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**ART AND SYMBOLS AS A COMMUNICATION OF  
FAITH IN THE HISTORY OF ETHIOPIAN  
ORTHODOX CHURCH**

Moderator

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## DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this long essay is my original work, achieved through my entire personal reading and critical reflection.

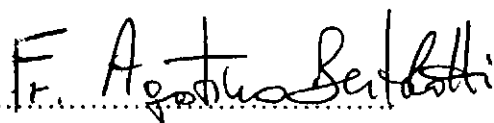
It has not been submitted in part or in whole to any other college or university for academic credit.

All sources of information haven duly acknowledged.

Signed..........

Samson Gebray Medhin.

Date.....25/2/05.....

Supervisor..........

Fr. Agostino Bertolotti, M.C.C.J.

## **DEDICATION**

This long essay is dedicated to my grandparents (Ato Medhin Tesfay and W/o Amlesu Weldesilase) who help me to be what I am now. I would like to thank for their loving kindness in my entire life and their prayer.

Eternal rest grand to them O Lord! Amen!

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The whole entire work of this long essay is not my own work; it is the result of the support and encouragement that I have received from many people around me. Even though, I couldn't list them, my deep gratitude still goes also to all of them. However, there are some who have been instrumental in this work coming to completion.

First of all I would like to thank my God who has given me good health, talent, knowledge and for listening to the prayer of my grandparents. I would like to thank also my superior Fr. Alfred Roca for giving me a chance to finish my entire study by father support, financial support and his encouragement and prayer to finish my study. At the same time I would like to give thanks to the Head of the Social Communication Department Sr. Paola Moggi C.M.S, who worked closely with me in this communication understanding of the Church. The truth of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church art and its communication aspect shines out in this paper. I hope the communication dimension of this Church will help to contribute to social communication and theology field.

I am also deeply grateful to Fr. Rolandi Giovanni and the community of Don Bosco Utume. I am so happy with all my brothers in Don Bosco Utume; directly or indirectly they gave me help to finish this work and all my study. In a very special way I would like to thank Fr. Gianni. I am most appreciative for his timely words of wisdom and expressions of love. I will never forget his ready assistance, whenever I

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Above all, I thank my family, without whom I could have done nothing, specially my grandparents who pass away during my theological study. They help a lot with their prayer until they pass away in peace. Even though during this last four years especially my mother w/o Gidey in te of her many problems, continued to encourage and pray for me and also my father Ato Gebray Medhin. I thank my uncle Fr. Hailemariam, Hagos, Girmay and my sister Akberet for their great support and encouragements.

I have been blessed with many friends who have stood by me not only during my long essay work but also during the long journeys of my entire studies with support and encouragement. Therefore, I thank sincerely all my friends all and other people who made my dream come true by assisting me both morally and financially.

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

With time, the term "art" has become to mean more than drawing and painting. To our understanding it has come to encompass a variety of expressive fields such as drama, theatre, music and much more. This fairly modern type of inclusion has made it quite a challenge to easily define art. "Culture", as one would expect, simply adds to the complexity. It is with this understanding and inborn knowledge of the unique, complex artistic nature of Ethiopia, that it is not easy to give a single definition as to what Ethiopian Art and Ethiopian Culture is. Instead in this long essay I have tried to outline what I think are the most important components of Christian Art in the History of Ethiopian Orthodox Church and its communication aspect in delivering the faith to the young Generation of Ethiopia.

To do this, in the first chapter I am going to stress on the Historical background of the Orthodox Church in Ethiopia and the origin of Ethiopia Art. I am going to show how Ethiopian Art developed together with the first Christian evangelization. As many historians tell us that One of the most important events in Ethiopian art history occurred around 330 A.D., when Ezana, the Aksumite ruler of the highlands of northeastern Africa, accepted Christianity. This occurred not long after the emperor Constantine declared Christianity a legal religion of the Roman Empire. By 500 C.A., the most sacred of Christian texts the Gospels had been translated into Ethiopia, and the foundations of a Christian artistic tradition, setting the course of artistic development in the region, had been firmly established. Pre-

Christian Aksumite rulers celebrated their victories by setting up monumental statues to the gods of heaven and earth. However, Ethiopia's Christian rulers celebrated their majesty by building churches and endowing monasteries. The city of Aksum became symbolically the New Jerusalem, and the cathedral there was dedicated to St. Mary of Zion. Therefore, all these points and other similar ideas will be developed in the first chapter.

In the second chapter I will try to explain in a more specific way some of Ethiopian Christian arts like painting, architectures, church music and Christian symbols and their communication aspect in transmitting the faith to the next generation. I will try to find out also those Ethiopian artists who manage to communicate effectively the Gospel value and traditional worship through their great artistic mind. When I speak of Ethiopian art mostly I refer to Ethiopian Orthodox Church because the Church was one of the most significant pillars of Ethiopian society. It developed the only significant fixed constructions monasteries and churches of any importance for many years. So, in a sense, the fixed icons of Ethiopian society were those provided either by the church, or by the ancient stelae (obelisks) of the Aksumite ruins. Therefore, the second chapter is more on the value and communication aspect of those Christian arts in the church.

The third chapter is more on a pastoral concern of those Christian arts today in Ethiopia and young generation. I will try to give the current situation of that traditional cultural heritage and the problem of young generations. In the last part of the chapter I will mention the effort of church in keeping those cultural heritages and how the church is communicating its faith to the young generation with arts and symbols. I will also portray some of the things that the church didn't do in reaching

the need young people and communicate effectively to them through its great historical arts and symbols.

Therefore the aim of this long essay is to help the young generations of Ethiopian to see and give values to their Christian cultural heritage and help them to know how those Christian arts communicate faith and pass the message of the good news. To help them to have respect, admiration, love and knowledge of their orthodox church, not to consider the church as out of fashion, which is the model of strong faith and rich tradition and

As a student of theology and communication my aim is also to show to those young people and church leader how the church was communicating its faith through out its past history starting from 4<sup>th</sup> c even during the challenging time and during attack from Muslims. So that, the church may open it eyes and learn from the past and know how to communicate its traditional faith and Christian values to the very challenging present generation with out changing its identity.

## Chapter one

### Historical background of Ethiopian Christianity

#### 1. In The Early Age

##### 1.1. Pre-Christianity

Before the Christian period the last four centuries BC, Ethiopia received influences from the Southern part of the Arabian Peninsula, which blended with indigenous elements. Probably this Arabians taking with them their sun god and moon worship together with southern other cultural elements were “crossing the Red Sea and in contact with people in northern Ethiopia before 1000 BC but archaeological record had so far given evidence of sustained South Arabian influence and permanent settlement only during the second half of the first millennium BC.”<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, the elements of all kinds of forms of worship were practiced in the country especially the sun god that was widely known in Aksum, one of Ethiopia's earliest kingdoms. Besides, “Ancient South Arabians made good use of writing, creating a vast number of inscriptions on stone which record the history of several rival, long-lasting Kingdoms: Qataban and Saba (the Biblical Sheba), Himyarnaut,

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<sup>1</sup> P.B. HENZE, *Layers of Time*, 20.

Ma'in and others.”<sup>2</sup> The religion of these settlers remained that of South Arabia and the exquisitely dressed stonewalls of the temple at Yeha (Northern part of Ethiopia, 38 kilometres from Aksum.) were raised to Arabian gods.<sup>3</sup> Here, in addition to the South Arabian elements, is another important influence in the character of Aksumite civilization, the Greek impact that was to endure for the several centuries.<sup>4</sup> “The Axumites minted their own coins with inscriptions in Greek and in Ge’ez.”<sup>5</sup> It is true also that Aksum was known as a kingdom before and after 1<sup>st</sup> century, to the early historians, The name of Axum appears for the first time in the book of W.H. SCHIOFF, “Periplus of the Erythraean sea” the periplus of the Earthreans see; travel and trade in the Indian oceans by a Merchant of the first century and also in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century Ptolemy mentions the kingdom of Axum in his Geography<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, Ethiopia is the first African nation to appreciate and worship the One True God of the Old Testament and adopted the Judaic element. It is said some of the Beta Israel are descendants of Jews who fled the destruction of the First Temple by the Babylonians, while others point out that Moses himself took an Ethiopian wife (Num 12:1). Equally intriguing is the colorful tale of Solomon and Sheba, which whether rooted in fact or fable, has had a major influence on the structure and beliefs of Ethiopian Society. The tale is recounted in an ancient Ethiopian text, the *Kebra Nagast*.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> P.B. HENZE, 19.

<sup>3</sup> GIRMA KIDANE – R.WILDING, *The Ethiopian Cultural Heritage*, 7.

<sup>4</sup> E. ULLENDORFF, 54.

<sup>5</sup> C. CHALILLOI, *the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewhedo Church Tradition*, 27

<sup>6</sup> C. CHALILLOT, 27.

<sup>7</sup> The *Kebra Nagast* or ‘Glory of Kings’ was written in Ethiopia’s classical language, Ge’ez, in the city of Aksum in the 14th century. Its author was Isaac, who humbly described himself as “a poor man”. An English translation, entitled the *Queen of Sheba and Her Only Son Menyelek*, was published by the British scholar E.A. Wallis Budge in 1922. In these books, besides the rules of

However, direct illustrations of Ethiopia's past, such as monuments and inscriptions, are found on Ethiopian soil beginning only with the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. These testimonies indicated the growth on the Ethiopian plateau of a civilization closely related to the Minaeans and to the Sabaeans from South Arabia. This led the Ethiopian nation to include in its ancient traditions the Biblical episode of the Queen of Sheba's Visit to Solomon as told in the 1king 10: 1-10. This powerful Queen had managed to reign over parts of southern Arabia in Sabaea (Sheba), and because of this was titled, Queen of Aksum and Sheba.

According to the book of *Kebra Negest*, The worship of the true God was officially announced and established by Queen Makeda (Sheba) on her return from her historic visit to King Solomon at Jerusalem. Her long and strenuous journey to Palestine in search of righteousness, was a symbol of great faith, and so our Lord Jesus Christ, over a thousand years later, spoke of her to the continuing generations, that she shall rise up in the judgment with this generation and shall condemn it: "because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and look, there is something greater than Solomon here." (Mt.12: 42).<sup>8</sup> However, as K.K. SHELEMAY states in his books, the relationship between Jews and Ethiopian Christians has led to suggest that:

The Jewish influence must have predated the Ethiopian court's adoption of Christianity in the fourth century. Yet others have questioned the likelihood of a Jewish influence on pre-Christian Ethiopia, especially from a South Arabian source.

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Christian life, ecclesiastical regulations were found, in particular, detailed canons regarding the liturgy. Formalities, prayers, prescriptions and formularies for all liturgical services from the celebration of the Holy Eucharist to the administration of sacraments.

<sup>8</sup> The *Kebra Negest*, States also that Makeda (Sheba) stayed in Jerusalem for six months during which time her union with Solomon produced King Menelik I. When Menelik grew up he visited his father in Jerusalem; and "according to the Ethiopian traditions the Ark is supposed to have come to Ethiopia following Menelik" when coming back home accompanied by Azarias, the son of Zadok the high priest and many other Israelites. He placed it in the St. Mary of Zion Church in Axum, which is the birthplace of the Ethiopian civilization. From this point of view Judaism was in effect in Ethiopia not only that many later Ethiopian ruler claimed descent from Solomon and Sheba.

Maxime Rodinson points out that Judaism was not well established in South Arabia until around 375 C.E., leaving no time for a profound effect before Ethiopia adopted Christianity. Unable to trace Ethiopian contact with any Jewish source, he suggests that the Church may have revived biblical traditions and itself been the agent of Judaic elements in Ethiopian culture. (K.K. SHELEMAY, 19.)

### ***1.2. The beginning of Christianity in Ethiopia.***

According to the tradition, Ethiopia embraced Christianity and maintained the doctrine of Christ from the era of the Apostles to the present day, as it is narrated in Acts 8:26-39. The famous history of St. Phillip the Apostle baptizing the Eunuch, who was very much interested in religion, is part of Ethiopian Church history<sup>9</sup> and reference to an Ethiopian eunuch, working with Queen Candace (Kandake<sup>10</sup>), of importance for Ethiopian Church history and its relationship to Jerusalem.<sup>11</sup> Besides St. John Chrysostom witnessed that among those who were present at Pentecost (the birth of the Church) were Ethiopians.

The fact is that when we speak of Ethiopia during early Christianity even before Christianity must not be limited (restricted) to the African political and geographical entity that today is called Ethiopia. "Ethiopia" was a generic term and vague, synonymous with regions very far and situated in the south of Egypt and to the Red Sea and of the Indian Ocean. But it must be kept in mind that our present Ethiopia not only was always included, but also was also the geographical and political centre of the above mentioned great and ancient Ethiopia.<sup>12</sup>

Even though unofficial evangelization had begun since the apostolic times, the evangelization of Ethiopia, in its true and strict sense, began toward the middle

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<sup>9</sup> AYELE TEKLEHAYMANOT, *Ethiopian Review of Cultures*, II, 144.

<sup>10</sup> A title meaning "mother of the King" in Meroitic.

<sup>11</sup> B. SUNDKLED-C. STEED, *A History of The Church in Africa*, 36

<sup>12</sup> AYELE TEKLEHAYMANOT, III, 22-23.

of the 4<sup>th</sup> c<sup>13</sup> and according to the western historians and writers the introduction of Christianity to Ethiopia was in the fourth century during the reign of Ezana (320-356 A.D.) and Ezana became the first African King to have been a Christian and to have made Christianity the official religion of his empire. "The Roman Church historian Rufinus gave a direct report at the end of the fourth century the colorful circumstances of Ezana's conversion,"<sup>14</sup> which he marked by putting the Cross on his coins and include such Christian invocations as 'By the might of the Lord of Heaven and on Earth has power overall'<sup>15</sup>. Ezana was the most famous of Akum Kings before Caleb. His conversion happened when Meropius a philosopher (pilgrim) from Tyre, accompanied by two young men, Frumentius and Aedesius (Sidrakos) came to Ethiopia. In that very night Meropius was ill with fever and after a few days he died. But the two young men were introduced to the King Ella-Amida; they grew up in the house of Anbaram, learning the customs and life-style of Ethiopia.

Later Frumentius was chosen and was sent to Alexandria, and then He became the 'first bishop of Ethiopia, consecrated by the Patriarch of Alexandria.'<sup>16</sup> He was given a new Ethiopian name "Abune Sellama" it means the father of light.<sup>17</sup> All the Orthodox Churches and the Catholic Church venerate him as a Saint as well.

The official declaration of the doctrine of Christ by Ezana was done not as a new introduction to the people; he did it to prove himself as the true Christian leader

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<sup>13</sup> S., MERCER, *The Ethiopian Liturgy*, 80

<sup>14</sup> P. B. Henze, *Layers of Time*, 32.

<sup>15</sup> E. ULLENDORFF, 55.

<sup>16</sup> P. B. Henze, 33.

<sup>17</sup> Following this tradition, the head of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church was always appointed by the Coptic Patriarch of Alexandria in Egypt. These bishops who succeeded Abune Sellama were always Egyptian Copts and their primary duty was to ordain clergy, crown Emperors, consecrate churches, and preside over the church.

of the nation. He also brought about “the definitive adoption for Ethiopian writing of an improvement of the Sabaeen alphabet” and “great building activities; among these the impressive series of obelisks occupies a very special place, the largest of them exceeding 100 feet in height”.<sup>18</sup>

“The most important development for the spread of Christianity throughout the country was the arrival of the nine Syrian Saints, in the latter half of the fifth century A.D.”<sup>19</sup> Their arrival made a large contribution to the growth of the Church in translating books from Greek, Hebrew, Syrian and other languages in Ge’ez and in propagating the Gospel as well as setting up monastic life and schools. Each of these saints founded a monastery, and Christianity was undoubtedly spread largely by the monks’ many monasteries, such as Debre Damo, (which I visited three times,) and was built in inaccessible places.

### ***1.3. The Decline of Aksum***

In the 8<sup>th</sup> c. great Muslim influence started to grow up in the Aksumite Kingdom and the kingdom lost the use of the coast and other areas. The newly established Muslim state along the coasts became a grave danger for the Christian state. In the 9<sup>th</sup> c. the Aksumite Kingdom had lost its Political power in the region of the Ethiopian plateau, the coastal plains and the red sea. At the same time a Jewess apparently seized power 920 c. and Queen Judith persecuted the Christian dynasty. She is credited with a lust to destroy by fire and sword churches, monasteries, buildings and everything that symbolized Christian and imperial power. She is said to have killed the emperor, ascended the throne herself, and reigned for forty years.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> E. ULLENDORFF, 55.

<sup>19</sup> P. B. Henze, 38.

<sup>20</sup> P. B. Henze, 48.

## 2. Middle Ages: The Time of Art and Symbols

### 2.1 *The Zagwe Dynasty.*

After the decline of Aksum and the death of Queen Judith in the 9<sup>th</sup> c another Christian dynasty (Zagwe Dynasty) was established in the northern highlands to restore Christianity in the Country, which lasted till 1137-1270. The Ethiopian culture we know today may be said to date from this time of Zagwe Dynasty between the ninth and eleventh centuries, coinciding with Axum's political decline. The Zagwe era is one of the most artistically creative periods in Ethiopian history, involving among other things the carving of a large number of rock-hewn churches. During this time Christianity spread far to the South and West.

Perhaps the most famous among Zagwe rulers was *Atse Lalibela*. He was very religious and spent much of his time building Churches. It is said that he sculptured ten monolithic churches at Roha (present Lalibela). There are many rock churches in Ethiopia, but those at Roha are remarkable. P. B. Henze writes in his book that the Lalibela Churches are:

Indeed wonders of the world, as the Portuguese Jesuit Father Francisco Alvares declared on seeing them in the 1520s. Though Lalibela has survived in tradition as a benign, saintly figure, he must in reality have been an energetic politician and effective organizer. The cutting of the eleven rock churches a project of major proportions, said to have taken twenty-four years. (P. B. Henze, 52.)

The artists and craftsmen of this period showed considerable ingenuity and skill in the endless variety and blending of forms that characterized their 'buildings'.

The sitting of the churches changed. They were no longer placed on the high mountains as in Aksum time but, adapting to the local Agew valley population with their river cults and holy wells; the churches were now built close to holy and healing waters. The monks made use of spring waters to Christianized the people. (B. SUNDKLED-C. STEED, *A History of The Church in Africa*, 38.)

## 2.2. *The Solomonic Restoration (1270-1630)*

After the mid-thirteenth century the Zagwe dynasty was reinstated as a new dynasty called the "Solomonic" dynasty and the political centre of Ethiopia shifted further south where it remained until the 16<sup>th</sup> century. This dynasty claimed to be the descendants from Solomonic ancestry extending back to the rulers of Aksum. The aim was the first monarchs after the 'restoration' was to clear up the Muslim and to establish and to strengthen a "Christian kingdom of Ethiopia". This was a great achievement of the Solomonic dynasty the total union of Church and State. "The number of churches and monasteries founded during this period is truly prodigious, missionary activity was intensified, and national sentiment was concentrated on monastic tradition and on the powerful institutions connected with it."<sup>21</sup>

The first king of the Solomonic dynasty was Yikunno-Amlak (1270-1285) who traced his origin back to King Solomon of Jerusalem through the Aksumite Kings. He supported the Church by giving land to monasteries. He also fought the Muslim in eastern Shoa. Perhaps the more famous figure of this dynasty was Atse Amdetsion, in the fourteenth century a great-grandson of Yikunno Amlak he was the first Ethiopian king in the Middle Ages to unite and rule much of the area controlled by the Aksumite Kings of ancient time.

In spite of extreme difficulties the relationship between the Ethiopian church and the West continued at the time of Zara Yakob (1434-68), however he managed to who send Ethiopian ecclesiastics as delegates to the Council of Florence in 1439. Zara Yakob was "responsible for the ecclesiastical reforms which determined the

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<sup>21</sup> E. ULLENDORFF, *The Ethiopians*, 66.

special character of Ethiopian monophysite Church once and for all”<sup>22</sup> and he “drew all the major monasteries of the county into a program of training more clergy and sending newly ordained monks and priests out to deepen religious understanding among both pagans and newly Christianized populations.”<sup>23</sup> He also wrote many commentaries on the early Christian Church. Generally “He was a patron of literature”<sup>24</sup> he is also called the ‘scholar king’.<sup>25</sup>

### ***2.3. Muslim influence***

During the reign of Ba’eda-Maryam (1468-78) and Eskender (1478-94) Muslim occasionally attempted to invade the Christian kingdom in the central highlands of Ethiopia. Na’od (1494-1508) tried to begin contact with the West and the attempt was successful. These efforts even led to the arrival, in 1520, of a Portuguese ambassador, who was received favorably by Lebna Dengal (1508-40). This meeting was finally possible because the Portuguese had just reached the Red Sea and had eliminated the monopoly held by the Indian and Egyptian fleets.

The arrival of the Portuguese in the area marked the end of the long period of isolation from the rest of Christendom that had been nearly total, except for contacts with the Coptic Church of Egypt. The Portuguese, however, represented a mixed blessing, for with them they brought their religion, Roman Catholicism. During the early seventeenth century, Jesuit and other orders sought to impose Catholicism on Ethiopia, an effort that led to civil war and the expulsion of the Catholics from the kingdom.

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<sup>22</sup> E. ULLENDORFF, 68

<sup>23</sup> P. B. HENZE, 71.

<sup>24</sup> Some of the oldest Ge’ez manuscripts extant go back to the reign of Zara Yaqob ( in fact, there are very few MSS. Still preserved which antedate Zara Yaqob time). (E. ULLENDORFF, 69)

<sup>25</sup> C. CHAILLOT, 31.

Despite Muslim invasions and the isolation of Ethiopia from the Mediterranean world, Ethiopia did not lose its civilization and Christian Heritage. Throughout the Middle ages it had an organized system of government; its religious institutions continued to expand; literature and education flourished; and art and architecture were kept alive.

### **1.3. Modern Period**

With Portuguese help, the Muslims, led by Ahmed Grag, were defeated in 1543. This did not bring to an end the hostilities, but it certainly limited serious uprisings. Portuguese and Catholic influence became greater. In 1632, the Emperor Fasiladas banished most foreigners and placed the Orthodox Church in its position of primacy and “expelled the Jesuits, because of their proselitism. All this produced a suspicion towards European missionaries”<sup>26</sup>

He resided at Gondar, which he made the capital of Ethiopia in 1636 and had a castle built. It remained so for two centuries, and a period of prosperity began. In a cultural sense it marked the beginning of an Ethiopian Renaissance without carrying the comparisons with Europe too far.<sup>27</sup> Fasilidas’ successor was his son Yohanne I (1667-82). Yohannes I was a strong defender of Orthodox and interested in doctrinal matters. He established a library for religious manuscripts.<sup>28</sup> He started to kill all converted Catholics who refused to return to Orthodoxy. He also burned all the books of Catholic.

From 1682 to 1706 Iyasu the son of Yohannes came to power. He was the greatest of the Gondarine emperors and made a saint by the church. He brought

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<sup>26</sup> C. CHAILLOT, 31.

<sup>27</sup> P. B. HENZE, 100.

<sup>28</sup> P. B. HENZE, 101.

about humane reforms in the administration; quelled controversies among rival theological factions and, by his wars provisory re-established his authority over the provinces of the south, from which Christianity had been swept away by the pagan Galla.

On 21 January 1872, Kassa was crowned at Aksum as Emperor Yohannes IV. He was more occupied with Orthodox Church. He set out to accomplish unity of faith among his subjects. During the Church council of Borumeda (June 1878), the doctrinal dispute of the Orthodox Church came to an end and the Tewahido<sup>29</sup> Doctrine was declared as official doctrine of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

When news of the death of Yohannis reached Menelik, immediately he proclaimed himself king of kings as Emperor Menelik II (1889-1913). He established Addis Ababa in 1908 as the capital city of Ethiopia. He introduced western science and technology into the empire. Menelik II is very famous not only in the history of Ethiopia but also in the history of Africa by defeating the Italian colonial forces at the battle of Adwa in 1896. It was a victory of blacks over whites. It restored black dignity and pride particularly in places such as southern Africa and America, where white domination and racism was most extreme. For the blacks of these countries, Ethiopia became a symbol of independence and dignity. The Church of Saint George, in Addis Ababa was built in 1896 by Menelik to commemorate the Adwa victory.

On 2 November 1930, Haile Sellassic I was crowned emperor in an extravagant ceremony attended by a number of foreign dignitaries. He dominated

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<sup>29</sup> "Tewahido" is an Ethiopian term (meaning "made one") which is the best expression conveying the faith of the Church, since it emphasizes the inseparable unity of the Godhead and manhood in the person of Christ. The Church official title is "The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Bete Christian".

Ethiopian life for over half a century and he ranks as one of the outstanding world leaders of the 20<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>30</sup> he declared that “the person of the Emperor is sacred, his dignity inviolable, and his power indisputable.” He claimed direct descendant from Makeda, Queen of Shaba and King Solomon of ancient Israel.

The emperor Haile Selassie, after long negotiation with John, the Alexandrian Patriarch, succeeded in having five Ethiopian bishops consecrated. However, the Ethiopian Church was still under the Egyptian bishops who had been from Alexandria by the patriarch, because the Ethiopian Church was considered as one of the provinces of the Alexandrian Church. (AYALA TAKLA HAYMANOT, *the Ethiopian Church and its Christological Doctrine*, 23-25.)

During the reign of King Haile Selassie I, Italian policy became a big problem for the Ethiopian church. The Italian policy aimed at isolating the Ethiopian Church by severing its ties with Alexandria. However the Church showed strong resistance to this policy, even some individuals like Abuna Petros and Michael paid with their lives for their steadfast patriotism and devotion to the church. On 30<sup>th</sup> November 1937 Alexandria Church satisfied to the full the secular aspirations of Ethiopian Christianity and the Church succeeded in having five Ethiopian nominees consecrated as Ethiopian bishops to head of the Ethiopian church. Finally on January 14, 1951 the Ethiopian Orthodox church got her own Ethiopian patriarch, Patriarch Basilios.<sup>31</sup>

Learning from all the past historical mistakes, it was the best time for Roman Catholic missionaries to spread Catholic faith in Ethiopia. Even though, still the evangelization system of the Jesuit missionaries was unacceptable to the Ethiopian Orthodox church because of respect to the local culture and Christian tradition of Ethiopian Orthodox Church they had.

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<sup>30</sup> P. B. HENZE, 187.

<sup>31</sup> AYALA TAKLA HAYMANOT, 35

Nevertheless, St. Justin De Jacobis, CM was very successful in spreading Roman Catholic Church in Ethiopia in 1846 and he opened a new era for the Catholic mission in Ethiopia. In fact, he had a healthy attitude toward the Ethiopian Church. For him, there was no change whether someone became Catholic or remained Ethiopian Orthodox except to foster communion between the two Churches. Because he had gained a good reputation among the people, he managed to establish genuine relationships with the local clergy, the monks and the *Debteras*.<sup>32</sup> Pope Pius IX was very happy with the missionary activity of Mgr. De Jacobis in Ethiopia and he wrote him a letter saying:

Therefore, we grant that all the sacred functions should be conducted according to the Ethiopian rite. Who is of the Latin rite, may carry out the sacred functions in the Ethiopian Rite. Those who use unleavened bread may use leavened. (AYELE TEKLEHAYMANOT, 213).

After the death of Emperor Haile Selassie in the same year in 1974, a military government, first socialist, known as Derg took power until 1987 and Mengistu Hailemariam became the head of the Derg. During this time “the abolition of the monarchy was announced, most properties were nationalized, including those of the Church, and then distributed. In 1976, patriarch Abuna Theophilos was arrested, detained without trial, and eventually executed. Other archbishops and clergy were imprisoned.”<sup>33</sup>

In 1991 the power of the Derg came to an end by the strong party EPRDF (Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front). In 1994 Ethiopia got a new constitution. The President of the present regime in Ethiopia is Weldegeyouros and the prime minister is Meles Zenawi.

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<sup>32</sup> H., RUSSEL, *Africa's Twelve Apostles*, 180-182

<sup>33</sup> C. CHALILLOT, *the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewhedo Church Tradition*, 37.

After having seen all this Historical even of the Orthodox church of Ethiopia  
it can be concluded that:

The significance of the Church in the nineteenth-century Ethiopia is different from the role of the church in the rest of Africa at that time. In Africa south of the Sahara, the Churches and their schools were welcomed as heralds of a new day and an enhanced future. In contrast, the ancient Ethiopia Church survived into the modern age as a keeper of Sacred Tradition and as the central legend of Ethiopia, with its Solomonic 'mythical charter', for both Church and nation. (B. SUNDKLED-C. STEED, 150).

## Chapter Two

### Arts and Symbols as a Communication of Faith in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church

#### 1. The definition Art in General

When we think of Art so many ideas come to our mind and is not easy to give a short and particular definition to a term art or we just know it in a broad sense, as a skill in “making” or “doing”. The word art is used in many other ways according to the place and culture. But most frequently the word art is used as *fine arts*, such as painting pictures, writing novels, or composing music. Some traditional fine arts are poetry, fiction, opera, painting, sculpture, drama, and ballet. Today architecture, motion pictures, photographs, pottery, weaving, and some forms modern dancing are also considered art in this special sense.

Another very important question is that why do people use art? Many people use art for many and different purposes it can be for practical needs, and also for most important discoveries regarding fundamental realities. However it is obvious that people have always used formal symbols and art to make their religious, social, moral, political and personal lives meaningful or to signify such ideas so they can be communicate and transmitted from generation to generation.

## 2. Ethiopian Christian art

In Studying Ethiopian art and architecture one is constantly impressed by the fact that Ethiopian art was extremely individualized and differed in many respects from every other type, both in pre-Christian and Christian times. However, it is true also Ethiopian Art has Middle Eastern art influence especially the influence of Byzantine art which was the result of a withdrawal from the realistic style of representation in the Greco-Roman art.

The reason why Ethiopian Christian art is influenced by Middle Eastern Churches is that Ethiopia had contacts with the Christian communities of the neighboring Middle Eastern countries. Greek merchants sometimes journeyed to Aksum. In the third century A.D however, Greek was of sufficient importance to Ethiopian capital for inscriptions to be written in Greek as well as in Sabacan and Ge'ez.

In 330 the Church of Ethiopia was intimately associated with the Alexandrian Church and in the same period the famous "Nine Saints" from Syria were in Ethiopia, bringing with them revered Christian writing and assisting the Ethiopian ecclesiastics to translate them into Ge'ez, building churches and monasteries. Another factor is that Ethiopians were having a pilgrimage to Holy Land, then this Ethiopian pilgrims would be examined with interest all the aspects of Christian ecclesiastical art which is found in Jerusalem with Byzantine art.

Both Byzantine art and the indigenous Ethiopian tradition were deeply transfused with Christianity, which imbued the two civilizations with an almost unparalleled exclusiveness and dominance of religious matter. Literature, art, music, and most facets of organized expression were virtually wholly ecclesiastical, and the religion of the state determined the scope of all artistic creation. Christianity was thus not only the source of Byzantine and Ethiopian art, but it also moulded it and prescribed its task and purpose. (E. ULLENDORFF, *The Ethiopians*, 159).

However, having all this Eastern influence Ethiopian has developed its own art and architecture, which is extremely individualized and differed in many respects from every other type, especially during the Middle Ages. Not only that Ethiopia also “has her artistic roots in the civilization of the Mediterranean and though it, in contacts with the occident, for Christianity deflected her from Africa and maintained her civilization her art and her entire life as part of the great Mediterranean culture.”<sup>34</sup>

It is true the primitive artist is characterized may be by his ignorance of the academic theories and techniques of art such as perspective, foreshortening, and so forth which are generally considered fundamentals. However, much primitive Ethiopian art is marked by an amazingly sophisticated sense of design and by great skill. All Primitive artists were able to transmit and communicate their religious, social, political, and moral values through art and symbols to the present generation and to the next generation.

### **2.1. *Painting***

Since the fourteenth century, painting has been as much in the service of Ethiopian Christianity as any other cultural manifestation in the country and the main aim of the Ethiopian artists was to use paintings for their religious services and to spread the faith;<sup>35</sup> it is only in very recent times that some secular art has begun. Even though, Ethiopian painting developed a style of its own, Ethiopian painters also had contact with paintings of other places and traditions. In fact, the earliest models for Ethiopian manuscript illuminations were Byzantine in origin, although in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and later, western models became frequent, perhaps because of the

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<sup>34</sup> E. ULLENDORFF, *The Ethiopians*, 159

<sup>35</sup> G. KIDANE-R. WILDING, 28.

several western painters who are known to have lived in Ethiopia around that time. However, borrowing was selective, as all cultural borrowing is, and the painters quickly incorporated borrowed features into their won independently evolved style and “remain uniquely Ethiopian in their expression.”<sup>36</sup>

Generally speaking, two great periods of Christian Ethiopian painting have existed: the first period is the Medieval period, from the 12th or 13th centuries until the 15th century, and this period is characterized by “paintings with a biblical theme, specially the evangelists, and some angels and saints. Colours are strong, proportions are large, and the entire style is one of great expressiveness rather than of elegance or delicacy of form.”<sup>37</sup>

The Medieval period reached its culmination in the 14th and 15th centuries and ended with the invasion of Ahmad Gran, a Muslim warrior who, from 1527 until 1543, destroyed most of the Christian churches of the Empire. Of the thousands of illuminated manuscripts, which existed at that time, few have survived. One can only surmise the destruction of paintings and other church decoration.<sup>38</sup>

The second period of painting starts from the Gondarine period (16<sup>th</sup> century) and after the defeat of Ahmad Gran to the present time. With the defeat of Ahmad the rebuilding of Churches and monasteries began. Painting thus received a vigorous stimulus in the late sixteenth century and throughout the seventeenth, for the decoration of the interiors of newly built or reconstructed churches needed as many artists did the illustration of manuscripts. At the same time there also occurred a perceptible change in the subject-matters which appealed to these artists; biblical

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<sup>36</sup> G. KIDANE R. WILDING, 17.

<sup>37</sup> E. ULLENDORFF, 167.

<sup>38</sup> E. ULLENDORFF, 167.

theme were increasingly displaced by, first and foremost, the attention given to the virgin Mary and, in the second place, by the lives and acts of saints.<sup>39</sup>

All the times in Ethiopian paintings, the content of the picture is predominant and the purpose is to illustrate the story and to intensify the words of the text or to explain it to illiterates. For example: in the manuscripts of the *Miracles of Mary*, contained as many as 250 pictures.

Ethiopian paintings continue to develop a sense of pure design. Patterns and colour, sometimes geometrical, sometimes natural, make each painting a unique work of art. Most of the time any painting is surrounded by the illuminations, trees, the trappings worn by horses, with the wings of angels, and this Church paintings supply items of daily use such as basketry, pots, utensils, writing materials, textiles, architecture, and both wild and domestic animals and birds all provide the artist with areas in which he can experiment with abstract design.<sup>40</sup>

Another very important element "In the Ethiopian art, the iconography of the persons of the Trinity and the saints was a careful interpretation of the scriptures. But unfortunately the crafts and techniques of wall painting and miniature painting were nearly lost. Those which were still made were degenerated copies of the old art form."<sup>41</sup> I am always amazed since my childhood to see the painting of Holy Trinity. Every year on the 7<sup>th</sup> of July (Ethiopian calendar) my mother celebrates and gives great dedication to the Holy Trinity (*Silase*) and she always put during this day the picture of trinity with three candles. The Holy Trinity are portrayed in the painting as three elder men with gray beards, identical in features and dress, to symbolize their

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<sup>39</sup> E. ULLENDORFF, 168.

<sup>40</sup> P. B. HENZE, 80.

<sup>41</sup> G. KIDANE R. WILDING, 30.

“Unity in Trinity”, and that in the Trinity “there is none that precedes and none that follows, none that is older and none that is younger”. No body thought my mother (who is one of orthodox believers), what it means Trinity (three person on God), but from this painting she understood the message and started to have believe and devotion to the Holy Trinity. Therefore, this the way the Ethiopian artistes communicate the message of the good news.

We may have the attitude that all those Ethiopian Arts are just crude and primitive but I consider them as free and modern almost abstract, in their basic idea of expressing feelings, and in their disregard of all other considerations than decorative value and also they are unique in their kinds, and important contributions to the history of painting.

It is not hard and difficult to differentiate Ethiopian painting from other painting and also it not hard to know the date of painting. Figures are drawn in two dimensions, almost cartoon-like in their direct and simplistic portrayal, with strong colors and clear lines. The “almond-shaped” eyes are a particularly appealing characteristic. Just by Looking at the colours used in the painting we can have a clue as to when they were painted.

For example, early paintings have thick dark outlines and strict balance with no movement and no decoration. In the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries a warm a bright red colour was often used as the background colour. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century the use of this particular bright red colour was dropped. But blue is became fairly common in the middle period, while the late Gondariane period saw the extensive use if a dark, dim blue and in the 18<sup>th</sup> a frequent use of stylized flowers.

In the Ethiopian painting we have two kinds of painting which are most know until now: wooden paintings and wall paintings. Wooden panel paintings are known as the method of painting that became common to the Ethiopian artist after the 15th century A.D. to the present. Concerning wall paintings: very often rich and beautiful paintings were depicted on the walls of the many churches and monasteries in early Christian times. These practices of decorating church walls and walls of monasteries with religious subjects (themes) still exist in present day Ethiopia.

Due to the feudal system of regional nobility in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the main thoughts of Ethiopian was only God and the land, but colonial invasions of the continent brought the distractions of foreign ways and Western technology. The simplistic culture could not endure; the church could not direct man's attention solely to things divine. Apart from religious painting many secular paintings started to develop, like the traditional scenes of King Solomon and the Queen Sheba and the battle pictures have been much in vogue.

During the 20th century painting began to illustrate the Ethiopian way of life dresses, weapons, baskets, church paraphernalia - providing visible proof of realistic inspiration a closer link between life and art. Inexpensive foreign-made paper, canvas and coloring materials became available in villages and artists found it possible to provide decoration for homes at a cost, which made popular sale possible. Sheep and goatskins, plentiful in an agricultural society, were used as a base for smaller paintings, and carried some remembrance of the past glories of illumination on vellum manuscripts. Furthermore, it was the development of this secular art in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century which paved the way for Ethiopian's serious modern painter.

Yet unique feature of Ethiopian painting with its naïve style remained almost unchanged for centuries until now and is to be found in every church and in many other locations. Figures are drawn in two dimensions, almost cartoon-like in their direct and simplistic portrayal, with strong colours and clear lines. The almond-shaped eyes are a particularly appealing characteristic.

One of modern famous Ethiopian artists is Afewerk Tekle. He has an international reputation as an artist of immense standing and “undoubtedly the best known.”<sup>42</sup> His works, though clearly based in an Ethiopian tradition, have a new and creative dynamism that is immediately of universal appeal. His vibrant paintings, many of them on very large canvases, are to be seen throughout Ethiopia in museums and galleries as well as on postage stamps and postcards.

Therefore, I believe that all this comprehensive collection of Ethiopian folk painting will stimulate a greater appreciation and understanding of primitive East African paintings among art historians, curators, and the public. The only thing, which can be done, is that to increase the number of scholars who can deal with this matter and to make the whole of the material known and put at the disposal of the researchers.

## **2.2. Architecture**

Ethiopian architecture occurred during the peak of the Aksumite Empire. During the first centuries of the Christian era “the Aksumites erected multi-storey buildings for themselves”<sup>43</sup> and the most typical examples of the unique Aksumite architecture are “the pair lions and the wooden beams carved in granite on the

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<sup>42</sup> E. ULLENDORFF, 168.

<sup>43</sup> B. SUNDKLED-C. STEED, *A History of The Church in Africa*, 36.

decorated stelae.”<sup>44</sup> At the present time many remains of this ancient architecture are still to be found in Aksum and around Aksum. Some of those remains are graceful columns, foundations and ruins of temples and churches, tombs and palaces, dams and reservoirs to collect water for populous cities. Records were inscribed on stone in various languages Ge'ez, Sabaeen, and Greek. The earliest of these inscriptions are dated to the 7th or 8th century B.C. “With the exception of the great obelisks and some royal and judicial thrones, Ethiopian architecture is primarily ecclesiastic”<sup>45</sup>

### *2.2.1. Obelisks*

The Ethiopian obelisks are the most famous of all the monuments in Aksumite Empire. These obelisks, also called stelae, are known to be the tallest single pieces of stone ever quarried and erected in the ancient world. “Perhaps the most notable achievement of indigenous art.”<sup>46</sup> Their age and use is a complete mystery. Some scholars, extrapolating from ancient coins found at the base of the giant pillars, suggest that they may have been carved and erected around the beginning of the 4th century AD. Due to their proximity to nearby tombs, the obelisks may possibly have been used as memorials to deceased kings and queens, but this is only a speculation. The most interesting in these obelisks are “their beautiful sculpturing and rich decoration as well-proportioned multi-storyed towers.”<sup>47</sup> At the present day there are:

six carved and decorated monuments the largest now fallen and broken formerly exceeded 33m in height with 12 storeys. The other which is now erected is only about 24m high with ten storeys. The third which was plundered by the Italians

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<sup>44</sup> T. DELESSA-G. ALEMAYEHU, 15.

<sup>45</sup> E. Ullendorff, 159.

<sup>46</sup> E. Ullendorff, 160.

<sup>47</sup> E. Ullendorff, 159.

during their invasions of Ethiopia in 1936-1941 and now erected at the centre of Rome is about 18m high and these monolithic towers unquestionably mark the sites of the tombs of the Aksumite Kings. (T. DELESSA-G. ALEMAYEHU, 15)

Aksum is also the seat of the Arc of the Covenant, which is the most sacred symbol of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The Arc is housed in a beautiful chapel that was built by the late Empress Menen, the wife of Emperor Haile Selassie. The chapel is fenced and no one is allowed to get to it. A monk guardian protects the Arc at all times. The replica of the Arc is found in all the churches of Ethiopia.

### *2.2.2. Church building*

After the conversion of Ethiopia to Christianity the local builders had to erect edifices of Christian basilica type. Features were introduced which were probably unknown to pre-Christian Aksumite building. Such features would probably include the nave, and its special type of roof, the two-storied aisles, and the sanctuary arch. Having all these features, from whatever source they may have been derived, the Ethiopian builders evolved a style, which was “ a true national product, resembling nothing else in the world”. But the model of the Church building may have some similarity with the Coptic Churches. Churches evolved to suit the Ethiopian Orthodox rituals, and traditionally, except for the rock and the original ancient Aksumite types, were generally circular.

The most ancient churches (Axum, Adulis, Matara) are ruins. Churches can be of different shapes. Among the most ancient churches still standing, all follow the rectangular basilica type (i.e. Debre Damo, 6-15<sup>th</sup> c.). Some modern churches are rectangular (for example Holy Trinity in Addis Ababa). Churches can be octagonal (Saint George and Ba'ata in Addis Ababa). Among the most ancient churches are the rock-hewn ones, the most famous being in Lalibela (in Lasta in the Amhara region). They are of different shapes: one, the Church of Bet Giyorgis (Saint George), is cruciform. Many of the rock-hewn churches are found in Tigray. (C. CHAILLOT, 101-102)

Basically there are three types of rock churches in Ethiopia.

1. Built-up cave churches, which are ordinary structures inside a natural cave (Makina Medhane Alem and Yemrehanna Krestos near Lalibela are examples of this style).
2. Rock-hewn cave churches, which are cut inwards from a more or less vertical cliff face sometimes using and widening an existing natural cave (Abba Libanos in Lalibela).
3. Rock-hewn monolithic churches, which imitate a built-up structure but are cut in one piece from the rock and separated from it all round by a trench. Most churches of this type are found in or near Lalibela (Bet Medhane Alem, Bet Maryam, Bet Giorgis, and others). Nowhere else in the world are constructions of this particular kind found.

In general, Churches are divided into three concentric sections, and they are “undoubtedly modeled upon that of the model Hebrew Temple.” the outer k'ane mahlet<sup>48</sup>, central keddest,<sup>49</sup> and the inner maqdas. Tabot are kept in the maqdas, which is only accessible to the high priest to offer the Mass. “The Christians are allowed to attend the Mass only in the second part of the Church so that they can celebrate the liturgy with the priest”

“The most beautiful as well as the oldest church is that of Debra Damo which dates back to the early Middle Ages and it the finest and the best preserved

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<sup>48</sup> The word “Kene mahlet” means “the place where hymns are sung and where the debteras or Cantors (singers) stand” (AYMRO WONDIMAGEGNEHU, *The Orthodox Church*, Addis Ababa 1970, 105-107.)

<sup>49</sup> “Keddest” is where Communion is administered to the People. (AYMRO WONDIMAGEGNEHU, 105-107.)

example of the old rectangular style.”<sup>50</sup> Debra Damo monastery is situated on an isolated mountain in northern part of Tigray. It is unique compared with most Ethiopian monasteries. Debra Damo was built, in the sixth century AD, with curved wood panels, painted ceilings and walls dedicated to the legend of Saint (Abune) Aregawi. He was one of the “Nine Saints” who came to Ethiopia from Syria to spread Christianity in the Tigray region. The other eight saints settled in Tigray countryside and all have their own church named after them. Debra Damo is magnificent in terms of its location and extensive collection of priceless manuscripts that have remained intact until today. It is extraordinary Church and “is one of the most inaccessible church buildings in the world”<sup>51</sup>, because it is:

“built on the top of a cliff which can be climbed only with a rope... the building is often considered to be the connecting link between the pre-Christian and mediaeval architecture of Ethiopia. The division of the ground plan is tripartite, and follows the Syrian or Copto-Syrian basilical type. There is a tripartite square apse in the east of the same width as the nave and the two aisles, and a narthex divided by a row of three square piers along the horizontal axis, with a staircase leading to an upper storey in the northern part... the most dramatic feature of decoration is the wooden panel ceiling of the narthex divided into thirty-three square plaques covered with low reliefs of symbolical content.” (G. KIDANE-R. WILDING, *the Ethiopian Cultural Heritage*, 22)

The interior of the church itself is divided by monolithic stone columns into a nave and aisles; a frieze above the aisles contains wood panels of lovely interlaced ornament.

After the decline of Aksum, the Zagwe dynasty rose to power around the 10th century in the province of Lasta. The Zagwe Dynasty ruled over Ethiopia until the middle of the 13th century. Emperor Lalibela-the most recognized ruler of the Zagwe dynasty-ruled over the Empire from a city Roha. It is to him that the construction of famous rock-hewn churches at Roha is attributed, a series of

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<sup>50</sup> E. ULLENDORFF, 162.

<sup>51</sup> B. SUNDKLER-C. STEED, 36

astounding monuments of singular impressiveness. Roha itself change its name and is called after its greatest king and architect, Lalibela. It is the site of the remarkable rock-hewn churches (13 of them), which have been justly referred to as one of the wonders of the world.

In Lalibela itself you will find two main groups of churches, one on each side of the river Jordan and one other church set apart from the rest. The town of Roha-Lalibela lies between the first and the second group of churches. It is situated on the higher part of a mountain-terrace on a vast plateau of rock. At Timkat (Ethiopian Epiphany. ca. January 19) a vivid ritual unfolds before the spectator: here the dances of the priests take place after the annual repetition of mass baptism in the river Jordan.

Bet Medhane Alem, is the largest of all this extraordinary rock-churches.

Taking the form of a Greek temple, it is unusual in being entirely surrounded by square-shaped columns, with a further forest of twenty-eight massive rectangular columns supporting the roof inside. In a corner of the church, one can see three empty graves said to have been symbolically dug for the biblical personages of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. A theory put forward by various scholars is that Bet Medhane Alem is a copy in rock of the original Church of Saint Mary of Zion at Axum. (Camerapix, Spectrum Guide to Ethiopia, Nairobi: Camerapix 1995,

Of all the churches, Bieta Giyorgis (Saint George) is particularly stunning and beautiful, situated apart from the other churches to the west, intricately carved into the shape of a cross. All the churches are still used as places of worship. This is the most mysterious complex in Lalibela, housing its holiest shrine, the Selassie Chapel, and according to the whispers of the priests - perhaps even the tomb of King Lalibela himself. While the ancient entrance to this group was probably from the west, passing the hollowed block of the Tomb of Adam, the courtyard is now

entered from the south, being connected by the trench leading to the Bet Maryam churches. A side door leads to the first church, Bet Debre Sina or Bet Mika'el.

Entering the church proper you will find that it is divided into two "naves" by three cruciform pillars that display no decoration apart from the usual corbels. Flattened arches connect the pillars with the corresponding pilasters at the wall.

### **2.3. Music**

Ethiopia is very rich in a musical heritage with a marked character of its own. The music includes different types of music: for example the highly refined Chants of clergy, melodious sentimental love songs and the warriors' songs. Throughout its history, Ethiopia had developed both secular and religious musical traditions that are unique from other countries. However, Ethiopian music still shares affinities with both Africa and the Near East. Drums are very common in Ethiopian music like other countries of African and the six-stringed *krar*, on the other hand is believed to have originated from the "kinnor" of Hebrew lyre.

As I have described before there are different type of music in Ethiopia but for now my main topic is Church music because in this chapter I am dealing with Art and symbols of the orthodox church of Ethiopian, how it was used and how it is used now to communicate the believe that they have about God and the whole misty of faith they have got.

In Chapter I have mention that Christianity's arrival in Ethiopia in the early fourth century at the same time now, what I can say is that this new Christianity of 4<sup>th</sup> century, brought with it the seeds for the development of ecclesiastical music, which well deserves to be called classical. However, Due to the long periods of isolation from the rest of the Christian world caused by Moslem encroachments on

the all sides have led to the development of a distinctly Ethiopian pattern in ecclesiastical music.

In a strict sense, the classical Ethiopian music is said to have had its beginning with Saint Yared (6<sup>th</sup> c.). It is true throughout the centuries, variations have added in the inventions of Saint Yared but still the Originality belongs to Saint Yared. It is he who is believed to have invented the three modes of melodies and these three modes according to the book of C. CHAILLOT are:

*Ezel*, used mostly for great festivals (Christmas, Epiphany, Palm Sunday, Easter, Pentecost, and Great and Holy Friday), during the Flowers' Season and Advent Sundays; *Ge'ez* used during the 'Supplication periods' (*astemehero*), for example after Pentecost and after the Flower Season (before the feast of the Flight to Egypt), during Lent, and during the Rainy Season; it can be mixed with *Araray*, the less used melody. (C. CHAILLOT, 110).

All three modes of melodies are quite different from the folk music of the country and its mastery requires years of rigorous training. The entire liturgy except for the Scriptures is chanted, certain part with the accompaniment of sistra and drums. It is the three general moods and the accompaniment and dancing that makes for the tremendous richness of Ethiopian Church music.

Saint Yared, after composing his hymns in the three modes, he created also the following ten notes: Yizet, Deret, Reqreq, Difat, Chiret, Quinet, Hidet, Qurt, Dirs, Anbir. These have an order of arrangement and together are called "Seraye". The name "Seraye" signifies their being hymnary guides, its veins and bases. Yared's notation comprises dashes, curves and dots having particular meanings.

All the hymns composed by Yared continue to be sung in churches all over Ethiopia by priests and choirs of debteras. These hymns are accompanied by various musical instruments created by Yared giving the performance more fullness. The singers chant in a choir in harmony with the melody, slowly moving their prayer

sticks back and forth or up and down in an orchestrated movement known as *tirkeza*. The beating of the drums and the rattling of the *sistra* also join in to make the music more melodious.

However, Again C. CHAILLOT in her book mentions those people who are master of this Church Music (*Zema*), which is invented by the Saint Yared.

The *debteras* are singers who know the rules of cantilation (*mahelet*) with musical instruments used before and after the Liturgy, and also after communion. *Debteras* form the Church Choir. The head of the *debteras* is called the 'leader mater' (*marigeta*). In important churches there may be several *marigetas*, but there will always be a leader among them. Some *marigetas* also teach Church music (*me'eraf, degwa...*) and also the art of *qene*. Today most of the *debteras* are deacons, and some are priests. (C. CHAILLOT, 111).

Therefore, at the end, the aim is one just to praise and worship God with all sweet voices and great instruments and to express and to communicate their faith in one God to their follow Christians and non Christians.

#### **2.4. Language, Literature and manuscripts**

According to the recent studies there are eighty-three languages with 200 dialects spoken in Ethiopia. These can be broken into four main groups: Semitic, Cushitic, Omotic, and Nilo-Saharan (on which three of them has a tracing of the parents language called Afroasiatic.) The Semitic languages of Ethiopia are related to both Hebrew and Arabic, and derive from Ge'ez, the ecclesiastical language.<sup>52</sup>

Until 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries Ge'ez was the main literary language. It came from southern Arabia and it is more related to an ancient southern Arabian language. Through long development and through the influence of the local Cushitic languages, Ge'ez evolved into languages know as Tigre, Tigrinya and Amharic. However the Ge'ez language is still used by the Christians of the Ethiopian tradition

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<sup>52</sup> CAMERAPIX, *Spectrum Guide to Ethiopia*, 66.

in a liturgical context and for traditional teaching, like in poetic composition (*qene*).<sup>53</sup>

From the early age of Ethiopian Orthodox Church History, Ge'ez became the source of literature and Christian manuscripts. The literature can be divided into "oral literature," "classical literature" and "Amharic literature". Ethiopians have a strong oral culture, which includes thousands of proverbs and stories. Stories teach and communicate morality, history and culture. It has been said, quite rightly, that the fundamental characteristics of Ethiopian oral literature seem to be unbridled imagination and an earthy poetic undercurrents.

Classical literature is the large body of writing in Ge'ez, the classical Ethiopian language. Parchment manuscripts still extant in monastic libraries, the National Library and at the institutes of Ethiopian Studies take us back some fifteen centuries. However, the origin of Ethiopian literature goes back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century of Christian history during Aksumite period. The first achievement during this period was the translation of the Holy Scriptures from Greek into Ge'ez.: Some original Greek texts which were lost are now found only through translations in Ge'ez. The translation was done by the Nine Saints in the late 5<sup>th</sup> century: the translation of Old Testament from Septuagint comprises, all canonical and apocryphal books in addition to some pseudepigrapha that were accepted as genuine in Abyssina. Among these are Ascension of Isaiah, Jubilees, Enoch, Paralipomena of Baruch, and all works for which the Ethiopic text is of paramount importance.<sup>54</sup> The Book of Enoch

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<sup>53</sup> C. CHAILLOT, 71.

<sup>54</sup> E. ULLENDORFF, 136.

is an apocalyptic compilation, surviving whole and integral exclusively in the Ethiopian version. It is of pre-Christian origin, circa 50 B.C.<sup>55</sup>

After the time of Aksumite and during the reign King Amda Sion (1314-41) another great work of literature happen in the History of Ethiopian literature. During this time the foremost creation of Ethiopian literature the *kebra Nagast* that has been woven into Ethiopian life in the most intimate manner and collection of hymns dedicated to the Virgin Mary by the name “Weddase Maryam”<sup>56</sup> was produced.

However, the golden age and classical period of Ge’ez literature goes from the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>57</sup> During these centuries the most popular time of Ge’ez literature was during the reign of King Zar’a Ya’qob in the fifteenth Century. His reign was known by the beginning of the great theological disputes. the “miracles of the holy Virgin Mary” was translated and many collections of hymns and other literature books were flourished like the biographical genre, the ‘Acts and ‘Lives’ of Kings and Saints. Among the most important works attributed to Zar’a Ya’qob himself are the *Mashafa Berhan* (“Book of Light”) and *Mashafa Mila* (‘book of Nativity’).<sup>58</sup>

During the reign of King Theodore in the nineteenth century, Amharic literature achieved full emancipation and became “Language of the Kings”, many theological writings started to published and commentaries on the Ethiopic texts. In 1840 the entire Bible were published in Amhairc. In the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> AYELE TEKEHAYMANOT, II, 243.

<sup>56</sup> The Weddase Maryam is a collection of hymns and laudations dedicated to the Virgin Mary, a work of literature of Mariolatry, and to this day widespread in Ethiopia. It was translated into Ge’ez from Arabic and is ordered according to the days of the week. Large numbers of MSS. Of this work can be found in Ethiopia and in the libraries of Europe.

<sup>57</sup> C. CHAILLOT, 75.

<sup>58</sup> E. ULLENDORFF, 146-147.

century, printing press was imported from Europe by Emperor Menelik, and the first weekly newspaper AEMERO rolled off the press in 1910.

Due to the invasion of Ahmed Gran (Muslim) in 1527, monasteries and churches were burnt down and with them a considerable number of manuscripts perished. Not only that many foreign people took large hauls of valuable tomes from monastery libraries. In his book "The Ethiopians," E. Ullendorff writes:

The number of Ethiopic MSS. in Europe, in public libraries as well as in private ownership, is considerable. Most of the early travelers returned with a few manuscripts, Bruce brought back an excellent collection, and later expeditions too large hauls of these valuable tomes. No wonder that monks are nowadays reluctant even to show their treasure. (E. ULLENDORFF, 142)

Fortunately, very small number of 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Manuscripts, have survived and can be seen in some of the fine collections in Ethiopia and in Europe. The numbers of manuscripts kept in Ethiopia is not known exactly, but there must be not less than 10,000 and 3000 to 4000 found today in the great libraries of the world outside Ethiopia. From 1975, about 500 microfilms, copied from manuscripts in Ethiopia, were published in a ten volume Catalogue but still more should be added the future.<sup>59</sup>

### 3. Symbolism

W.E. BIERNATZKI describes symbolism in connection with 'meaning', because:

Symbols have meaning, in the sense of the univocal meanings of signs and signals. However, adopting a less restrictive meaning for meaning, we can say that the meanings of symbols consist of entire network of memory contents they are capable of evoking for a given individual at a given time essentially open-ended, incomplete and including emotional associations as well as concepts. (W.E. Biernatzki, 31).

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<sup>59</sup> C. CHAILLOT, 73.

Christianity is, and always has been, a faith that finds expression in highly visual ways through art, image, icon, symbol, design, and other non-verbal means. The bread and wine, the cross baptism and other Christian arts are symbols that bring believers deeper into their faith and even the invisible really becomes visible through a visible symbols. Thorough the power of symbolism the communicators gets across the meanings to communicate.

Therefore, Ethiopian Orthodox church is one of Eastern Christianity who used many symbols until now, in order to transmit and communicate the faith and church rituals to the present and next generation. All arts which I mention above painting, architectures, building church, church music, manuscripts, festivals and other which I didn't mention are symbols of faith to the people of Ethiopia until now.

Today a replica or symbol of the Ark of the Covenant, known as the *tabot*,<sup>60</sup> occupies pride of place in the holy of holies of every Ethiopian Orthodox Church. These replicas, which derive their sanctity from their relationship to the true and original Ark still believed by Ethiopians to be kept at Aksum are so important that no church is considered consecrated without one and center of the festivities. Lalibela Churches hewn from solid rocks symbolize the enduring strength and steadfastness of the Ethiopian Orthodox Christian Church, the greatest Church in the world.

Another very important symbol in the heart of the church is the different kind of crosses. Ethiopia has been a Christian nation since the 4th C. and probably

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<sup>60</sup> The *Tabot* is the most potent symbol of the Ethiopian Orthodox *Tewahido* Church and also represents a considerable part of Ethiopia's heritage. The seized objects include numerous sacred artefacts, manuscripts and Ethiopian historical and cultural valuables which are now owned by individuals and institutions scattered all over Great Britain and beyond.

the first cross as a Christian symbol reached with Frumentius. These cast silver crosses take three major forms. Processional crosses; those with hollow round bases were mounted on staffs and use in religious processions or displayed on altars. Hand crosses; medium-size crosses with no bases were hand carried during services and carried under the priest's robe and used for blessing the faithful. Neck Crosses: Small pendant crosses can be worn as jewelry. All are made of a silver alloy and have been individually hand cast in Ethiopia. As C. CHAILLOT explained, the Cross became the life of the Church life and the spirituality of the people:

Symbolism, mostly based on the Bible, is important in all aspects of Church life, liturgy, prayer and tradition. For instance, one proclaims the faith with the symbol of the Cross which is omnipresent: around the neck, tattooed on forehead, neck, hands and arms, embroidered on clothes and other materials or objects. The Cross is very venerated. The priest always holds a Cross in his hand, ready to bless people coming to kiss it and to be blessed. Large Crosses are used during liturgies and processions. (C. CHAILLOT, 129)

## **Chapter three**

### **The communication aspect of Christian Art today to the young generation of Ethiopia**

#### **1. The situation of Christian heritage today**

Ethiopians are proud to have successfully resisted European colonialism in the 19th and 20th centuries. The expansion of the country has brought more Muslim groups into the population, and the Marxist government after 1974 withdrew official support for the Christian church. As I mention in the previous chapters, Christianity arrived in Ethiopia in the fourth century AD and its presence is still strongly felt in the astonishing architecture of the rock churches, in paintings and in ancient rituals that connect the population with history and place. However, its cultural and religious history grapples with the problem of her fast disappearing cultural objects. These include ancient coins, inscriptions, steles, crosses, manuscripts, paintings and church objects. Of all these, manuscripts seem to be the choice of objects to be carried out of the country by scholars, travelers and collectors. This is because they combine historical, literary and artistic values. From this background, the capital, Addis Ababa, is a prominent center of pan-African concerns, but local political and

climatic difficulties have left Ethiopians little time to develop new avenues for their rich cultural heritage.

The churches have declined over the centuries, but by and large they have withstood wars, invasions and the torrential rains that drench the highlands from June to September. But as the twentieth century ended, Lalibela rock churches face new threats. They will need the protection of God, to survive the expected waves of tourists. Most people who live around those historical places are also affected by poverty. The churches are the town's only real source of wealth. In addition to the clergy and students associated with them, they provide work for those members of the Community who live from the tourist trade.

Still, medieval Lalibela is slowly but surely catching up with the twentieth century. Few years ago it was impossible to reach the medieval complex by road during the rainy season but when I went for my holiday in 2003 I was able to go by bus to Lalibela. Since 1997 a new road has led to the town, which has a real airport and telephone service. The problem is, the government and the Church do not have enough influence to control development of the site. They should be more sensitive to the preservation of heritage. There are operators' guidelines for protecting the perimeter around the churches for the inhabitants and tour.

Most of those churches in Lalibela are covered by shelters—metal sheets and wooden structures that will, it is hoped, prevent leaks from further damaging the landmarks until a better solution is found. Political instability of the country put preservation efforts on hold. Ethiopian civil war has not been the only stumbling block. After decentralization measures were implemented in 1995 and 1996, heritage preservation fell to the federal ministry of culture, but carrying out the

projects and local planning schemes are within the province of the region. There is also interference from the newly created municipality and the clergy, without whom nothing can be accomplished in Lalibela.

## **2. The situation of young generation with the Church**

We cannot say that all the young people of Ethiopia have given up on the traditional church and on all those secret arts and symbols, which are the expression of their faith. Quite the contrary. Most of them, they believe the church can help them solve their problems and meet their needs if only the church would take them seriously. Most young people of Ethiopia are facing tremendous problems. They wish the church could help them to solve these problems, to do so it must listen to them and then invite them to help find solutions to what life brings them. To make meaning of all the good things that they received from their ancestors, and to make all those arts and symbols able to communicate to their present situations.

I carried out a small research in August 2004, in the northern part of Ethiopia where there are many orthodox followers and where there are many traditional worships going on. I interviewed 122 young people in order to find if they did not have much interest in art and symbols of the church, and not only that, if they really knew what they believe and the history of their church. 75% of those young people they did not know what is really going on in their churches. Most of them they don't go to church on a regular basis. Even those who went to church they kissed the walls of the church and they use to go back home, and they did not follow the mass properly, because they did not understand those rituals celebrated during Holy Mass which is performed in the Ge'ez language. What impressed me most was that most

of the youth told me that they really believe in the Orthodox Church because they believe that it is the only true and one religion.

Therefore my own conclusion is that it isn't because they don't have interest or they don't like their entire Christian cultural heritage. The reason, according to me, is lack of education, poverty and political situation that makes youth not to become the real protagonists of their old traditional Ethiopian orthodox Church and not familiar with the old cultural heritage of the church. However, they really like to make signs of the cross every time when the danger or evil things are threatening them. They like kissing the cross from the hand of a priest, they like to have many painting of Mary, Jesus, and saints in their house, and they are very proud of their Orthodox church but without any real knowledge. The only thing the young people are looking for is a welcoming church and a church ready to explain to them all those symbols and arts.

Poverty is also having great influence in their life. All Young people cannot attend church regularly even those young people who do attend church find it difficult because they have to look for food all the time, including Sunday. Those who do come to church cannot concentrate because they are worried about their house rent, food, clothing, and medication. But a more common difficulty for young people in growing in their spiritual lives is relating to a church they see as outdated, out of touch, old fashioned.

In the cities like Addis Abba most of the youth find church boring and uninteresting, traditional and slow, whereas outside there is so much more entertainment. It is true that youth aren't attracted by a quiet, reserved style. Many young people leave the church and don't go back because they don't feel accepted.

The lack of musical instruments in church leads many youth to attend revival churches where there are musical instruments, strong praise and singing.

Therefore, all above factors can help the young people of Ethiopia to lose their faith and lose meaning of those arts and symbols which survived for many years. The real communication between the young and that cultural heritage gives no effect because there is nobody to explain for them and to educate them the faith.

### **3. Church's answer to the current situation of the youth and cultural heritage**

In fact the Church has a great good point for resisting both the anti-Christian forces and the colonizing aspect of European Christian missions over the last centuries having been able to preserve her identities and communicate effectively the faith up to the present time. This has lifted the Church to the position of an example at a regional level bearing in mind the concept of "Ethiopianism." Churches of modern times also had no significant impact on the native Church in the past. Their very existence within the country, however, has aroused the request of young Ethiopians for ecclesiastical reform.

Of all Ethiopian monarchs in history, Haile Selassie is said to have worked, to educate his people and to cope with the forward march of modernizing influences, though without breaking away from time-honoured tradition. He was succeeded by the Marxist military regime in 1974. The communist ideology of the new military government soon resulted in anti-religious pressure exerted on officials and Church leaders. After the downfall of the military government in 1991 the Church seems to enjoy relatively more freedom based on pluralistic democracy. But analysis of the fragile social, political, religious, economic and cultural issues of the country still

raises challenging questions to the oldest Ethiopian Church and its future survival as a repository of Ethiopian national culture as we approach the beginning of the twenty-first century.

However, the church didn't give up, it is still trying to keep the faith and to communicate it effectively to the next generation, even though still needs to use all the means and to solve the real problem of the young generation of Ethiopians. One of the means, which the Church is using, is the youth Church association and this it is called the "Sunday School Movement" (*Mahebere Kidusan Youth Association*). The Church thought this the best way to reach out to all young people in Ethiopia because other means of communication are not much available in the country.

### ***3.1. Sunday School Movement***

The Sunday School Movement was founded in the 1970's under Patriarch Theophilos and there were twenty-one branches with about 42,000 members throughout the country. Its main concern was that of adapting to contemporary needs like liturgical reforms, development activities in the church, while preserving the traditional heritage in a manner meaningful to the younger generation. Even the Emperor was involved in this movement. The movement was having two newspapers: *Faith of our Fathers*, and *Participation*.

Due to the political problems the movement was stopped for a long time. After the overthrow of the government in 1991, most of college students created an association under the name of the archangel Michael. In 1992, the idea of uniting all the student associations was discussed in the Zway Monastery: it was then decided to have only one association grouping all the others, with was called *Mahebere*

*Kidusan*. In the same year the association was recognized by the Patriarchate under the Sunday School Department.

The main aim of this youth association is to serve the Church in parishes and elsewhere on voluntary basis. They also use mass media (books, magazines, audio-video cassette) in order to reach other youth in the country and to educate them in their faith. Their oldest magazine is called the *Ark (hamer)* that is the Ark of Noah, a symbol of the Church. Newsletter; “Witness of Truth” (*sem’a tsidq*) is published monthly. The other practical work of the association is to help the monasteries and traditional schools,<sup>61</sup> in order to preserve and transmit traditions and culture to the coming generations. The members collect money and buy food, clothes, and medicine, spiritual and liturgical books, liturgical vestments and vessels.

The association also gives training in different skills such as carpentry, farming, and weaving, so that, monasteries and traditional student may become financially independent. Another aim of the association is to encourage the young students to engage in research about Ethiopian Orthodox Church history, literature, architecture, and tradition. At the present there are more than 25,000 members and 77 higher education institutes. The first charismatic leader and spiritual father of this

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<sup>61</sup> For centuries education was sponsored only by the Church. This traditional Christian education is still given today in most of the parish churches and monasteries. Basic education consists of teaching reading and writing, and chanting the Psalms. The best traditional schools for the Old Testament are in Gonder, Gojam and Axum, and for the New Testament in Gonder and for both in Saint Paul’s College Addis Ababa. According to custom, the students leave their families and they go and live, study and sleep in the chosen monastery or parish. There special quarters are reserved students living together in the same room hut. In the towns you will find modern houses, often built on top of underground graves in the church compound; in the countryside, there are simple traditional thatched huts, sometimes built in a circle form. (C. CHAILLOT, *The Ethiopia Orthodox Tewhedo Church Tradition*, .83-94).

association was Abuna Gorogiros II of Shoa. And he was very good in motivating the youth.<sup>62</sup> He used to tell to the young people:

“Young people must serve the Church with all their capacities. The Church is your mother and you have to treat and respect her as such. Love your Church, Fathers of yesterday and of today. Never forget: young people are the backbone of the Church. The traditional Ethiopian Orthodox way life is a continuous expression of the Gospel. Do in your daily life as Christ did in the Gospel. Your religion is in your blood. You have to care for your religion and transmit it to the next generation. You have to unite your spiritual service with your daily work and to be active members of the Church. Christianity should be expressed in action more than in words, which means that you have to act rather than to talk. Be models of Christian life so that can follow your example. Give attention to every person, rich or poor, because God expressed Himself through each of them.” (C. CHAILLOT, 69-70.)

#### **4. The Church needs more effort to communicate its faith through its Arts and traditions to the new generation**

The Sunday School Movement and other youth activity of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church are really to be admired. It is a first move that the Church has started in order to bring young people closer to their Church and give value to their Christian heritage so that they can pass their believe and Christian art to the next generation. However, the Church still needs great effort in order to reach the young generation and in order to find out the real problem and to make meaning full all arts and symbols of the Church to them.

Ethiopia survived for so long thanks to a system of power suited to the purpose of survival. The system rested on three overlapping bases: the imperial throne, the Church, and the nobility. But now the political system is completely changed. The present government has little interest in the Church and Church's traditional heritage. The government is interested in some historical places only because of truism and not because of the survival of Church ant faith that people were having for thousand years and not because of the concern for the next

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<sup>62</sup> C.CHAILLOT, *The Ethiopia Orthodox Tewhedo Church Tradition*, 64-70.

generation. Even through that useless war which, took place in the past years between Ethiopia and Eritrea so many churches were damaged and many young people lost their life.

Therefore, as I mention before the real problem of the young generation in Ethiopia is not just focused on modernization or western influences but the most and real problem is lack of Education, poverty and politics. Their lack of knowledge and poverty and Church's apolitical stand led them to lose interest in the Church activity, not to get meaning in Christian arts, symbols, and traditional Christian heritage. Modernization and western influence also a problem especially to those young people who live in the city.

In General, young people have a great respect for their Orthodox Church, and they are very proud of the Church. We should also accept the fact that the Ethiopian society is still very traditional. In the minds of the overwhelming majority of Ethiopians, a priest is seen as a moral authority, a beholder of proper social living, and a guide to Divinity. Priests are revered and, in most instances, feared by the ordinary Ethiopian.

However, The Ethiopian Orthodox Church doesn't like the "evolution," which is accepted by the Western mind. There is very little "progress" in Orthodox mentality. According to this viewpoint, we do not change little by little, but the contact with God is radical and asks for a full personal transformation. I think for the younger generation what is important is that spirituality is very good. I believe you can find spirituality in various ways. But in this sense, the young generation can find spirituality through the Ethiopian church, a meaning for their lives. It can be as guidance for them. The church is not only the church they go for worship. It is a

sense of belonging for them. It can be also the answer to their problems to their lack of education and other poverty.

As we have seen in the first Chapter, the role of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church as a source of political power and monarchical legitimacy was deeply rooted in the history of the Ethiopian society. Therefore, I understand that the Church can still play an important role in modernizing the Ethiopian socio-cultural, economic fabric and change the life of the poor young people of the country without getting involved in useless politics. But, this can be realized only if it changes its rigid and outmoded doctrine.

Another common accusation against the Ethiopian Church focuses on its lack of missionary zeal, or on the ignorance and worldliness of its priesthood. Extreme conservatism, associated with a deep-seated interest in the traditional landholding system, is another frequent reproach. The great dependence of the church on the state is generally believed to be the prime cause of these defects.

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

After describing, the historical aspects of Ethiopian orthodox church in the first and second chapter what I can say is this: Ethiopians possess many cultural riches collected in the long history of the country. Their identity is one and after all Ethiopia is the oldest independent kingdom in the world. Another is their great ethnic diversity and their wealth of languages and they are particularly proud of their experience of the co-existence of religious traditions.

It is historically true that Ethiopia has been a Christian nation since the 4th C; however before the introduction of Christianity, Judaism also had been practiced in the country over many, many years. So whatever is left over from Judaism is inherited. Ethiopians did not get it off the Judaic culture so when Christianity came simply that culture absorbed it. If we look inside the church now always you find replica of the Ark of the Covenant. So that is the Old Testament symbol that remains in the Church. As well so many Old Testament traditions still survived in the Ethiopian Church.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church, despite the fact that the Empire has always been home to substantial Muslim and animist populations, as well as to other Christian sects. It was the Ethiopian Church which became unique to the culture and the most significant pillars of Ethiopian society; although its origins were in the

earliest Christian church, at Alexandria, Egypt, a link which survives to this day. The Muslims of Ethiopia could identify with the Muslims of Arabia, whereas Ethiopian Christians were limited in the outside forces with whom they could identify. Part of this was because, along with the development of unique languages for the area (and in this case, Ge'ez, the language of the church), the antiquity of Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity ensured that a strong local set of traditions evolved. In Ethiopia, as with Israel through much of this period, and Arabia, but more in Ethiopia than elsewhere because of the isolation, it is still more natural for people to lead a life in harmony with their religion and culture, despite the invasion of modern communications and the exposure which today's modern transportation brings

One of the most important events in Ethiopian art history occurred around 330 A.D., by 500 A.D., the most sacred of Christian texts the Gospels had been translated into Ethiopia, and the foundations of a Christian artistic tradition, setting the course of artistic development in the region, had been firmly established. Ethiopian artists have produced a unique body of church wall painting, manuscript miniatures and panel paintings on wood. The themes and forms of religious paintings in Ethiopia have been handed down from one generation of painters to another by training and local tradition. This accounts for the remarkable continuity that has been maintained for centuries. Lalibela Churches hewn from solid rocks symbolize the enduring strength and steadfastness of the Ethiopian Orthodox Christian Church.

Therefore, this entire strong Christian cultural heritage of Ethiopia needs special pastoral care. I am confident the Ethiopian Orthodox Christian Church will be greatest shield to the Christians in Ethiopia especially to the young people against

all those global challenges. The Church must be more vigilant activist in promoting the unity and territorial integrity of Ethiopia. The Church should play an active role providing moral guidance and communicate effectively its faith through those Christian arts to the young people of Ethiopia. It ought to reform some of its ritual and antique liturgy. It should be more involved not only in spreading the word of God but also on matters dealing with social problems. Young Ethiopians may not know that much about the greatness of their own Church. It is the duty of the Church Fathers to encourage evangelism and involvement in the personal and spiritual lives of Ethiopians.

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