the liberating power of the gospel as the source of liberation. Furthermore, the letter criticises the western development approach for seeing the developing world, the community and the people as objects rather than agents of the development process. The letter claims that in consequence, development becomes a specialised field of short-term development projects that require expertise distanced from the community. The document points to the potential of congregations as development actors and members of the congregations as development agents in a process where spiritual and physical needs are united. The letter calls for more flexibility in the use of funds, and asks that the use of resources should be directed by need (Tumsa, 2007: 85-98).

Another document “The role of a Christian in a Given Society” was written by Gudina Tumsa (2007: 1-12) only days before he was arrested for the third time and killed. In this document, he expresses his view on how a Christian should relate to authorities and to society.

According to Gudina Tumsa, the Christian is in a given society to serve the people and witness to the risen Christ. A Christian should obey the law and the government of the country and co-operate with governmental bodies to serve the people in the country. The only situation when a Christian is obliged to oppose the law “is if he is commanded to act contrary to the law of God” (Tumsa, 2007: 12). This applies “only when he is faced with the demand not to confess Christ as Lord, and when he/she is denied to teach in his name” (Tumsa, 2007: 8). It appears that the key to understand Gudina Tumsa is to understand what “confession to Christ as Lord” means for him.

Out of context, Gudina Tumsa’s explanation on the role of a Christian in a given society may sound like the classical Lutheran Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms. Øyvind Eide (2007) met Gudina Tumsa several times. On one occasion, they discussed the Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms. Gudina Tumsa explained that as in the Ethiopian context the secular and the religious cannot be divided, the Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms is not appropriate. Mind cannot be divided from the body and development cannot be separated from faith. In one of his reports, Gudina Tumsa explains that in Ethiopia, evangelical Christianity is perceived as “the new religion of love and justice” (Tumsa, 2007: 129-139). As witnesses to the religion of love and justice, Christians are obliged to stand up against and speak out against injustice, as witnesses to Christ as Lord. On this basis, I understand the consequence of Gudina Tumsa’s theology and worldview to be that confession to Christ as Lord and Saviour includes confession to justice and fighting any kind of suppression. Gudina Tumsa’s rejection of the opportunity to escape the Derg and his will to pay the prize of his own life for the sake of staying with his people and the church during the revolution bear witness of his commitment to this understanding (Krause, 2010: 112-114).

### 2.3. Norwegian Church and mission organisations in Ethiopia:

I will here give a brief general presentation of the profile of the Norwegian Lutheran Mission, the Norwegian Mission Society and Norwegian Church Aid, and more specifically of their engagements in Ethiopia and relation to the EECMY.

### 2.3.1. The Norwegian Lutheran Mission:

NLM presents itself as a free and independent mission organisation working with the vision: World for Christ! The emphasis is on the spiritual dimension of mission. The NLM 2020 Mission Strategy Document states, “As a mission movement, our primary task is to win souls” (NLM, 2009: 2).

At the same time, the Mission Strategy Document expresses that acts of mercy, like caring for the sick, the poor, and the oppressed, is an integrated part of the mission mandate (NLM, 2009: 2) and a wish to participate in improving people’s life conditions. The goal of the development work is to improve people’s life and contribute to a just world (NLM, 2009: 11). The document states that missionaries should not engage in political activity. At the same time, the strategy says, “The Christian value of human beings compels us to advocate for fundamental human rights and purposeful development aid. The work to eradicate poverty and injustice can take place at many levels” (NLM; 2009: 6). The mission document calls for a healthy balance between evangelism and development work (NLM, 2009: 11).

Women are excluded from the most influential leadership positions and the main board of NLM (NLM, 2012: §8).

NLM started work in the southern parts of Ethiopia in 1948, after approval of Emperor Haile Selassie. (Tolo, 2002: 76-75). The organisation emphasises sending of missionaries, and in 1973 NLM had 189 missionaries in the country (Tolo, 2002). From the beginning, NLM in Ethiopia gave special attention to work among women and children (Tolo, 2002: 78). NLM worked in areas without schools and played an important role in developing schools in the area. The teachers had a double function, they were teaching people to read and write while at the same time teaching about the Christian faith and from the Bible. There was no college for education of teachers in Southern Ethiopia, and NLM started a school for education of primary school teachers. Faith was not a condition for entering the teachers training (Tolo, 2002: 81-82). The local authorities were struggling to run the hospitals in the area, and NLM employed doctors and nurses, and took over the responsibility for several of them. The health services were recognised as an integrated part of the work of the mission and seen as a good way of communicating the gospel (Tolo, 2002: 83). The hospitals and schools have later been handed over to the government.

Tolo (2002:89) points to how the suppressed minority ethnic groups in Ethiopia through the gospel discovered their dignity and value as human beings created in the image of God. He suggests that the awareness people gained through the gospel and through increased educational level may have contributed to the growing resistance towards the authorities in the build up to the revolution (Tolo, 2002: 98-99).

The relation to the authorities has been an ongoing issue for NLM in Ethiopia (Tolo, 2002: 89) and NLMs strong involvement in schools and health services has served as a condition for the missionaries to get work permits (Tolo, 2002: 75-76).

NLM has now withdrawn from many of the initial areas and focuses on the eastern parts of the country dominated by Islam. There is still a strong involvement in diakonia both financially and with expatriate staff. Furthermore, missionaries are working as teachers at the Tabor Evangelical College in Awassa, which offers both high school education and theological training for mission, and one missionary family is working with Bible translation to the Tsamakko language, one of the minority ethnic groups in the country. NLM is still giving some financial support to the EECMY synods in the southern parts of the country. NLM has independent registration as an NGO in Ethiopia and an administrative office in Addis Abeba where most of the employees are local. The majority of the work is implemented in partnership with the EECMY. One big health programme that works to reduce maternal mortality is implemented directly in co-operation with the Ethiopian Ministry of Health (NLM website, NLM, 2009 and NLM, 2013).

#### 2.3.2. The Norwegian Mission Society:

With the vision “A living, acting and missional church in every country!” NMS has a strong identity in church. NMS Basic document on mission (2004: 2) emphasises that mission is the task of the Christian Church, and is based in and springs from living Christian congregations.

The mission document (2004: 5) clearly states that mission involves the sending of missionaries. There has however been a steady reduction of the number of missionaries in NMS. In the 3 year report presented to the NMS general assembly in 2014, this is explained by lack of qualified applicants, financial priorities and increasing level of education in many of the countries where NMS works (NMS, 2014: 8).

The NMS Basic document on mission stresses that NMS communicates the gospel in words with boldness (NMS, 2004: 15). At the same time the document points to how diaconal services always express God's good will, and can be an expression of the gospel, when this is made credible in the context (NMS, 2004: 15). The document is clear that diaconal service is not inferior to preaching the gospel and has no hidden agenda.

In 1968, the EECMY general secretary Gudina Tumsa and the church president Emmanuel Abraham invited NMS to start work in western Ethiopia among the Gumuz people (then called "Shankalla") in the Blue Nile Valley and the Oromo in Beghi. It was a new situation for NMS to start work in integration with an already existing national church, but in 1969, the NMS General Assembly approved it (Kjosavik, 1992: 127-132).

The first NMS missionaries arrived in Ethiopia in 1970. From the start, the work involved both evangelism, education and health services. According to Kjosavik (1992: 132-139), the health care offered played an important role in the building of trust between the missionaries and the people, particularly among the Gumuz people, and many students became Christians through education at the schools.

From the beginning, the relationship between EECMY Western Synod and the NMS missionaries was challenging. This is explained partly in poor communication due to geographical distances, partly in the ethnical differences between the highlands where the Synod leadership was situated and the Blue Nile Valley that NMS wanted to prioritize, and tension connected to this. The issue calmed when some missionaries were placed to work closer with the synod (Kjosavik, 1992: 138-140). The balance between the work among the Gumuz people in the Blue Nile Valley and the work among the highland Oromo in areas with many Christians has remained a challenge in the NMS engagement in Ethiopia. The last missionaries living among the Gumuz people left in 2005 and for some years, the majority of the financial resources went into bigger diakonal projects in the highland areas. The support to smaller projects in the Blue Nile Valley has however continued and recently NMS initiated a project particularly aiming to support minority ethnic groups in preservation of their indigenous languages and cultural resources. There is now concrete plans of the Gumuz area becoming a synod of its own, with office in the town of Kamashi in Benishangul-Gumuz national regional state.

Today, there are five missionaries in NMS Ethiopia. The work has a strong emphasis on empowerment of women and gender issues, in addition to church building and the particular focus on minority ethnic groups in the western parts of the country (Ny Blomst, 2014). NMS is not a registered NGO in Ethiopia, and operates solely through the EECMY. There is a small NMS office in the capital.

### 2.3.3. The Norwegian Church Aid:

NCA presents itself as an ecumenical and diaconal organisation. The organisation strongly emphasises that work to influence people's faith is not part of its mission (NCA, 2014: 9). The organisations statement of principles says that its mission is to make God's love manifest in the world on behalf of the churches of Norway (NCA, 2008).

A central characteristic of the engagement of NCA today is rights based and advocacy work. The organisations vision is "Together for a just world, empowering the poor and challenging the privileged".

The work is organised in five thematic areas:

- The right to peace and security.
- Gender justice.
- Economic justice.
- Climate justice.
- The right to water and health.

(NCA, 2014)

According to Tønnessen (2007: 259), the rights based approach has some places created a distance between the organisation and their traditional partners, like churches and other faith-based organisations. NCA has therefore many places chosen alternative local partners.

NCA has become one of the driving forces for aid co-operation across national and confessional boundaries. Particularly through the ACT (Action by Churches Together) Alliance, a coalition of over 140 churches and affiliated organisations, in which also the EECMY-DASSC is a member.

NCA has adopted the Church of Norway's definition of diakonia: "Diakonia is Christian faith translated into action, and is expressed through compassion, inclusive communities, responsible stewardship of creation and the struggle for justice" (NCA, 2008: 7). In connection to this definition, NCA has identified these core values: the integrity of creation, human dignity, global justice, inclusive communities, compassion (NCA, 2008: 9).

The NCA area team-leader for Ethiopia Kari Øyen, explains that NCA works with faith based organisations and local churches because of the strong ties and influential position religious actors hold at the grass root. She describes this as the benefit of NCA compared to other development organisations (Øyen, 09.12.2014). According to the global strategy, NCA acknowledges the role of religion in development by seeking "to help people identify and strengthen forces within their own religion that affirm justice and reach out to protect the oppressed and destitute" (NCA, 2011: 6). Furthermore, NCA understands itself as a bridge between the big donors and the grass-root organisations that identifies potential sources of funding, channels the fund towards the grass-root and equips the implementer to utilize the financial resources (Øyen, 09.12.2014).

NCA's engagement in Ethiopia started in 1969. According to my informants, this was after invitation from the EECMY during a period of hunger and drought. For many years, EECMY was the only partner of NCA in Ethiopia. Today the organisation supports some projects through the EECMY-DASSC. These projects are renewed on a year-to-year basis. NCA has identified a number of other partners in Ethiopia and is registered as an international NGO in the country. It is however rarely the implementer of projects, but usually operates through local partners. NCA has an office in Ethiopia led by one Norwegian resident representative (Øyen, 09.12.2014).

#### 2.4. Summary:

This chapter has introduced the context in which the study takes place. The first part of the chapter describes the political, religious and social background of Ethiopia. The political history of the government as a suppressing power with opposition from different ethnic groups influences the political atmosphere of the country today. During the time of Emperor Haile Selassie, the connections between the government and the Patriarch of the Orthodox



Church were so close it could be difficult to distinguish between them. In the process of the revolution, political change gradually involved opposition against religion. Despite the closing down of churches during the Marxist period, evangelical Christianity experienced massive growth. The Ethiopian economy has been steadily growing over the last decade. The country is however still counted among the poorest countries in the world and the poverty hits women and girls particularly hard.

The second part of the chapter, describes the process that lead to the establishment of the EECMY. The Church is the result of the joint effort of national Christians and western mission organisations. Today, the EECMY is one of the fastest growing Lutheran churches in the world, with approximately 7 million members. The Church has its own development department which is registered as a separate legal body. The vision of the church is Holistic Ministry. This term is rooted in the theological understanding and worldview of Gudina Tumsa, who served as the general secretary of the Church during her early years, when she was seeking to define her identity. The essence of Gudina Tumsa's worldview and theology is that the world is one and whole, which means witnessing to the gospel cannot be separated from living a life in love and for justice.

The third part of the chapter presents the three Norwegian organisations, the Norwegian Lutheran Mission, Norwegian Mission Society and Norwegian Church Aid. The organisations define their mission differently. All work in Ethiopia in partnership with the EECMY.

### 3. Theoretical framework:

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In this chapter, I will present some theoretical perspectives that relate to the topic of my study. Based on The Lutheran World Federation's documents *Mission in Context* (2004) and *Diakonia in Context* (2009), I will attempt to give an overview of the contemporary understanding of mission and diakonia in the Lutheran context. Diakonia is interdisciplinary (LWF, 2009), and as international diakonia relates to development theory, I will in the second part of this chapter present some of the recent discussions in the field of development, particularly surrounding the role of religion and faith based organisations in development.

#### 3.1. The Lutheran World Federation's understanding of Mission and Diakonia.

LWF (2009) does not operate with a clear definition of diakonia. This reflects that diakonia is understood as a developing term that is being born in a process where theology and action meets context and that may get different expressions in the different contexts of the member churches of the LWF. The document does however define two fundamental underlying assumptions of diakonia. Firstly, diakonia is a theological term that identifies a core characteristic of what it means to be church. Secondly, diakonia is practical response to the experienced consequences of the life conditions of the created world (LWF, 2009: 8). This means that diakonia can be understood as a subject where systematic theology meets empirical reality. Diakonia is the response of the church to the situation of the world, and the study of diakonia is an interdisciplinary study that is interpreted within the frameworks of both theology and the social sciences.

##### 3.1.1. The Mission of the triune God:

LWF (2004) definition of mission is rooted in the understanding of the reign of God:

to point to and participate in the eschatological reality of the in-breaking of God's reign in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, anticipating it's final fulfilment as the basis for transformation, reconciliation and empowerment (LWF, 2004: 7).

The mission belongs to the triune God, the Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier, the role of the church is to point to and participate in the mission of God. Being sent by God to the world to participate in the mission of the triune God is therefore the identity and nature of the

Church. Through participation together in God's mission, the global church can experience unity across cultural, geographical and lingual boundaries. God's reign is eschatological; it is a reality of the end of time that is revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Even though all destructive powers were conquered on the cross, the world and all human beings, including God's people, are still part of the old creation. At the same time, the church is the body of Christ, sent into the world to tell the story of the reign of God, and through diaconal action be a sign and foretaste of the reign of God, in the world and for the world by addressing and denouncing all suppressing and evil powers and structures (LWF, 2004: 23-27 and LWF, 2009: 21-22).

Because it is God's mission, God sustains, inspires and empowers for mission. Through baptism, the person becomes part of God's people and commissioned to take part in His mission, and through His Word, God provides His people with the will and insights to participate. In the Eucharist, the unity with Christ and the presence of God's reign transforms, reconciles and empowers the church for mission. By the Holy Spirit, God renews and guides his people, women and men, in this mission (LWF, 2004: 27-32, LWF; 2009: 24-27).

### 3.1.2. Transformation, reconciliation and empowerment:

The LWF describes mission and diakonia as transformation, reconciliation and empowerment. The three dimensions refer to the Trinity as Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier and to Christ as incarnated, crucified and resurrected. The documents identify these dimensions as criteria against which the church can judge its faithfulness in mission (LWF, 2004: 32-36).

Diakonia in Context (LWF, 2009) identifies several areas of consideration for reflection around diaconal practice. Diakonia aims to take care of and lift up the value of each person's experiences, capacities and dignity. At the same time, diaconal action must address the social and political causes of sufferings and poverty. Targeting causes of suffering at community level implies the opportunity of involving many people in the process of transformation. Diaconal action involves both short-term and long-term perspectives. The aim is to respond to the immediate need while at the same time address causes of suffering to promote a better future. In some situations, change appears impossible. Diaconal action

may then serve as a sign of hope, by being present to see the suffering and listen to the silent voices (LWF, 2009: 40-43).

Transformation is described as “an ongoing process of total reorientation of life with all its aspirations, ideologies, structures and values” (LWF, 2004: 32) that changes all who are involved. Because we all are vulnerable and in need of Christ, involving in transformational processes together offers the possibility of mutual care and responsibility. The goal of transformation is change towards increased respect for human dignity, peace and justice.

Reconciliation is the gift the broken world has received in Jesus. As the body of Christ, the church is sent to participate in the act of reconciliation by inviting people to be reconciled with God and with each other. Reconciliation requires that truth is spoken about injustice. The silenced voices must be listened to and given special attention. This requires a safe environment, where protection of the victim takes priority. Reconciliation is not only an end to the sufferings; it transforms and empowers both the victim and the oppressor for new relations and responsibilities.

Empowerment refers to how every person, irrespective of the social situation, is created in the image of God, with potential, capacity and dignity. By the Holy Spirit, the disciples were empowered to speak on Pentecost. When the weak and powerless gets the opportunity and power to speak, it is a witness of how God continues to empower people. As empowerment involves shifting of power, diaconal action must always address power imbalance, in society, in relations and in the life of the church. By diaconal action of listening to understand different sides of the situation, the church may act as a diplomatic bridge-builder that can build mutual relations. When voices have been silenced, the situation may ask for prophetic communication that lifts up the suppressed voices and defends justice (LWF, 2009: 43-47).

### 3.1.3. Diakonia and proclamation:

Mission in Context (LWF, 2004: 37) explains that mission involves both proclamation and service. The gospel needs to be verbalised in a language that people can understand, through evangelistic proclamation. “The church invites people through the evangelistic proclamation to receive the gift of the forgiveness of sins in baptism, to join a fellowship of the Christian community, and to live a life of discipleship in mission” (LWF, 2004: 37).

Diakonia in Context (LWF, 2009: 29) identifies celebration (leiturgia), proclamation (kerygma) and service (diakonia) as dimensions of being church. The dimensions are interrelated and

cannot be separated. A diaconal identity maintains both the vertical and horizontal dimensions. Without the identity in the triune God, diakonia becomes secular development work, characterised by the interest and goals of the world, and without the horizontal dimension, diakonia will fail to respond to the challenges of the society and people's real life experiences.

LWF emphasises the importance of distinguishing between proclamation and diakonia. The dangers of mixing proclamation and diakonia are identified as potential rejection of diaconal action, for example in Muslim countries, and potential use of religious practice to manipulate people in situations of power imbalance. The basic purpose of diaconal action is defined as service to the neighbour in need (LWF, 2009: 83-84). Furthermore, the document stresses that diaconal activities should not be chosen based on their effectiveness in recruitment of church members, and issues a warning against evangelisation of people in vulnerable situations and against the rich converting the poor. Churches must address the division between the rich and the poor and be critical about own involvement in unjust structures and imbalanced power relations (LWF, 2009: 84-85).

At the same time, the document describes how separating proclamation and diakonia may have turned international diakonia into humanitarian aid and development, a task separated from the proclamation of the reign of God. The document admits however, that a sharp division between diaconal work and evangelism may be justified based on governmental funding of international diakonia (LWF, 2009:85).

In summarising the relationship between proclamation and diakonia, the document suggests the task of the church is to acknowledge "both the distinctiveness of diakonia and its embeddedness in the holistic mission of the church" (LWF; 2009: 86).

## 3.2. Religion and development:

### 3.2.1. Development theory:

The meaning of the term development has often been associated with economic growth at a national level. As Adam Smith and Karl Marx developed the first theories on how to secure financial growth, it became clear that distribution is a central concern in development. The different theories of development value distribution and the importance of financial growth

benefitting in a global perspective all nations and in a national perspective all individuals within a country differently. Questions surrounding the role of state control and regulation of market and welfare are central in the discussion (Payne and Phillips, 2010). While Marx' theory of materialism saw religion as an undesirable distraction, Max Weber discovered a possible positive correlation between Calvinist Christianity and financial growth (Payne and Phillips, 2010: 29). Early development theories have been criticised for ignoring contextual factors in the development process (Hopper, 2012: 41).

Amartya Sen was among the first to acknowledge human aspects of development. For Sen, freedom is both the road to and the goal of development processes. Sen defines freedom as the person's ability to decide and to seek what is of value for her or him. Development is to enable people to define and to seek what they deem valuable. As development is freedom to define what is valuable, and freedom to seek it, every person needs to participate in, and be empowered to, define and seek what is of value. Human development theories therefore have a strong focus on empowerment and participation (Payne and Phillips, 2010: 122).

With a growing focus on equality and participation, the awareness around development not benefitting women and men equally has increased. Critics have pointed to how financial growth has benefitted men more than women and thereby increased men's power over women, and how structural changes have strengthened the patriarchal society. Encouraging women to seek employment is a suggested solution. However, as women continue to carry the greater share of domestic tasks and responsibilities, paid work in addition may increase the burden of women (Payne and Phillips, 2010: 125-131). Furthermore, the concept of development and the power relations within it are criticized for being imperialistic and a strategy the North uses to extend its control over the developing world. The defence against this critique points to how suppression and misuse of power are present also within the so-called underdeveloped societies, where it takes the forms of abuse of the most vulnerable of all (Payne and Phillips, 2010: 138-143).

The recognition of the role of democracy and of structures outside the state and the market, like civil society and family, as deterrents of the outcome of development has increased over the last 2 decades (Payne and Phillips, 2010: 148-151). Governments have realised that they will not be able to reach the development goals on their own and that contributions from civil society may be crucial as a broader approach including a diversity of strategies and

agents is replacing the strong focus on governments and states (Payne and Phillips, 2010: 180-181).

### 3.2.2. Religious actors and development:

As part of civil society, the role of religious actors in the development process is now widely accepted. Haynes (2007: 16-18) has identified some factors in religion and religious actors that can be of advantage in the development process:

- As fighting poverty and reducing human suffering are key issues for all the world religions, the interreligious aspect of working together for a common goal can be an inspirational source of fellowship and partnership.
- As service provision is a crucial part of achieving the development goals, faith-based organisations contribute by building and running institutions like hospitals and schools.
- As faith-based organisations hold high levels of trust in communities in the developing world, they are important partners for utilisation of trust in the development process.
- As faith-based organisations through mosques and churches have networks even in places where governments and infrastructure may be weak, they can reach people even in the poorest communities.
- As religions have a long history of addressing ethical questions they can bring competence in addressing ethical issues that arise with social change.

Faith-based organisations have gained increased recognition as partners in development processes. At the same time, they are criticised for patriarchal structures, being sources of conflict and undermining democratic values of equality and human rights. Development donors have been criticised for instrumental use of religious actors and ignorance of spiritual dimensions of religion and of human development. Many people may regard freedom and a satisfying life, to which religious and spiritual dimensions may be an important source, as more important than income and improvements in social indicators (Haynes, 2007: 50).

### 3.3. Summary:

This chapter presents the diaconal understanding of the LWF and development theory as different parts of the theoretical framework of international diakonia.

Based on the gospel message of God's incarnation for the transformational, reconciling and empowering mission in the world, the Lutheran World Federation describes diakonia as transformation, reconciliation and empowerment. According to the LWF, addressing injustice and lifting the suppressed is at the centre of diaconal practice as a foretaste of the in-breaking just reign of God. As a sign of the reign of God, diakonia is both a witness of, and participation in the mission of, the triune God.

With growing attention on human aspects of development, the role of religious actors in development processes have gained increased recognition. Religious actors are valued because of their networks and the high level of trust they hold in communities. At the same time, religions are criticized for being non-democratic, paternalistic, and for suppression of women. Development donors are criticized for ignorance of religions identity, instrumental use of religious networks, and for the involvement in development to gain power over the southern parts of the world.



## 4. Methodology:

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In this chapter, I will explain what I have done in the study and discuss the methodological considerations and choices made.

### 4.1. Epistemology:

The purpose of social research is to acquire knowledge about the social world by seeing and interpreting the world from the point of view of the people studied. Because qualitative research is occupied with the social reality of people, qualitative methodology builds on an epistemology that accounts for the differences in people's social world (Bryman, 2012: 399). This methodology is useful in a study of differences in worldview and understanding of diakonia. The underlying epistemology is that social knowledge is built in social interaction, as through face-to-face interaction the researcher participates in the mind of the other person to understand this person's social world. In this case, the aim is to see and interpret the world from the point of view of the leaders of the EECMY, to understand their social world. By learning about how the EECMY leaders understand the world and their ministry I hope to understand more about the world and the ministry of the church in the world. As one of the world's fastest growing Lutheran churches serving in a country counted among the world's least developed, I see the EECMY as a good place to learn about diakonia.

In a study that starts with the perspectives of those who are studied, the process of reasoning is described as abductive. In abduction the theoretical understanding is grounded in the language, meaning and understanding of those studied (Bryman, 2012: 401). Studying the term holistic ministry, which is so central to the identity of the EECMY, is an attempt to ground this study in the perspectives of the leaders of the EECMY.

### 4.2. Sampling:

The material was collected during a one-week stay in Addis Abeba in January 2015, where I met with all the seven informants. The sampling is purposive (Bryman, 2012: 418). The informants were chosen because they offer responses particularly useful in answering the research questions. Given my research questions are concerned with the EECMY leaders'

understanding, asking the EECMY leaders about their understanding seems to be a good way to find the answer to the questions. In a church of 7 million members, there are many kinds of leadership positions at different levels. I chose to interview the top leadership. The top leadership in an organisation influences and shapes the profile and identity of an organisation and the understanding of the people below them in the organisation. They represent deep insights into what it means to be church in today's Ethiopia. Another advantage of choosing the top leadership is that they are all highly educated and all speak good English. Leadership at the synod level could have been an alternative group of informants. The advantage of this would have been that the NLM and NMS work closer with the synods, and so the synod leadership might know the day-to-day work of the missions better. On the other hand, the organisations work in different synods, so the synod leadership would not be able to compare the organisations.

Among the seven informants, three are top leaders of the EECMY central office and two are the top-leaders of the EECMY-DASSC. To secure sample variety further, as all the top leaders are men, two women were included in addition, one from the EECMY central office and one from EECMY-DASSC. In addition to the gender variety, the informants represent different ethnic groups and geographical areas. It has been time-consuming to transcribe seven interviews, and the sample size is maybe somewhat large considering the short time-frame of the project.

The sample carries an element of convenience sampling as the selection of church leaders depended on their availability for interview during the week I spent in Addis Abeba. This turned out to be a minor issue. Even though it was difficult to pre-arrange appointments by e-mail, once I arrived in Addis and approached the leaders in person, they went far to accommodate and help me. Choosing the top leadership rather than the synod level served the convenience and simplified my task, as the top leaders' offices are located in the capital.

#### 4.3. Qualitative interviews:

In qualitative research, a flexible approach is often preferred. Structured interview guides will often refer to a theoretical frame or understanding of the world that may hinder the perspectives of the people that are being studied to surface (Bryman, 2012: 403). As a new

and slightly nervous researcher, I still prepared a comprehensive interview guide. This preparation helped me identify relevant topic areas. The interview guide was also a good help to handle my initial feelings of stress when meeting with the church leaders, who for me represent authority. The interviews lasted between 40 minutes and 2 hours. In the first interview, I followed the interview-guide with some flexibility. During the week of interviewing, as I grew in insight, experience and confidence, I adapted a more flexible approach where I introduced topic areas rather than specific questions. Not all topics were covered in all interviews. This was mainly because some of the informants had limited time available for the interview. The flexible approach opened up for the perspectives of the informants, gave room for follow up questions and allowed the connections made by the informants to appear. I believe this offered opportunities to go deeper into some of the areas and discover perspectives and connections that I had not previously been aware of or considered. On introducing the topic of justice, I referred to how justice and human rights are important in ecumenical mission and diakonia. In hindsight, I wish I had not made this reference. By referring to this understanding, the opportunity to discover whether the leaders of the EECMY understand justice and human rights to be part of the mission of the church was reduced. Apart from this, I believe my approach was mostly open. At the same time, after the initial response of the informants, I was not afraid to challenge them by asking some confrontational follow up questions. Considering the high level of education, reflection and maturity of the informants, I assessed them capable of being challenged, and I wanted to investigate their argumentation.

#### 4.4. The researcher:

Qualitative research is criticized for being subjective and difficult to replicate. The research process is dependent on the social interaction between the researcher and the informants and the choices the researcher make, and the characteristics and personality of the researcher is likely to impact on the responses of the participants (Bryman, 2012: 405).

It can be argued that my history of employment in NLM and NMS with the EECMY in Ethiopia disqualifies me from researching this topic as my history might influence the answers of the respondents. Being conscious of this, on the first contact with the respondents by e-mail, I introduced myself as a master student at the Norwegian School of Theology in Oslo and did

not mention my history as a missionary. However, on meeting with the informants, it became natural and in some cases necessary, to reveal my relation to and history in Ethiopia. Some of the informants were therefore aware of my connections to Ethiopia, to the EECMY and the Norwegian organisations when the interviews took place. I believe this may have been an advantage, as my close relation to the people, the church and the organisations built a foundation of openness, respect and trust that allowed the informants to share critical aspects. In analysing the material, I have identified critical perspectives that strengthens my belief in the honesty of the respondents.

My history of employment in the two mission organisations, working at the grass root level in the EECMY and marriage to an Ethiopian, have given me unique knowledge, insights and experience into the culture and context of Ethiopia and my area of research. Some might argue that my close connections with the research area disables me from approaching the area openly and objectively and therefore disqualify me from researching this topic. On entering the research process, I did not enter a new area but could build on what I already knew about the field and on my previous experiences. With an academic approach, it has been important to keep an open mind and to be willing to critically assess and change my previous perceptions. The level of analysis and reflection in the thesis and the application of the theory on the material test whether I have succeeded in using the previous insights and experience as an advantage and a stepping stone, rather than allowing it to bias me in the research process.

One of my research questions relates to gender equality. Considering the researcher is a western woman, there is a danger that the church leaders (the majority older men) may have filtered their attitudes towards gender issues in their interaction with me. Including the two women among the informants strengthens the validity of the findings related to gender.

#### 4.5. The material:

The purpose of the study and how the material would be used was thoroughly explained at the beginning of each interview, and as I introduced my study, I asked permission to record the interview. All the informants agreed to this. Some of them expressed that it is important that the recording is only for the purpose of my research and that I delete it after use. The

informants are identified as top leaders of the EECMY, hence their anonymity is limited. To limit the possibility of identifying the persons, I have not identified the gender or position of the individual respondents in the presentation of the material. This is because of the sensitivity of some of the issues discussed in the study. On the topic of gender issues, the gender of the informant is included in the presentation.

After my return to Norway, I wrote down the full record of the interviews. Having completed the transcription, I listened through all the interviews once again, and corrected and perfected the written account of the interviews, 117 pages in total.

Because of the emphasis on context, qualitative studies often provide detailed thick descriptions (Bryman, 2012: 401). In this study, the description of the empirical findings (chapter 5) contains many direct quotations of what the informants actually said. This is because many of the quotations offer an insight into the context and the worldview of the informant that is deeper than the direct meaning. The meaning of what is said must be understood in the context and the worldview and understanding that is revealed in the way the informants express themselves. Furthermore, by reading what the informants actually said, it is possible for others to evaluate the credibility of my analysis.

In an unjust world, exploring and addressing justice and situations where justice is compromised is controversial and may sometimes and in some places have unknown consequences or even be risky or dangerous. This may have impacted on the extent to which the respondents felt free to speak openly, and is a threat to the validity of the material. If the respondents did not feel free to share their understanding and experiences, the material does not give a valid account of their understanding and experience. In preparing the presentation of the data, potential consequences of sharing the findings have been considered and kept in mind in the process of analysis. Names of individuals or particular sensitive issues are not included. Despite this challenge, by paraphrasing some of the sensitive expressions, I have tried to balance the different considerations and I think the presentation gives a good reflection of the collected material.

## 5. Empirical findings:

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This chapter presents the empirical findings from the interviews undertaken with the leaders of the EECMY. The first part of the chapter describes the leaders' understanding of partnership, experiences of partnership with the Norwegian organisations included in the study, and factors related to the partnership relations, as a frame for the ministry of the EECMY and the three Norwegian organisations. The second part of the chapter describes how the leaders of the EECMY understand holistic ministry and the main issues identified in relation to the implementation of holistic ministry, with special attention on justice and gender equality.

### 5.1. Partnership:

The informants agree that partnership means working together in a mutual relationship towards a common goal. Several of the informants express that partnership is built on shared values and involves sharing of resources, which could be money or knowledge and expertise.

#### 5.1.1. Experiences of partnership:

In reflecting on how the partnership relations with the three organisations are functioning, the leaders of the EECMY feel that there are challenges in relation to mutuality. One informant explains that the partners easily fall into the old ways of thinking about mission, seeing Mekane Yesus as a mission field rather than a partner in the Mission of God.

Another informant explains the challenges of mutuality in the issue of money. This person criticises the EECMY for always asking the partners for money, forcing the partners into the role of a donor rather than a mutual collaborator, and suggests that when the partner is not able to respond to the requests it strains the relationship.

There is agreement that accurate financial reporting is necessary and that when the donor demands high standards of reporting it is a good thing that serves to protect the implementer from accusation of corruption. At the same time, it is expressed that tight time-limits, frequent change of standards and differences in standards and report formats from

project to project and donor to donor can be challenging and sometimes unpractical and difficult to manage.

The informants see challenges concerning common objective as a defining feature of partnership, as it is often felt that the common goal is lacking. One person describes the distance between the values and objective of the EECMY and the values and objective of the partners like this:

So on the part of Mekane Yesus it (mutuality) is realised, but on part of missions, it is still, there is a tension between values and objectives and strategies that the partner organisations owns, and also between the values and partnership objective that Mekane Yesus has.

To solve this, the agreements with partners may often be very technical, limited to specific projects serving a specific purpose. One informant explains: “When we establish a partnership, we define the goal of our work, in the partnerships of the EECMY, what we do with our partners, we do common projects, and what defines the goal is the goal the project fulfils.” Another informant explains that the EECMY has to assess how the contributions of the partners can support the church: “we (the EECMY) use both our eyes. With the right we look inside, deeply into our potentials, with our left eye, we look into what partners can do, how they might participate in this. So, we do not want to press the partners, but we invite them.” According to one of the informants, there is no forum for discussing common goal. One person explains the difficulty in identification of a common vision in declining interest for witnessing to the gospel in Europe. One of the other informants describes how the different understandings of mission impact on the process of communication with the partners and the mutuality in the partnership like this:

They listen, but that doesn't mean they answer. In terms of respect, yes, yes, as I said, Mekane Yesus is insistent on its position and its identity and so there is a respect there, but at the same time also there is, there are times when some partners say Mekane Yesus is doing some crazy thing.

Another informant thinks the challenges of communication may be based in the organisations themselves not being free to make decisions, as back-donors, boards and committees at other levels in the organisation direct them.

#### 5.1.2. EECMY partnering in World Mission:

All the church leaders interviewed have been to Europe. They are worried and saddened about observations they interpret to be severe symptoms of secularism, like church acceptance of gay marriages, low attendance in church services, reduced interest in mission

and difficulties in recruiting missionaries. From a recent trip to Norway, one person shares observations of how people are too busy to prioritize Christian fellowship:

When they listen to the Word, people like to listen, but people do not want to have more time, especially on experience sharing and preaching, if we can take time, more time talking and sharing, eating, drinking, talking, talking about Jesus, about Ethiopia and about the mission. But people were rejecting to listen to the Word of God, it is very very sad. It is not only in Norway, it is all over Europe.

When challenged about how the EECMY can engage to help in this situation the church leaders say they have taken responsibility. They explain that when the EECMY cut the relationship with ELCA and the Church of Sweden it was a way of taking responsibility in world mission, to help these churches realise that gay marriages are not in accordance with the Bible. One of the informants describes the sadness and shock when the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America and the Church of Sweden accepted gay marriages:

The church (the EECMY) took this big decision at the general assembly. And when our delegates to the general assembly heard about this, what does it mean? Homosexual? And when this term was explained, the people in our church, they were so sad and down. Our missionaries who taught us the gospel and who taught us about marriage, do they support this? And then in fact it was decided in the executive board and in the council that we give time to other churches and partners to revisit their decision, and they did not do it. And finally, at the general assembly just we decided to stop our partnership. And many of the leaders in our church they were weeping, when they think about former missionaries, they weep. They still weep and we pray for them.

Other churches and organisations, both from Africa and western countries, have been congratulating EECMY with the decision and express appreciation of the clear stand of the EECMY in this question. The informant continues by explaining that the EECMY decision is a consequence of taking the Word of God seriously. It does not mean that a Christian lives a perfect life, but even as sinners, the church still has to teach what is right and wrong:

So our contribution is, just in fact when we say this is against the Bible, it does not mean that we are holy people and we do not make any sin, and those people, those partners in America and in Sweden are sinners and we are sinless. It does not mean that. We are sinful, we know that, but we try to live to the word of God. To live, in fact, we learnt the Bible from the missionaries, and this is the Word of God, and we try to obey to the word of God. And we are not saying we are better than them. But we pray for them, and whenever we meet with other churches we encourage them to live within the word of God.

The EECMY has missionaries serving abroad in Mali and Afghanistan. The Church leaders see the need for a spiritual awakening in Europe and wish to contribute, but recognise the challenge of communicating the gospel in the European context of the 21st century:

Mekane Yesus must be able to be listened to as a missionary church in Europe. In order to be listened to, you have to be able to communicate everywhere. I am not talking about English, I am talking about context. So we need some kind of capacity building in that respect. But we have a universal calling, and out of the world, Norway cannot be missed out.

The informants point to prayer for each other and together as an important service in Gods Mission. Another way of contributing mentioned by several church leaders is reception of



guests from other countries. When teams of youth, lay people or church employees visit, share experiences and fellowship, and participate in the congregational life, it may affect their lives and values. One informant says that when people suggest it is time to stop sending missionaries to Ethiopia, the response is rather that it is time to come and experience Ethiopia, to share, to learn and to take the values and experiences back to Europe.

#### 5.1.3. Church self-reliance:

As the will from western partners to support spiritual ministry and the cost of running the church structure has declined, the financial independence of the church has increased. The church leaders see a benefit of increased self-reliance in freedom to define its own identity:

The church has to pursue its theological understanding, without being pushed by any entry from any direction. So to do that the Mekane Yesus has to be, you know, independent financially. Otherwise, the financial pressure comes with some other things, some other talks, which we don't believe in. So if you are financially self-supportive, then you can talk to friends confidently. "Do you accept this?" "Yes, I do" or "No, I do not". Otherwise, the finances will push you in a direction which you do not actually accept.

The church has now developed a "policy of church economy development" to increase the self-reliance. This has been a difficult process. One informant suggests that the difficulties faced are partly because the missionaries did not teach the church members to tithe. The congregations were taught about offerings in the church services, but as the work was funded from abroad, the church offerings were only small symbolic amounts. Now the church is working hard to teach all the members to tithe of their income to the church. The leaders are proud and excited about this strategy.

One informant expands on the understanding of the church being financially independent explaining that independence does not mean you don't receive gifts and support:

That does not mean that we do not receive support from our sister churches, brothers and sisters, but we do not depend. If they give us some we bless them, and we can use the money for something different. If they don't give us, it is ok. We will not blame them in our prayers.

In the discussion on self-reliance, the church leaders separate the work of DASSC, which is highly dependent on funds from abroad, from the other church work. One informant says that the church, apart from the development projects, is already independent: "except the development projects that requires much input; that is why we are forced to prepare projects and request support from global funding initiatives, I think the church functions on its own".

#### 5.1.4. The role of expatriates:

The informants express mixed feelings about the role of expatriate staff and see it as a controversial issue. The historical contribution of missionaries is acknowledged and much appreciated. The church leaders emphasise that today the situation is very different as there are qualified local staff and it is therefore difficult to defend the cost of having expatriates. In addition, several of the informants mention that a challenge with missionaries today could be that they do not always share the values of the church. This is seen as a symptom of the secularism in Europe, with reference to how missions say they experience difficulties in both recruiting and raising funds to send missionaries.

At the same time, the church leaders express that missionaries maintain the relationship with the international partners. One informant expresses this value of expatriates:

There is a tradition of having expatriates in our organisation, our church, and this tradition of working together, you know, it created a kind of a unity and closeness to one another, I think that has an advantage and also our partners feel at home when they have someone here working with us.

In responding to the question of the role of missionaries in the EECMY today, one informant points to how working together is part of God's mission, commissioned by Jesus Christ, and that the role of missionaries is mission.

Areas mentioned by the church leaders where foreign missionaries can contribute are:

- Theologians are wanted to teach theology, as westerners usually have the skill of teaching students to be critical, to analyse and reflect, and there may be a lack in the church of qualified people who can teach at MA and PHD level.
- Theologians are wanted to help maintain the Lutheran doctrine of the church, as with the fast growth of the church, there is a danger of the church losing its doctrine due to lack of theological teaching.
- In some cases, professionals can support the development work with specific technical skills.
- Western women are important as role models.
- Foreign missionaries have awareness about culture sensitivity that Ethiopians may lack. This may be particularly important when working towards minority ethnic groups or in Muslim areas.
- In areas with a history of ethnical conflicts, foreigners may have the advantage of being seen as a guest, not a representative of the suppressing power.

## 5.2. Holistic ministry:

### 5.2.1. The meaning of holistic ministry:

The leaders of the EECMY understand the church vision of holistic ministry differently. All the informants emphasise that the focus of the development work is not the church people only, but everybody, irrespective of faith and denomination.

Four different ways of understanding holistic ministry can be identified from the informants' explanations of holistic ministry:

#### A. Holistic ministry as serving many aspects of a person's life.

This understanding points to how a person has many needs and life has many dimensions.

This quote points to how spiritual salvation may not respond to people's experienced needs and sufferings:

Serving the whole person, it means food, clothing, making houses and bridge and lands, developing lands and developing people, and then also preaching the gospel. To those who get something to eat, not to the poor who do not have anything to eat, just with empty hands, then preaching the gospel is not helping.

Another informant divides human life into the three dimensions, physical, mental and spiritual:

Its meaning is proactive holistic ministry, the integration of human needs, body, soul and spirit. In our holistic programme for the ministry, we consider human beings as three entities, the physical being, spiritual being and also psychological being, soul, body and spirit, so we respond to all three entities of human being through evangelising, diaconal work and also educational work.

This informant identifies human rights and issues of justice as dimensions of holistic ministry:

It serves all aspects of human life. That would mean spiritual, pastoral care and evangelism, and reaching out to human spiritual needs in one way. On the other reaching out to human physical, social needs, which are big. It is big this time when we say holistic. It has to do with human rights, it has to do with equal opportunity, it has to do with fair distribution of resources, it has to do with all kinds of church ministry.

#### B. Holistic ministry as development work that strengthens the Christian witness.

The second understanding of holistic ministry points to how the trustworthiness of the Christian witness is strengthened when it is accompanied by good deeds. One informant explains it like this:

Even if you are not preaching you are coming from the church and you are not hiding your identity and if you are helping the people and teach to plough their land properly, preserve the environment and working hard and improving their moneys and their lives. And if you are doing good things and they know that you are relating to the church, that is a sort of Christian witness.

Several informants told stories of how development activities have created a goodwill towards the church in Muslim areas.

- C. Holistic ministry as service to transform people's life and the world by the power of the gospel.

This understanding of holistic ministry points to the gospel as an empowering and transforming force in development. One informant defines development as "the lifting up of the life standard of people, community, through empowering the individuals", and explains how the gospel message changes people's lives:

That is what the gospel does, when we preach the gospel to support the awareness of who they are and understand themselves, as people created by God. There is equality between genders and the humanity, and also understand that they can change things, that they are created with that full potential, so when we do the preaching we support what we do in action.

Similarly, another informant defines development as a change in people's understanding of themselves and of life, and explains how the role of the church is to bring light to the people who are living in darkness through the gospel in words and in action, to change people's life.

- D. Holistic ministry as sharing of resources.

This fourth understanding of holistic ministry is rooted in the Ethiopian context of lack of resources for evangelism and the ministry of pastors. One informant says that an example of holistic ministry is when development work supports the evangelism work by facilitating the use of the cars of the development projects for the pastors and evangelists to visit and preach in the rural areas.

#### 5.2.2. The background of holistic ministry:

Some of the respondents understand holistic ministry to originate from the missions. One informant explains how missionaries started holistic ministry as when they first came to Ethiopia they did not bring only the Bible, but also started clinics, hospitals and schools, and there was morning worship at the clinics and biblical teaching in the schools. Another informant refers to a former missionary who while she worked as a nurse also did evangelism work.

One leader refers to the letter of 1972 as the background for the vision of holistic ministry:

The context in which that vision was born was that, the earlier missionaries, who came to establish church back many years, were more gearing towards conversion and saving of souls, development for them was seen as the means to the end, the end is evangelism. And then, after the end of the war, the Italian war, there came

missionaries of different vision, created by the social gospel movement, and they gave very low view for saving the souls and concentrated only on political. Then the EECMY built its own image and they protested in the reason of disconnecting. She took value for both, she did not disregard both, but she, the church said, ministry is not only saving the souls, it is not only supporting the, doing diaconal work, it has to address the holistic need of humanity, that's how this holistic ministry vision was developed. So do that the two extreme groups who have become our missionaries where behind it, if only we do that, connect.

One of the informants, who refers to evangelism and development work as different activities, understands the letter of 1972 to be a request for partners to increase the financial support to evangelism work. This person explains that the situation is even worse today and is frustrated that the partners are not challenged:

Even NMS itself. A lot of money is spent on development, but this is now how it is, nobody is challenging this time. On top of that, the development work itself is just, it is with the government this time. And it is challenging. Because in the lowlands, the churches are not there, it must be 50-50, if possible, but there is a challenge today. Nobody speaks.

### 5.2.3. The ministry of the Norwegian organisations:

The Church leaders feel that none of the Norwegian organisations shares the vision of the church fully.

They are disappointed with NLM being a registered NGO of its own that is running some projects directly with the Ethiopian Ministry of Health without the involvement of the church, and struggle to understand why a mission organisation chooses to implement a project in collaboration with the government rather than the EECMY. "Because the church has already an useful development wing, what is the difference? What is the advantage of the government? It would have served the wing, capacitated this wing, and also, served our God, but this did not happen."

From this quote, it appears that this person seems to think that to serve Gods mission, the project must be implemented through the church. Several other informants point to poor communication in the process and feel that by not involving EECMY in this project NLM has violated the partnership. Furthermore, the church leaders refer to how NLM decided to refocus its strategy in Ethiopia towards the eastern parts of the country without prior consultation with the church, as another example of disrespect for EECMY as a partner. Some of the informants try to excuse NLM by suggesting that the reason why NLM did not involve the church in the health projects could be that the Ministry of Health might not wish to involve the church, or it could be a requirement from the back-donor.

During my meetings with the church leaders, it was evident that the disappointment with NLM was very painful. When asked why the relationship with NCA is not equally painful, as NCA is also a registered NGO that runs projects with many other collaborates, several explanations are offered. Firstly, it is explained by NLM's long and good history in Ethiopia. As NLM is one of the organisations that contributed significantly to establish the church many years ago, it is considered one of the closest partners. Secondly, the informants feel that NLM is a mission that shares the values of the church, whereas NCA is doing only development work. Thirdly, it is explained in poor communication from the side of NLM.

The church leaders see NMS as a small mission with limited resources that works mainly towards minority ethnic groups in the western parts of Ethiopia. The contribution of NMS to the Gumuz people is recognised. One informant says that the work of NMS and the running of the projects "is not fully managed by the church". The church leaders' feelings of ownership of the work among the Gumuz people appear to be weak. The work among the Gumuz is referred to as the work of NMS. When challenged about whether the work of NMS is the work of the church the response reflects ambiguity:

When we say it is NMS work, it is not NMS work it is church work, because NMS is working because it is requested by the Church. So it is church work really, and I appreciate it very much. That they willingly do things down with the Gumuz people. And I think most people forget about them. The Gumuz people they are..., the area is very remote and basic, undeveloped. But since the time of the start, we are really coming now, and it is the work of the Church and NMS supports it. The initiation as far as I know came from the Church, from Gudina Tumsa.

The contribution of NMS in focusing environmental programmes targeting climate change is acknowledged. Furthermore, the female informants appreciate NMS working on gender issues and promoting women leadership. One person expresses doubt about NMS's commitment to evangelism: "NMS they..., we are not quite sure about their spiritual situation right now, but they are doing very good work within DASSC in diaconal ministry".

On the contribution of NCA, the church leaders clearly state that NCA does not share the church's vision of holistic ministry. They call NCA a professional development organisation and an international organisation, something they understand to be different from mission. One informant suggests one characteristic of an international organisation is distance to the grass root level:

The Norwegian Church Aid is an international organisation, I think. It works as an international organisation. When it comes to NMS, sometimes I do not feel it is an international organisation because it goes directly to the community and works there.

The informants are critical of NCA not supporting evangelism and collaborating with secular organisations. One informant questions the eligibility of NCA to carry the name of church:

I wish it should have strong partnership with the church, as it is Norwegian **Church** Aid, and it is not only a humanitarian organisation, if it change name it can change. The church should pay attention with churches. I prefer that.

One informant makes excuses for NCA only supporting development work explaining that it is due to the source of funding:

I think that is not to say that the NCA does not like the evangelism work, but the source of money, sometimes they get money from government, which you cannot do any preaching, you cannot do evangelism work with the money from the government.

Another suggested explanation for NCA's lack of involvement in church work is the Ethiopian law preventing development organisations to engage in evangelism activities. Even if the church leaders do not consider NCA a close partner, they recognise the work of NCA as a good service to the people of Ethiopia. The organisation is valued for initiating meetings with other organisations in Ethiopia to target issues of common concern like harmful traditional practices, gender based violence and peace, and the fellowship with NCA through membership in ACT is also much appreciated. Furthermore, the informants from DASSC appreciate NCA for consulting DASSC in processes of change and having very good systems of communication.

Despite the different limitations identified in the ministry of the three organisations, all the informants agree that all the organisations participate in the holistic ministry of the EECMY. Summarising the contributions of the organisations, this informant acknowledges that the limitations the EECMY experience in the organisations contribution is because of different understanding, not lack of will to help: "They (the 3 organisations) are helping whatever they could, within their own understanding".

#### 5.2.4. The separation between the EECMY and the EECMY-DASSC:

DASSC is now a registered NGO, a legal entity that operates separately from the EECMY. The informants agree that the Ethiopian government imposed this. One informant explains how it was controversial in the church:

The church was obliged to separate DASSC to do development. It was a difficult time for the church. How many times the council was discussing this issue at the agenda. How many times? It was the biggest struggle; I was part of the process. So the time went, and the church argued, and then at the general assembly level, to have DASSC as a legal body that is recognised by the government and let it work according to the legal framework of the government.

When asked about the purpose of the separation, one informant responds that it was not for the purpose of the church:

No. It was no purpose...the separation was...I think it was the strategy of the government because the government knows all the money goes into accounts from the banks, and all this money should be controlled by the government. This is my short answer.

Another informant explains that the work of DASSC has to be in line with government strategies and defends the government's monitoring and control of the development work:

In a way I understand what the government is doing. The development work is required to go with the policy of the country. We contribute to the policy of the government. We are not separately developing the country in our own way. We are under the government policy. We have to be related to that. And then the government thinks that this input, this resource coming through this organisation, is making money to fulfil to the policy of developing the country, the nation. So I want to see this money, I want to give licence to this body which is handling this money and I want to look into the way they are handling, the way they are using, and I want to support their work. That is what the government is saying.

This person expresses agreement in separating evangelism and development work as it has different purposes and should not be mixed up.

One of the informants suggests that one advantage of the separation is increased freedom for the church, as before the government used the development work as a reason to interfere with and control the whole church, whereas now the government can only inspect what DASSC is doing while the church is free.

Some of the informants think that the separation between the development and the gospel ministry challenges the integrity of the church and the implementation of holistic ministry.

One informant explains that after the legal registration of DASSC, holistic ministry is difficult because of the separation of development work from evangelism work, and because the development work now refers to governmental policies rather than the vision and mission of the church. This person expresses that integrating gospel and development work is a benefit and not a problem: "it is the culture of a church to preach to the community, there is no obligation, anybody can hear and accept or reject, it is easy, people are free".

Even if the church leaders understand the decision to make DASSC a separate legal entity to be enforced by governmental regulations, several informants say that the separation was also in line with signals from back donors. It is however felt that the influence of secular back donors on the implementation of the projects is limited. One of the informants explain that whether a project is funded by a secular or a religious body makes little difference as the work is directed by the governmental policies in addition to the values of the church:



I do not see any difference as far as development is concerned. We sign agreement; we have our own strategy and policies. Before we sign agreement, we actually do talk to one another to learn from one another and also learn about one another, this is more. And then, here we have our own legal framework at the department level and they have also legal framework from their own government. So we respect both, the local legal framework and also the requirements of the partner. Maybe, if present or not present, it does not matter, because we do not go into the spiritual ministry as far as DASSC is concerned. We serve the community, with development and social work. There are principles; there are different principles, so we follow all the standards of the different policies. Whenever they are fully against the principle of the church, against a core value of our church and also the legal framework of our country, we don't accept this kind of dimension.

One of the informants expresses that the impact of Norad is a good impact of improved financial control and reporting that prevents mismanagement. This person suggests that Norad should be challenged to also support evangelism.

Despite the challenges caused by the separation between the church and DASSC, the informants say that the idea of holistic ministry is still alive, as it is the vision of the church (both EECMY and EECMY- DASSC). To maintain the identity of holistic ministry the church has established an office for diakonia organised under the Department of Mission and Theology, to strengthen the diaconal work of the congregations. It is suggested that the way to overcome the separation and take care of the church vision and integrity is to connect the work at the community level. One of the DASSC employees says that the gospel can be expressed even without the use of words:

We cannot preach gathering people as a development person now, it will not be accepted, we cannot say that, but we can say it indirectly. Some projects they even plant congregations indirectly, without even saying anything about the gospel in talk.

The informants give many examples of actions taken to strengthen the holistic ministry of the EECMY:

- As part of the recruitment of DASSC development professionals, the vision of holistic ministry is one of the topics discussed in interviews.
- When DASSC holds different kinds of training and workshops at the grass root level, to improve their understanding of what DASSC is doing, pastors and evangelists are invited to attend.
- DASSC is working to strengthen the anti-corruption policy.
- DAASC is working to influence all staff to serve the people in faithfulness as good examples in the community and for governmental employees.
- Employees who have a different religious background and are not members of the EECMY must still honour and respect the values of the church.

Several informants say that in the end, implementation of holistic ministry depends on the personal commitment of the individual.

#### 5.2.5. EECMY's relation to the Ethiopian authorities:

The church relation to the Ethiopian authorities appears to be a controversial question. Some informants emphasise that the church and especially DASSC is well recognised and has a good reputation with the government. One informant expresses appreciation about how representatives from different religious groups, including the EECMY, were invited by the Ethiopian government to represent the Ethiopian people in talks with Egypt regarding the building of the Renaissance Dam in the Blue Nile. The same person criticises the governmental regulations that strictly limit how much development projects can use for administrative costs, and claims this is unmanageable. At the same time, this informant recognises that when the issue was raised with the government, even though it has not been changed, the government was listening and created a task force to look into the matter. Several informants see the government's restriction on organisations that receive more than 10% funding from abroad to work on human rights issues as a challenge. At the same time, some recognise this regulation as a way of protecting Ethiopia from influence from abroad. One person suggests that the limitations on advocacy for human rights were created to target some specific organisations, that the implementation is not strict, and that by supply of the legal framework for the development work, the government facilitates and is a partner to the development work. Another informant is critical and says that the relationship between the church and the government is only good because the church accepts the governmental policies and does not speak out about injustice.

The informants explain that formally there is no restriction on the church addressing human rights issues. The restriction is only on DASSC, as it is a registered development organisation, which receives more than 10% of its income from abroad. Several informants express that the church can challenge the government, but is not doing so. One informant says that the government will listen to the church, but if the church does not speak, "they have nothing to listen to". Another informant says that as a church, the EECMY can address issues of justice and human rights, but even though the government may listen to the church, it will not change.

Some of the informants express a feeling that the room to challenge may have limitations. One informant refers to Gudina Tumsa in reflection on why the church is not addressing injustice in a louder manner:

There are several intruding factors that prohibit the church from doing whatever it wants to do, but the church has tried to speak out in a softer way. You can ask me, are there any as strong in this church this time as they were in the time of Kes Gudina? And I will say no. That sacrificial engagement is not there.

The reference to Gudina Tumsa can be interpreted in the direction that challenging the government may have serious consequences. Another informant expresses that the church has an obligation to address injustice and feels the church is not doing enough: "The place of the church is to stand with the voiceless people, but it is quiet. Even to the government, this is not how church should be." This informant explains that people are afraid of being arrested or killed. Furthermore, this person suggests that suppression takes place at all levels, including people's homes and the church, but that people are silent:

The people this time they do not want to speak anything. It is a big problem. Just not against the church, not against the politics, even people are dying and we cannot speak even in our home, and in the worreda (municipality), and nobody say anything, it is quiet.

One informant shares a personal experience of how writing an article addressing the relation between poverty and political system "put me on fire for some time". What this involved is not further explained.

Several informants point to action, to all kinds of church and development activities as a way of addressing injustice. One informant explains how the church is fighting for justice by working to empower the suppressed and relieve all kinds of sufferings:

Well, the way we address and express ourselves is not only by verbal speaking. By doing the actual work, for example that is what we do through our development and social work, whether it is working for food security and also giving priority for the victims, of all sort of suppression. Especially concentrating on the left behind. Not completely by the concentration of the government. And also fighting for the victims through standing by their side, that is the strong side. Of course, the verbal speaking and being vocal needs a forum, and also, of course we are, since we are within the law of the land there are limitations also there, that is what we feel.

In summary one of the church leaders describes the EECMY's struggle for justice as a careful balancing act: "The keeping with the balance of our relationship with the state and also the truth of the gospel we promote, that is what we try to communicate in our preaching and in our activities."

#### 5.2.6. The Norwegian organisations addressing injustice:

In general, the informants see little difference between the Norwegian organisations engagement in addressing injustice, although some of the informants say that NCA is more

involved in advocacy. One informant refers to the diplomatic crisis between Norway and Ethiopia in 2007 (for more on this crisis, see Sørli, 2009), and explains how the room to address human rights issues depends on trust. According to this informant, because of the history of the breakdown of trust between Ethiopia and Norway, even though the Norwegian Embassy is now re-opened and the relation between the two nations may be improved, the Norwegian organisations have to be very careful. Many development projects receive funding from Norwegian authorities, and this informant thinks there is a possibility that the Ethiopian authorities may look for a hidden political agenda behind the projects.

One informant says that church related organisations must stand up for global churches, but it may have a cost, which is unknown. Another church leader says that the international organisations are not doing anything different from what the church is doing, but address injustice through activities to empower the people: “They do the same thing; they support the church in the area of the actual work. The activity. Being vocal through action”. When asked if the international organisations and church fellowship should have done things differently, the answer reflects that this informant values action more than words: “well, there could be, but what is actually more needed is supporting the people”.

#### 5.2.7. Gender equality:

Legally and formally, there is full gender equality in the EECMY. Ordination of women is the official policy of the church and is according to the informants not up for discussion. None of the church leaders expresses any theological arguments against gender equality, and all deny that the question of female pastors and female leadership is theologically controversial in the EECMY today. One female informant explains that gender equality has its foundation in the Bible, and therefore is part of the identity of the EECMY:

According to the Bible God created man and woman. It is all in there. If we believe that, there is no need to be pushed (by international organisations promoting gender equality). It is all in our Bible, in our hands. It is our constitution.

One of the male EECMY leaders claims the church started the fight for women’s rights in Ethiopia. With reference to the priesthood of all believers, another of the male informants explains how gender equality is part of the church doctrine: “Mekane Yesus is very much committed to leadership of the ministry of the priesthood of all believers, on which women are. But what you can ask me is: is Mekane Yesus doing it affirmatively?”

The female informants express doubts about the commitment to gender equality, as it is not implemented in practice:

You know people are different. Of course, it is on paper, in the office, the privilege is there, it is written on the paper and it is by law. When it comes to the individual leaders, it is very difficult to say that it is in their heart. Sometimes there are few who oppose, who say yes, it is good, but when it comes to the implementation, to make it real, that is the biggest, the hard part, to make it real.

One of the female informants thinks that some of the church leaders invite women to attend meetings as a gender equality alibi, but if a woman raises her voice and expresses her opinion it is not welcomed and this woman will not be re-invited to meetings. She will be seen as outspoken and opinionated, characteristics that are interpreted to be negative in a woman. The other woman has experienced that the extent to which women will be included in processes of decision-making depends on who holds the leadership position in the organisation. One female informant says that she has stopped going to meetings as she feels people prefer her to be absent. The other of the female informants explains that when she attends meetings, if she is not invited to speak, she raises her voice at the end of the discussion and gives her opinion.

Some of the informants point to good progress of implementation of gender equality locally. One male informant describes improvements in gender equality in decision making bodies at the lower levels:

On the congregation level, there was no women elders, only men, for many years. Now it is changed. Even out of 7, sometimes 3 or 4 women will be elected. That is a big change. On the parish level there is a committee. In that committee also, formerly it was only men, but now women are included, 3 or 4.

The slow implementation of gender equality in official leadership positions in the church is by one of the male informants explained by the cultural background and the tradition in the Orthodox Church:

We accept and understand the equality of women. Our culture, our culture does not accept this. And women and men are not equal they say. And the big church in the country is the Orthodox Church. In the Orthodox Church women are not allowed to come up to the pulpit and preach, or in many ways they are not equal with men. And they support the tradition of the country. And it is difficult really.

One female informant explains that women have been suppressed from they were young, and therefore lack the experience of speaking in public:

The very big problem I am seeing, women are not educated in the same way. To come to that leadership. In the start our culture was telling women to keep silent, even if they know, they are silent. This is yesterday, they have that idea in their mind. They don't speak up. So the problem these days is the skills are lacking.(...) Women are not shaped in that way, so there is a kind of imbalance in shaping women.

The same informant expresses hope of the EECMY having a female general secretary or president in the future, as the expectations the girls are raised with is changing:

I think. Really. I don't know when, but I am quite sure this will happen. Because, everybody in their house, in the family, they are shaping their girls in the way that they speak out. Therefore, there is good will, and I really...it takes time, I know, and we have so brilliant women, who can come to that position. But it takes time. The next generation has to bring it.

At the time of the interviews, 68 women were ordained pastors in the EECMY. Most of them are from the western parts of the country, but some women from the southern parts of the country were ordained last year. The differences in the geographical distribution is by some informants partly explained by differences in gender policies among the historic partners of the western (SEM, GHM and NMS) and southern (NLM) parts of the country. On the other hand, it is pointed out, NLM is a lay-men's movement that is not that much in favour of ordination anyway, so because of the impact from NLM, proportionally there are fewer ordained pastors in the south, irrespective of gender. One male informant describes the policy and practice of NLM as conflicting, as the policy excludes women from leadership positions while in the mission field female missionaries are employed to preach and teach. The low value of ordination in the organisation adds to the contradiction:

NLM you see, they say women are not allowed to stand on the pulpit. Maybe that works in Oslo, or Norway. Maybe. For missionaries who came from NLM, whatever, they are standing on the pulpit, they are preaching and teaching, (mentions several previous female NLM missionaries by name). They are so many, they use the pulpit of men, but NLM say the pastors cannot be women. In fact, they say ordination it is only for order, but what they do is teaching, preaching, counselling, they do it all! But by the name NLM does not allow women either to preach or to teach. But they send missionaries to us. What to do? To preach!

This church leader suggests that the female NLM missionaries have promoted gender equality in the church, by showing that women are capable of preaching, teaching and leading. One of the female informants says that even if the cost of western missionaries is high, the sending of missionaries should continue as they have an important service as female role models for Ethiopian women.

### 5.3. Summary:

The leaders of the EECMY identify shared values and a common goal as important aspects of partnership. Even though they feel the partnerships with Norwegian organisations are limited by the lack of a shared vision, they recognise and value their contributions. The EECMY leaders understand the church vision of holistic ministry differently. They identify the

gospel as an empowering and transformational force in development. Issues of justice and advocacy for human rights are controversial in Ethiopia today, and the church leaders point to community development as the most important way of addressing injustice and suppression. The suppression of women in the EECMY is based on cultural traditions, not theology. Western female missionaries may have contributed to a theological understanding of women as equal servants in the Mission of God.

## 6. Discussion:

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In this chapter I will discuss the empirical findings in light of the background and the theoretical framework with the aim of answering the research questions and thereby the question of the study.

### 6.1. How do the leaders of the EECMY understand holistic ministry?

Four different ways of understanding holistic ministry have been identified in the interviews with the leaders of the EECMY. In the following, I will discuss how these different understandings relate to the theology of Gudina Tumsa and the LWF understanding of diakonia.

Understanding A, explains the meaning of holistic ministry by pointing to how human needs can be divided in physical, psychological and spiritual. To respond to the different needs of a person and different dimensions of life, the church offers many different kinds of services. In this understanding, proclamation responds to spiritual needs, and diakonia responds to physical needs, two different wings in the ministry of the church. Even though this understanding puts diakonia firmly within church ministry, it may sound like a division of human needs. This division is what Gudina Tumsa and the letter of 1972 tried to overcome. In Gudina Tumsa's understanding, proclamation of the gospel addresses people's understanding of the world and the purpose of life, and the purpose of a person's life and of the church is to witness to the gospel of justice and love. In his holistic worldview, this means that fighting all kinds of suffering and suppression is an integrated part of proclamation of the gospel, and proclamation of the gospel is an integrated and crucial part of the development process. When several of the leaders of the EECMY refer to understanding A, it suggests that the position of the theology of Gudina Tumsa is weak among the church leaders. This may reflect the strength of the impact of the western worldview on the informants through education, interaction with western partners and the process of globalisation.



LWF has contributed to the understanding of holistic mission by placing proclamation and diakonia firmly within what it means to be church. At the same time, the LWF documents emphasise that it is important to distinguish between proclamation and diakonia. According to the LWF, integrating proclamation and diakonia may lead to rejection of diaconal practice, particularly in Muslim communities, and to religious manipulation of people in vulnerable situations.

Understanding B resembles the understanding that has been so heavily criticized historically, when Christian missions have been accused of using charity work and development activities as a door opener for the gospel, and missionaries have been accused of hidden agendas, and for using the power of money to attract vulnerable people towards conversion to Christianity. At the same time, understanding B points to the value of development activities, not only in promotion of the gospel, but also as a way of reducing conflict and tensions between religious groups. Haynes mentions how faith based organisations working together in development can be a source of fellowship and partnership. In a Muslim community where faith is so visible and integrated in the way of life, keeping silent about your religious identity may appear more suspicious and raise greater questions about your agenda, than a holistic understanding that integrates the gospel in words and the gospel in action.

When it comes to the risk of manipulation of vulnerable, this must always be taken seriously. This is why it is so important to be critical about power relations. Like the message of the gospel, diaconal action aims to lift up and empower a person's freedom. When church ministry suppresses rather than empowers it is not diakonia and not the gospel of justice and love.

Understanding C gives the best reflection of the theology of Gudina Tumsa. The gospel message is seen as source that empowers, liberates and changes people and their lives, and preaching the gospel is therefore seen as an integrated part of development activities. In a holistic worldview, the development process is rooted in how people understand themselves and life, as the way they understand themselves and their life gives direction for the choices people make. LWF reflects how the gospel is a source of transformation, reconciliation and empowerment. While the LWF documents stress that it is important to distinguish between proclamation and diakonia, understanding C points to how hearing the gospel will help

people understand who they are and wants to make use of this potential in the important process of change.

Understanding D suggests that holistic ministry means sharing of material resources. The example mentioned by the informant is that pastors should be able to use cars that have been bought by development projects. In holistic ministry where proclamation and diakonia serve the same purpose of witnessing to the gospel message of love and justice as a sign and foretaste of change, sharing a car should not be a problem. There may be a problem if it is not agreed, and therefore hidden in the financial report. This is fraud. As secular donors like Norad do not want to support proclamation of the gospel as an integrated part of development, it is not possible to use money budgeted for development projects for evangelism. The letter of 1972 tried to address this by challenging donors to be more flexible and open up for the church to use the funds where they identified the greatest needs. If this was agreed and the church managed the finances transparently according to agreed standards of financial reporting, it would not be financial mismanagement. It would rather reduce the temptation of fraud. When the challenge of imbalance between funding for proclamation and funding for development continued it might be because of the different worldviews, as the western donors did not accept Gudina Tumsa's understanding of holistic ministry and the role of the gospel in development. The suggestion to use development resources for evangelism purpose does not suggest financial mismanagement when built on a holistic understanding of church ministry. When all the informants stress the importance of transparent financial management and appreciate the stricter systems of reporting, it confirms this interpretation of the suggestion.

## 6.2. How do the leaders of the EECMY understand the role of NLM, NMS and NCA in holistic ministry?

The leaders of the EECMY have identified some challenges in the partnerships with the Norwegian organisations and limitations in their contributions to the holistic ministry of their church. As described in chapter 2.3, the Norwegian organisations understand their diaconal ministry differently. I will now discuss the criticism of these three organisations in light of

the context, the organisations' understanding of their mission and of diakonia and the theoretical framework, including the theology of Gudina Tumsa.

#### 6.2.1. The role of NLM in holistic ministry:

The church leaders criticize NLM for the decision to implement some health projects directly with the department of health. They find this decision very difficult to understand. Firstly because they interpret it as lack of commitment to the partnership with the EECMY. The leaders of the EECMY value relationship and fellowship highly. This is evident when the informants say that despite the high cost of missionaries, they are important as they serve the relationship between the EECMY and the mission organisations. Furthermore it is evident in the pain the EECMY leaders express about the cut in relationship with ELCA and CoS. In this situation, it is particularly painful that NLM as one of the strongest historical partners who share their understanding of the "Word of God" decides to implement their biggest health projects with the government without involvement of the church.

Secondly, from the EECMYs holistic worldview, the NLM decision is interpreted as lack of commitment to the holistic mission of the church. In a time where holistic ministry is challenged by governmental regulations, it is particularly difficult that even NLM promotes the separation of development from the church ministry. The interpretation of this is further complicated by the complex relationship between the EECMY and the Ethiopian government as the government is not only seen as a protector of, but also as a threat against justice. The justice that is so central in the theology of Gudina Tumsa.

From the NLM point of view, the decision to implement the project directly with the department of health is far less complicated. NLMs main mission is to "save souls". Diakonia is understood as an ethical duty to help the sufferings in the world and is not directly connected to witnessing to the gospel. In view of the criticism of missions using development work as a tool to serve the hidden agenda of building churches, NLM may see separating the development work completely from the church work as a way of strengthening its credibility as a serious development actor and a good way to strengthen the sustainability of the project. Furthermore, the direct co-operation with the Ethiopian government may serve to strengthen the relation between the NLM and the Ethiopian government. In the Doctrine of the Two Regiments, which is central in the NLM theology, the government is delegated by God to govern in the world (Henriksen, 2005: 277), and co-

operation with the government on earthly matters (which include development activities) is therefore unproblematic. This question demonstrates how theology and worldview have practical implications for the relation between evangelism and development in daily life. NLM has been criticised for using earthly services to promote the spiritual Kingdom of God (Tvedt, 2004). In the theology of NLM, the solution is to distinguish completely between evangelism and development work. The development work is only an integrated part of the mission of “saving souls” in as far as the individual development worker or missionary engage in church activities and evangelism in the spare time. When the term diakonia has been in limited use in NLM it is a reflection of this understanding, where development work belongs to the worldly realm. Recently NLM has organised workshops on diakonia and the organisation is in the process of developing a document on diakonia. Unfortunately, the process was not completed in time to be included as a background for this thesis.

NLM is criticized for making the decision to focus on the Muslims in the eastern parts of the country without prior consultation with the EECMY. This is again interpreted as lack of commitment to the highly valued relationship between the EECMY and the NLM. While the EECMY understands the global church to be the main instrument for the Mission of God in the world, and may see itself as the centre in the Mission of God in Ethiopia, NLM understands itself as a movement of followers of Christ that is continuously moving to reach further, to new places and people. With the establishment of a strong national church in Ethiopia, NLM is eager to move on. From this perspective, the NLM decision can be interpreted as a recognition of the independence of the EECMY. As NLM has completed its mission in the southern parts of the country, the organisation is ready to move to another area and another group of people. A group of people that live also within the national borders of Ethiopia. In its independent tradition, NLM failed to recognise the value of the already present, spiritual and fast growing EECMY as a partner in this mission.

#### 6.2.2. The role of NMS in holistic ministry:

With the vision “A living, acting and missional church in every country!” NMS puts church at the centre of its mission. The organisation is not and has never been an independent body in Ethiopia. All the NMS activities in the country are operated through the EECMY structure. This is in accordance with the wish and understanding of the EECMY. Despite this, it is evident in the interviews with the leaders of the EECMY that the church’s feeling of

ownership of the work of NMS is limited, and there is some doubt about NMS' commitment to spiritual ministry. While NLM and NCA have made independent strategic decisions about the direction of the organisations engagement in Ethiopia, NMS is only operating through the church. The only way NMS can shape the work in Ethiopia in accordance with its own vision, values and strategy is therefore by influencing the work of the EECMY. If there is distance between the interest of the EECMY leadership and the interest of NMS, NMS may find it necessary to take lead of the work, to maintain the interest and vision of the organisation. This is a possible explanation of why the church leaders express that the work of NMS is not fully in the hands of the church. NMS has always found it challenging to balance its relation with the EECMY leadership with the call to serve in the rural and "unreached" areas the organisation initially was invited to. As the part that provide the financial resource, NMS has the opportunity to use the power of money to monitor and control the details of the work through budgets and financial reports.

One of the informants identified a difference between the NMS and NCA in the distance to the community. In general, NMS' closeness to the community and engagement in the work at the grass root level will be valued a strength in diakonia, as it offers insights, opportunities of fellowship, building of common understanding and learning from each other. LWF points to how presence to see the sufferings and listen to the silent voices may serve as a sign of hope. NMS has been recognised for its commitment to the Gumuz people and emphasis on preservation of indigenous language and culture. On the other hand, the presence of a highly educated person with access to material power requires the ability to listen, to be able to value and lift up the voices and perspectives of the suppressed. If the person acts as an expert who knows best, her presence may suppress the voices of the community. The report "A Changing Missionary Role" (Abuom, 2013) has identified this as a danger when young missionaries are employed as experts or advisors in southern churches. When NMS suggests the need for missionaries is reduced as the level of education in the mission fields has increased, it can be understood as a reflection of an understanding that sees the missionary as an expert. The letter of 1972 suggests that this understanding of missionaries is a consequence of a mission understanding that emphasises materialistic development. None of the five NMS missionaries has theological education. This reflects the situation in Norway, where the mission organisations struggle to recruit theologians for international

mission. The leaders of the EECMY emphasise that foreign personnel can contribute with theological education, while they feel that the contribution of and need for so-called development experts are less. Hence, there is a gap between the support NMS is offering and the felt need of the church.

#### 6.2.3. The role of NCA in holistic ministry:

NCA is a church organisation and defines itself as a diaconal organisation. It has however consciously distanced itself from traditional Christian mission and mission organisations. This can be understood as a strategy that serves to distance the organisation from the criticism raised against Christian mission. In the LWF understanding, diakonia is part of God's mission, hence a diaconal organisation can be understood as a mission organisation. With the strong and clear reference to the triune God in NCA's statement of principles the distance to Christian mission appears contradictory.

The LWF documents point to how the whole world is suffering under the suppression of evil structures and sin as part of the old creation and understand diakonia as a transformational process and a sign of the in-breaking reign of God. NCA's vision and thematic areas reflect an understanding of diakonia that divides people in "the poor" and "the privileged" where the so-called poor are the victims of suppressing structures. A consequence of this understanding may be that the resources and the solutions are seen to be in the hands of those with earthly power and money, the so-called privileged. The "poor" may easily become objects. This is what the letter of 1972 points to when it criticizes western development agencies for seeing the people of Ethiopia as objects rather than agents in the development process. In the transformational process of holistic ministry, the spiritual strength of the EECMY is a valuable resource and contribution. Despite her spiritual strength, fast growth, and vast diaconal ministry, the EECMY is struggling for recognition as a partner in the Mission of God. When NCA chooses other partners before the EECMY, it can be interpreted as a reflection of an understanding of diakonia that sees little value in the resources of the EECMY for the transformational process of the world, be it in developing countries or in Europe.

Another consequence of NCA's approach to diakonia is evident in the organisation's new global strategy. According to this document (NCA, 2015: 24) NCA prioritises its work based on factors like political relevance and potential for achieving results. LWF is warning that if

diakonia loses its identity in the triune God it becomes secular development work, characterised by the interest and goals of the world. World politics change rapidly and are not always working for the empowerment of the suppressed. The letter of 1972 criticised how donor agencies by defining the criteria for support also define what is good for people. According to the LWF, diakonia aims to listen to and lift up the value of each person's experiences, capacities and dignities. In the words of Amartya Sen, each person must be free to decide what is of value. For Gudina Tumsa the aim of development is freedom from self-centeredness and the road to this freedom is the liberating power of the gospel of justice and love. If political relevance defines the priorities of NCA, it may not be a contribution towards the lifting up of people's experiences and freedom to decide what is of value.

Furthermore, the LWF suggests that change may sometimes not be possible. When indicators like tangible results and potential for sustainability direct diaconal action, it may compromise the most vulnerable in situations that appear hopeless. This contradicts the diaconal call of presence and fellowship to listen to the silent voices. While development donors emphasise independence and sustainability, diakonia points to how all human are vulnerable and created to live in relationships with each other and with God. When one of the informants from the EECMY says that the church prioritise victims of suppression and the left behind, not completely in accordance with the priorities of the government (5.2.5, last quote), it may reflect a realisation of how holistic ministry prioritises differently from secular development. According to the LWF, when the interests and goals of the world determine NCA's priorities it may suggest that the diaconal ministry of the organisation is in danger of losing its vertical dimension and identity in the triune God.

Development actors have been criticised for not taking religions seriously by only making use of the instrumental benefits of religious actors in the development process. When NCA expresses that it seeks to help people identify forces within their own religion that affirms justice it can be understood as a recognition of religious dimensions. For the leaders of the EECMY, this pluralistic approach to religion may be interpreted as a failure to take the truth claim of religions seriously. It implies either that NCA undermines the gospel and the Holy Spirit as sources of transformation, reconciliation and empowerment, or that the organisation does not wish to share the gospel and invite people to join the Christian fellowship. For the EECMY leadership, the gospel is their dearest resource and the greatest

unjust is when people are deprived of the gospel. NCA may argue that God acts in all people and that emphasis on the gospel may actually serve to exclude people of other faith. The presence of Muslim employees in the EECMY shows that believers of other faiths are not excluded from holistic ministry. An interesting study would be to look at the experiences of Muslim employees in the EECMY.

### 6.3. How do the leaders of the EECMY relate to justice and gender equality?

In accordance with the theology of Gudina Tumsa, the leaders of the EECMY identify witness to justice as an indicator of whether the church is truthful to the Gospel. The LWF points to how addressing all kinds of suppression is at the heart of what it means to be church as a sign of the reign of God that was inaugurated in Jesus victory over all suppressing powers on the cross.

In the context of Ethiopia today suppression takes place at many levels. On a global scale, Ethiopia belongs to the global South and is one of the least developed countries on the UN's global development index. The global injustice is partly explained in the suppressing power of western interests. The larger amount of NCA's funds comes from governmental and multilateral organisations and much of the diaconal ministry of NMS and NLM is funded by Norad. This offers the donors an opportunity to use the power of money to impact the situation in developing countries. The critique of development as another way whereby the North maintains power over the South, and Terje Tvedts critique of the strong ties between non-governmental organisations and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Norway (Tvedt, 2009) raise the question of whether this strategy is actually contributing to empowerment of the South.

The EECMY is still struggling for its freedom to work in accordance with its own theology of holistic ministry. We have seen that the separation of development and proclamation through DASSC, and the dichotomised worldview and theology of western partners challenge the freedom of the church. Most of the income of NLM and NMS comes from private donors and collections in mission groups and congregations as a sign of the fellowship and sending of the global church. When it comes to the practical implementation,



it makes little difference whether the source of income comes from powerful agencies or congregations and individuals if the values and priorities are the same. By working for self-reliance, the EECMY leaders have identified an effective way to out-balance the financial power that western donors use to impact and direct church activities.

In the following, I will look at how the leaders of the EECMY relate to the political suppression of the Ethiopian people and the suppression of women, and discuss the contributions of the Norwegian organisations towards political justice and gender equality.

#### 6.3.1. Political justice:

Through its advocacy work, NCA has built an image of superiority among Christian organisations and possibly even among all the Norwegian development organisations when it comes to addressing issues of injustice. NLM (Shanka, 2001) and the EECMY (Olana, 2006) have been criticized for their loyalty to the Ethiopian government. A recent example of NLM's loyalty to the governmental regulations is the closing down of the NLM-Sinana Dinsho FGM Elimination Project (for more on this project see Larsen, 2012) after the restrictions on internationally funded NGOs involvement in gender issues, while gender projects funded by NMS and NCA have continued.

The LWF suggests that diaconal action addresses injustice by lifting up every person's experiences, capacities and dignities and by addressing social and political causes of sufferings and poverty. In situations where change may appear impossible, LWF points to how presence to see the sufferings and listen to the suppressed voices may serve as a sign of hope.

The leaders of the EECMY describe the issue of justice in today's Ethiopia as a careful balancing act and share personal experiences of how people and the church are silenced by pressure and fear. The diplomatic crisis between Norway and Ethiopia has shown that organisations that address political issues are in real danger of being expelled. The low faith the leaders of the EECMY appear to have in advocacy may be explained in their experiences of living in a country of suppression. They express that raising their voices involves an unknown risk of persecution that is not worth taking, as it will not make any difference anyway. Furthermore, they doubt the value of international agencies addressing the political situation in Ethiopia and are in a way even proud of their nation not allowing western powers to interfere with the politics of their country. The governmental restriction

on international NGOs involvement in human rights issues may be understood as a principled demonstration of the sovereignty of the Ethiopian state. These perspectives question advocacy as an effective and just way of addressing injustice.

The leaders of the EECMY point to presence and activities among the people at community level as the most valuable contribution towards justice, not only as a sign of hope, but also as a source of empowerment. In the eyes of the leaders of the EECMY, this lifting up of people from below is the most important contribution towards justice. This is what NLM has been and is doing through presence of missionaries, provision of schools and health services, preaching the gospel and translation of the Bible to minority languages. NMS has contributed towards the empowerment of the Gumuz people in similar ways.

### 6.3.2. Gender equality:

The LWF makes clear that diaconal ministry must fight all kinds of injustice including the suppression of women. In contemporary development theory, empowerment of women is key to overcome poverty and it is top of the agenda of Norwegian development policies (Østebø et al, 2012). Religions are criticized for paternalistic structures and suppression of women. NCA therefore sometimes chooses to implement projects with non-religious partners. NLM represents an example of how women are suppressed in the name of religion. NMS gives high attention to the empowerment of women at all levels.

The responses of the female informants confirm that practically and culturally women are still suppressed in the EECMY today. Both male and female informants point to the gospel as a force in favour of gender equality and a source of women empowerment. This challenges the understanding of religious suppression of women. Considering the strong historical ties between NLM and the EECMY, I was surprised that none of the informants raised any theological arguments against the ordination of women. This can be explained by the EECMY's holistic worldview. As there is no separation between the spiritual and the material world, and women and men are equal, created in the image of God, equality applies also in spiritual ministry. NLM's policy of excluding women from spiritual leadership, while promoting human rights on earth, can only be maintained with a division between the earthly and spiritual. In a holistic worldview, democracy has to apply in the whole world, including spiritual ministry. One of the male informants from the EECMY refers to the priesthood of all believers as an argument in favour of ordination of women, as women are

included among believers. Given the strong position of the ministry of all believers in the NLM as a laymen's movement, the exclusion of women from spiritual leadership in NLM appears contradictory.

The church leaders suggest that the presence of female missionaries has strengthened the position of women in the EECMY. Even if it may have been unintentional, by sending female missionaries, NLM may have contributed to the empowerment of women in the church. Through the call to witness to the Gospel, these women became witnesses to justice and against suppression of women, witnesses of the empowering force of the triune God.

NMS gives very high attention to promotion of gender equality, both through development projects that address gender issues and through promotion of women in leadership positions, as leaders of diaconal projects, as ordained pastors or in higher leadership positions and decision-making bodies. While NCA implements many of the projects that address gender issues in partnership with other organisations, NMS influences by working integrated in the church structure. Considering the potential impact of a church with 7 million members, this appears to be a wise strategy. Gender equality is in accordance with the theology and policy of the EECMY, and support to implement the policy in practice can therefore be welcomed given it is done in a mutual partnership built on common understanding and mutual respect.

#### 6.4. Holistic ministry, diakonia and development:

According to the traditional understanding of the Lutheran Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms, God acts in the world in two realms. In the worldly realm, God upholds and sustains the world through the continuous creational act. In the realm of faith, God brings spiritual salvation (Henriksen, 2005: 277-279). Consequently, proclamation of the gospel has been understood as participation in the spiritual ministry of salvation (gospel), and charity and development work as part of the ministry of sustaining the world (law). The LWFs understanding of diakonia as a sign of the in-breaking reign of God (the gospel in action) challenges this division. Through transformation, reconciliation and empowerment, the message of diakonia is that salvation is not only spiritual. Jesus being both human and God

and the reign of God being inaugurated in Jesus life on earth and physical death, bear message not only of spiritual salvation, but also of a new and just heaven and earth.

Gudina Tumsa grew up in a holistic worldview, in a country of suppression and in a church that was fruit of the holistic ministry of traditional mission integrating proclamation and diakonia. For him witnessing to justice and fighting suppression was a consequence of confession to Christ as Lord, and proclaiming the gospel integrated in the process of transformational development. The letter of 1972 issued a warning against the consequences of a dichotomised worldview for Christianity. Today the leaders of the EECMY describe a secularised Europe where Christianity and church apparently have lost relevance. The leaders of the EECMY experience that holistic ministry is challenged and under pressure from the western dichotomised worldview. When international development agencies fund diaconal ministry, there is potential of conflict of interests. While politics and secular interests that emphasise tangible results and sustainability direct development, diakonia and holistic ministry are directed by the gospel of love and justice. This requires diaconal ministry to be critical about own practice and continuously assess its truthfulness to the diaconal identity.

From a development perspective, Amartya Sen's definition of development as every person's freedom to decide and seek what is of value challenges development donors to reconsider whether the conditions set for the support to the EECMY through DASSC contributes to or suppresses this freedom.

## 7. Summary and outlook:

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The first part of this chapter summarise the main findings of the study, and the final part points to some challenges raised by the study.

### 7.1. Summary of findings:

To answer the question of the study, three research questions were identified. The first research question seeks to understand how the leaders of the EECMY understand holistic ministry. The study shows that both proclamation of the gospel and diaconal ministry are important in the leaders' understanding of holistic ministry. The study suggests that the leaders understanding of the relation between proclamation and diakonia differ and that the position of Gudina Tumsa's theology of holistic ministry is weak.

The second research question seeks to understand how the leaders of the EECMY understand the role of NLM, NMS and NCA in holistic ministry. The study shows that the experience of partnership and the contributions of the organisations may be limited by the organisations' understandings of mission and diakonia, which differ from the way the leaders of the EECMY understand holistic ministry and participation in the Mission of God. The organisations' understandings of diakonia appear to be impacted by a dichotomised worldview where the southern partners may become objects, rather than equal participants. A potential consequence might be that political interests and strategies that are not always just direct diaconal ministry.

The third research question seeks to understand how the leaders of the EECMY relate to justice. The study discusses three levels of suppression. Firstly, the global suppression of Ethiopia as a developing nation and EECMY as a church in a developing country. Secondly, the national suppression of the Ethiopian people and people groups. Thirdly, the suppression of women. The study suggests that the freedom of the EECMY is challenged by the impact of western worldview and values. Furthermore, the findings question the value of advocacy work in addressing suppression in a developing country, as it may be seen as an attempt to interfere with the politics of the country, part of the western suppression of the south, and it

may have little effect. The study points to the value of listening presence and dignifying and empowering action at community level and identify the gospel as a source of dignity and empowerment in response to the suppressing life conditions in the world. The presence of female missionaries may have contributed to the EECMY's theological understanding of women and men as equal and the gospel becoming a source to address suppression of women, an empowering force in the struggle for gender equality.

## 7.2. Outlook:

The term holistic ministry is central to the identity of the EECMY. The superficial level of agreement on the meaning of the term challenges the church to seek deeper to define the term and build a common understanding. Furthermore, the different factors that limit the church in the implementation of holistic ministry according to its own wish challenge the church to develop a strategy to overcome these factors. This process has started as the church is working towards self-sufficiency and has established an office for diaconal ministry in the Department of Mission and Theology.

The study points to a possible discrepancy between NLMs own understanding of how the gospel relates to gender equality and the consequences of the organisations' practical ministry. This suggests a reconsideration of the relation between theory and practice may be required to maintain the integrity of the organisation.

The findings question the value of advocacy in addressing injustice, and calls for organisations working in diaconal ministry to continuously re-assess their role in imbalanced power structures. The gospel is the reference and identity of diaconal ministry and the study has identified a need for increased awareness about the meaning and consequences of this for international diakonia.

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## Attachment

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A small selection of sayings from the Oromo language:

Dubarti fi harree uleetuu danda'a: Women and donkeys are managed with a stick (beating).

Dubartiin beektu hinqabdu, ilma beekaa deessi: A woman has no knowledge, but gives birth to a knowledgeable son.

Dubartiin abbaan manaa mana hinjirree du'a ga'ii fardaa dhaqixi: A woman whose husband is away goes to the funeral of a horse (spends her time on meaningless activities).

Durba dhalchuu mana dhiisuu wayya: Rather than giving birth to a girl (not a boy) it is better to leave it (to not give birth).

(Source: Ebise Ashana, on e-mail February 2015, translated by Ebise Ashana and Lamessa Endalew).