

## **EOTC Synod Renewed its Failure**

**By Teklu Abate**

Millions of Ethiopians have been closely following the peace and unity talks underway between the two competing synods. There was a general understanding and optimism that the synods would make sacrifices of all sorts to ensure reconciliation. The optimism seems to be effectively dashed out now. In their general assembly, the EOTC synod in Addis passed several decisions that successfully put aside the peace and unity initiatives. They decided, among others, that Abune Merkorios would not be allowed to head the patriarchate; election for the sixth patriarch should proceed as planned; members of the synod abroad could participate in the election should they agree; and the peace talks should continue. These decisions are planned to sustain the leadership crisis the church has been suffering from for years.

### **Same Trajectory**

Long time before the nomination of the nominating committee, I argued (<http://tekluabate.blogspot.no/2012/11/eotcthe-two-synods.html>) that the EOTC stood at a crossroads. Now, it is quite clear that the church in deed chose to follow the trajectory it followed for the last two decades. We are yet to witness years of division, skirmish, blackmailing, and unnecessary competition between the synods. This was the trajectory the clergy and the followers most hated. The trajectory is a symbol of spiritual weakness, authoritarianism, nepotism, corruption, injustice, and backwardness. By all accounts, the decisions made would not contribute to the well-being of the Christian community. The way the decisions were articulated equally hurt. The communiqué read on mass media is full of political maneuverings.

### **Scapegoating**

To a layperson, these decisions seem a little bit spiritual and compromising. But it is just the tip of the ice berg. Deep inside lies a lot scapegoating- character assassination. The long communiqué read by Abune Abraham via government-controlled media has a clear goal: to 'assassinate' the credibility and identity of the

synod abroad. Long explanations are given to justify 1) how “wrongly and without interferences” Abune Merkorios left his position; 2) how the synod abroad has been reluctant to make peace a reality; and 3) how much resources and efforts the home synod “genuinely” invested in the peace talks. The explanations are meant to tell the public that the synod abroad is the cause of the problem and the home synod is the holy peace negotiator and savior of the great church. Abune Merkorios and the synod abroad are identified as the scapegoats- the ones and only ones who are responsible for the chaos and stagnation of the church. One would be tempted to ask this: Is that, from spiritual point of view, encouraged to assassinate the identity and character of others? That is why the communiqué looked much political and has nothing to do with the teachings of Christianity: faith in truth, mercy, unity, and love.

Interestingly, the public already knew the **CAUSE** of the problem. The people knew that the synod members are under the mercy and whims of the ruling party. Millions knew that Dr Shiferaw and Ato Abay make the patriarchate their other official seats and the synod members their ‘valued’ clients. They intimidate and harass the synod members 24/7 and gave such ultimatums as the confiscation of lands owned by synod members and possible prosecution of resisting bishops. And they equated the return of Abune Merkorios to the return of the mass murderer Mengistu Hailemariam.

What is hilarious is that the synod members denied such ‘naked’ government interventions. The fact is that the government was the real cause of the problem and it is still the biggest factor that explains much of the phenomenon. At least, history would judge the government for its constant breach of its own constitution. For now, government guys got the guns and the guts to terrorize in public the powerless monks.

This does however not mean that the synod members are not to be blamed for the failure. In fact, they must be considered the **REASONS** behind the mess as preventing the church from interventions of all sorts is their major job. They do not want to make sacrifices of some sort. They tend to love and care for their earthly life,

sometimes to a greater scale compared to the secular lives of ordinary believers. What they fear and respect is government officials and cadres, and not God and over forty million Christians. Simply, they failed twenty years ago and they failed this time around, too.

### **Mind the Gap**

One jacket does not fit all. There are several members of the home synod who are neck-to-neck with government representatives and pro-government bishops. That is mainly why the communiqué read by Abune Abraham does not have stamps and numbers on it. Only a limited number of the bishops are acting like belligerent cadres. They believe (or at least appear to believe) that Ethiopia has got the most popular and developmental government ever. A more ugly stuff is when they decide to invite the government to squash resisting/peace loving bishops. Using government as a shield, they would like to usurp and 'own' the church. In simple terms, they are power thirsted few who are poised to win this time around again.

### **What to Do?**

The people have the right to know all those bishops who are abusing the opportunity put on table. For those who stand against the manipulations, we need to give our support and respect. Believers and unity lovers could still continue the 'fight' until the end in several ways. In my previous article (<http://teklubate.blogspot.no/2012/12/the-eotc-patriarchate-cause-for-disunity.html>), I provided alternative courses of action that were intended to force the synod to prioritize peace and unity. Some of the actions we could still consider include the following. The assumption is that the people are the ones who would and should have final says when it comes to implementing the decisions the synod made. If we all clearly and in a sustained way communicate our choice for freedom, unity, and reconciliation, the synod would be coerced to reconsider their decisions.

- ❖ Those members of the home synod who vehemently oppose government intervention and the decision passed need to carry on their resistance. Create unity

among yourselves and try to speak even louder. Do not sign on the minutes and clearly show defiance against all sorts of ultimatum.

- ❖ The nominating committee must understand that their assignment will not ensure peace and unity- something upon which the church itself is founded. They must turn down their nominations and join the bishops that prioritize reconciliation. Do not let yourself to be part of the untidy heap.
- ❖ Leaders and parish councils of individual churches have a huge possibility to say “No” to this unjust decision. In a way, these are (and not the synod) who are closer and dearer to millions of Christians. They must reject invitations that request collaboration with and to the nominating committee. They must criticize in formal letters and meetings the decision made by the synod and clearly show that they would not financially contribute to the patriarchate if peace and unity are not given priority. They should bring together preachers and spiritual associations for this cause.
- ❖ Collect petitions that oppose the decision and deliver them to the synod
- ❖ Make entirely peaceful demonstrations just around the patriarchate and/or within churches
- ❖ Do not question for a second your religion/EOTC because of the synod’s failure; leadership failure is not strictly speaking equal to institutional failure. Leaders are temporary executive arms.
- ❖ Look forward for ways of collaborating with Christians abroad irrespective of their synod affiliation
- ❖ The media should continue spreading the truth surrounding the matter

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