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The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church in the Diaspora: Expansion in the Midst of Division

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Abstract: *The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC) has expanded considerably during the last two decades throughout the globe in the midst of turbulence caused by the division within the Patriarchate. Focusing on the Diaspora EOTCs, this article discusses critically the causes that gave way to the split within the Church into two Holy Synods—one in Ethiopia and the other in North America—while setting apart some of the major social, political and economic dynamics that contributed to both the division and expansion. The paper contends that the Ethiopia’s government intervention in the Church’s affairs has been at the heart of the problem, and thus the division within the Church is a consequence of the ethnically-politicized social milieu that the regime has created since it came to power in 1991. Quintessentially, the schism within the Diaspora EOTCs into three types—affiliated with the Exiled Synod, affiliated with the Home Synod and neutral—has been the most visible manifestation of the forces at work in Ethiopia. The paper concludes that the Holy Synod in North America must find ways to embrace all Diaspora EOTCs, especially those that are neutral, until such time that the unity of the Church is guaranteed once again at some foreseeable future.*

Keywords: Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, Holy Synod-in-Exile, Patriarchate, affiliated churches, non-affiliated churches, neutral churches, Diaspora EOTCs, Oriental Orthodox Churches

Introduction

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC) has gone through a turbulent period of existence during the last three decades and a half, especially since 1991, when the current regime took over the reins of power from a Marxist military junta that had toppled the government of the late Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974 (Engedayehu 1994). The most dramatic outcome, in the context of the Orthodox faith, of this tumultuous period has been the official split of the Patriarchate of the EOTC into two Holy Synods—one exiled in North America, and the other in Ethiopia. The Church encountered this unheralded turn of event immediately following the 1991 seizure of government by a coalition of rebel movements, known as the Ethiopian People Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) (Engedayehu 1994, 150-151). Immediately after seizing power, the Tigrean People Liberation Front (TPLF), the dominant faction in the EPRDF coalition, removed the then-incumbent Patriarch of the Church unceremoniously, and replaced him with an Archbishop originally from Tigre, who at the time was residing in the United States. However, critics assailed the government’s action as a politically- and ethnically-inspired exploit intended to politicize the Church, while contending that it egregiously violated one of the

cardinal tenets of the Ethiopian Orthodox faith. In their view, installment of a new Patriarch while the incumbent is still alive contravenes the long-standing canon and practices of Oriental Orthodox Churches. Needless to say, the action of the regime led to the unsavory split of the Patriarchate between two Holy Synods—The Holy Synod of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church in Ethiopia (HSEOTC), and the Holy Synod of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church-in-Exile (HSEOTCE).

This paper provides insight into how political, social and economic issues have affected the EOTC since the change of regime in 1991. Relying on the historical method of analysis, the paper traces the earlier period of development of the EOTC and looks into the current crisis of legitimacy within the Church, taking the split in the Patriarchate as a point of departure. It also examines the functions of both politics and religion in church administration and services while gauging their effects on unification and expansion. The overriding goal is to critically analyze the plethora of issues affecting unity among the Diaspora EOTCs.

The paper is significant for two major reasons. First and foremost, there is no known systematic analysis done on the Diaspora EOTCs, and even more so, on the Holy Synod-in-Exile. This has created some confusion and lack of understanding among the faithful about the Church's expansion beyond Ethiopia and the valuable services that it provides for the Ethiopian Diaspora Orthodox community. Second, a thorough investigation of the issues leading to the schism in the EOTC Holy Synod has not been made to date, and this is an effort to do just that.

The premise undergirding the analysis is that politics and religion are inextricable within an organized institution, such as a church, where group interests are aggregated, and values are shared by members of the group. Given that a church is an organized entity where group interests must be articulated and defended, the notion that politics and religion cannot mix in church business or activities is rather a myth than a reality. This fact will be shown throughout the article.

The scope of the paper is limited to those EOTCs outside Ethiopia, with a special focus on both the churches affiliated with the HSEOTCE and the non-affiliated EOTCs, both of which are mostly located in Canada and the United States. While the gist of this exploratory study is aimed mainly at the North American EOTCs, it also attempts to include all others established outside Ethiopia over the years.

Brief Historical Overview of the EOTC

As one of the world's ancient civilizations, Ethiopia's historical development has been conspicuously intertwined with Christianity. In fact, "...the earliest reference to the introduction of Christianity to Ethiopia is in the New Testament (Acts 8:26:38) when Philip the Evangelist converted an Ethiopian court official in the First Century A.D. Ever since then Christianity has played a major role in shaping the culture, tradition and history of Ethiopia" (Ethiopian News. 2012). As such, the Christian faith has been deeply rooted in Ethiopia since Biblical times. Yet the legal foundation of Ethiopia, as recorded in the *Kebre Negest* (The Glory of Kings), is also linked with the introduction of Judaism to this ancient land by means of two historical occurrences: "The birth of Menilek, Son of Solomon, King of Israel and the Queen of Sheba of Ethiopia (970-33 B.C.) and the Ark of the Covenant which was brought to Axum from Jerusalem by the Levites (946B.C.)" (The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church 2012).

The Axsumite Kingdom, the forerunner to modern day Ethiopia, accepted Christianity around 328 A.D. under King Ezana, who ruled the powerful kingdom in northern Ethiopia from 313-339 A.D. Toward the end of the 5th century, Ethiopia's Christian tradition was further enriched by the coming of nine monks from Syria who were credited for bringing monasticism to Ethiopia and making their mark in the translation of the Scriptures into *Geez* (Britannica Online Encyclopedia 2012), a liturgical language that the EOTC uses in most of its services even to this day.

At the same time, many historical events have shaped and influenced the EOTC, starting in the time of the New Testament. For example, the church joined the Coptic (Egyptian) Church in repudiating the Christological proclamation decreed by the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D., which validated that the Human and Divine natures of Jesus Christ were equally present in one person, not combined as one. However, this two-nature doctrine, followed by the Roman and Eastern Orthodox churches, was in conflict with the belief held by the Coptic and Ethiopian Orthodox churches, also known as Non-Chalcedonian or Oriental Orthodox churches, on the Incarnation of Christ. The latter adheres to the single-nature doctrine, holding that Christ had only one nature, which was a complete union of the Human and the Divine, and which could not be divided or separated. According to the Oriental Orthodox churches, Jesus Christ did everything as both Man and God, but the Roman and Eastern Orthodox churches advance a doctrine that He did some things as Man while doing other things as God (Britannica Online Encyclopedia 2012, 1).

In our day, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church is one of the six Oriental Orthodox Churches, and the largest among this group. Tewahedo is a Ge'ez word conveying the meaning of "being made one" or "unified," and referring to the Oriental Orthodox doctrine of the united Divine and Human natures of Christ. So, the Oriental Orthodox churches (The Ethiopian Orthodox Church 2012), including the Coptic Orthodox, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo, the Syriac Orthodox (sometimes referred to as "Jacobite"), the Armenian Apostolic, the Eritrean Orthodox (Separated in 1991 from the EOTC upon Eritrea's independence from Ethiopia), and the Malankara (Indian) Orthodox churches, are in a spiritual union, sharing the common belief on the Biblical mystery of Incarnation (Imperial Ethiopia 2012).

However, the historical legacy and theology of the EOTC tradition has its own unique features that separate the Church's practices and rituals from those of its sister churches. For example, "Many practices related to ancient Judaism—such as veneration for a representation of the Ark of the Covenant in every church—are unique to the Ethiopian Church. On the altar of the Ethiopian churches there is a miniature facsimile of the tabot, one of the tablets of the Ark of the Covenant, which Ethiopians believe is preserved in their country. Ethiopian icons are colorful works of art depicting traditional Orthodox saints, such as early martyrs, but Ethiopian saints as well, and have their own distinctive style" (Imperial Ethiopia 2012, 1).

Events Leading to the Establishment of the Holy Synod-in-Exile

As an organized institution, the genesis of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church beyond the borders of Ethiopia can be traced back to Biblical times—the church has had a significant presence in Jerusalem for more than 1,500 years, as chronicled by historians acknowledging the existence of Ethiopian monasteries in the Holy City (St. Mary Ethiopian Orthodox Ethiopian

Church 2012). “The connection of Ethiopia to Jerusalem dates back to 1,000 B.C. when {the legendary Ethiopian} Queen Sheba visited King Solomon.” In addition to these religious milestones, “...monks and nuns of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church have for centuries quietly maintained the only presence by black people in one of Christianity’s holiest sites—the Church of the Holy Sepulchre of Jesus Christ in Jerusalem” (St. Mary Ethiopian Orthodox Ethiopian Church 2012,1). This iconic presence in the Holy City is even more manifested by the continuing existence of 7 Ethiopian Orthodox monasteries that were built by various Ethiopian emperors over the centuries (St. Mary Ethiopian Orthodox Ethiopian Church 2012, 2).

Nonetheless, EOTC’s historic existence in the most recent past has gone through an evolutionary process that began in the Caribbean Islands more than six decades ago. The EOTC planted the roots of its Orthodox Tewahedo missionary work in 1952 in Trinidad and Tobago for the first time outside Ethiopia and later expanded its teachings to the rest of the Caribbean countries (Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church 2012). Furthermore, the foundation of the Church’s subsequent expansion to North America was set sometime in 1959, when a group of Ethiopian priests and deacons were sent from Ethiopia to the Americas by the order of Emperor Haile Selassie, with the blessing of the then-Patriarch of the EOTC, His Holiness Abune Basilios, for advanced study. Among those who stayed behind was Father Laike Mandefro, who later established a congregation in the Bronx, bringing Ethiopians living in the Western Hemisphere together for their spiritual needs and atonement. Subsequently, Father Mandefro was consecrated as Bishop with the Orthodox religious title of Abune Yeshaq, and later became officially the Archbishop of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church in the Western Hemisphere in 1979. Throughout the years, and until his death in 2005, Abune Yeshaq helped expand the Church’s presence throughout the Caribbean and North America (Wikipedia 2012).

While both the expansion of the EOTC to the Caribbean Islands, and the most celebrated presence of Ethiopian-owned monasteries and churches in Jerusalem centuries ago are quite unique in the annals of African church history, the spread of Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo teachings in the most recent past in North America, to the larger extent, and in Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and a few other African countries, to a lesser degree, is equally significant. Although the exact number of Ethiopian Orthodox churches outside Ethiopia is unknown at this time, those that are found in North America, Europe, the Caribbean Islands, Africa, New Zealand and Australia may have reached at least 70, by some estimates (Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church 2005). One can reasonably assume that the increase in the number of EOTCs in North America and elsewhere outside Ethiopia over the last two or more decades may be linked to several factors, among which is the upsurge of forced and deliberate immigration of Ethiopian citizens to other parts of the world, including members of the clergy, particularly to the United States and Canada, beginning in the latter part of the 1970s and throughout the 1980s, and, more recently, in the 1990s and thereafter.

By some estimates, close to 1 million Ethiopians may have migrated from the Horn of Africa country during the last three decades. The first wave of Ethiopian migration to North America and Western Europe started in the latter part of the 1970s, and grew to a higher level throughout the 1980s. The 1990s and the first decade of this century saw even more Ethiopians immigrating to the United States, Canada, Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Australia and New Zealand. Included within the second wave of immigration were individuals and families who

entered the United States through the Diversity Visa Program, better known as lottery visa, issued by the U.S. State Department on a quota basis to a number of countries, including Ethiopia. However, the second wave of immigration from Ethiopia to the West and other destinations was driven, for the most part, by political, social and economic factors associated with the change of government in 1991.

The coming to power of the TPLF-led regime in Addis Ababa caused thousands to flee their country over the last two decades because of government implemented policies viewed by its critics as unwelcoming to the wishes of the majority. The TPLF rulers, headed by a former Marxist Melese Zenawi, who ruled the country for more than 21 years until his death in July 2012, came to be regarded by many as too authoritarian, repressive of human rights, and anti-democratic; they imposed their vision of a new Ethiopia by virtue of controlling every aspect of the social, political and economic lifelines of the country. The ruling party—the EPRDF—has virtually created a de facto one-party state since it came to power. Four national elections during the last 20 years have gone in favor of the ruling party, which controls virtually every facet of the electoral process, thereby making the opposition parties irrelevant in a political culture that gives no room for transparency.

In light of the burgeoning presence of Ethiopian immigrants in major cities across North America and elsewhere in the post-1991 era, it became rather inescapable for the adherents of the Ethiopian Orthodox faith to search for ways they could practice their religion freely. As one would expect it, immigrants often find spiritual solace and self-contentment by observing their religion with and among the members of their own communities. In the case of Ethiopian immigrants, it became inevitable for them to raise their American-born children with the values and beliefs that their religion calls for. Hence, the goal of finding places of worship became their overriding preoccupation.

To some extent, the earlier existence of a few Ethiopian churches in the Caribbean and the United States gave them an added motivation to continue the tradition of practicing their religion in their newly-adopted countries. As such, the task of creating EOTCs in cities across the United States and Canada began in earnest, and in places such as Europe, Africa, New Zealand and Australia, to a lesser degree. Just as European immigrants in the United States during the earlier decades had done before them, Ethiopian immigrants of the Orthodox Church made a concerted effort to organize themselves and develop fellowship thorough churches, sports clubs, community centers, professional associations, business partnerships, and the like across major cities where they lived. Among such cities are Los Angeles, Denver, Seattle, Washington, D.C., Atlanta, Houston, Dallas, Toronto, Frankfurt, Stockholm, and Johannesburg, just to name a few. A great majority of Ethiopian immigrants live and thrive as legal residents or citizens in these and many other metropolises.

Amongst the community-oriented organizations that Ethiopian immigrants created and nurtured from time to time, the churches became the most indispensable to them. Given their value to immigrants in both spiritual and social contexts, churches normally can offer vital services to new arrivals that are, in most instances, unfamiliar with the languages, cultures and lifestyles of the countries to which they have emigrated. As a rule, it is at churches that new immigrants, for example, find information from fellow countrymen and women on the best ways to develop language competences, find jobs, acquire career enhancement skills, learn about

immigration requirements and services, and become familiar with civic responsibilities and the rules of law. It is a place where networking and solidarity, based on shared values, can be truly created and nurtured. Thus, during the process of assimilation, the value of churches in helping immigrants acclimate to the prevailing culture and society of countries where they live can be immeasurable. This is of course in addition to the spiritual support they render to a community of faith. Along these lines, ETOCs have proven to be most important to Ethiopian immigrants wherever they live.

In the company of Ethiopian immigrants who left Ethiopia also were members of the clergy, without whom Orthodox religious services would not be possible. Since Ethiopian Orthodox Church services require knowledge of both Amharic and Geez languages, it would be unthinkable to set up a church without clergymen, who have attained the minimum credentials of Orthodox priesthood to conduct Sunday services and perform similar activities during all Orthodox religious holidays. Gradually, Orthodox Ethiopian priests, deacons, monks and other ranking clergymen began making their way to North America and other parts of the world, as more churches were created by immigrants and the services of the clergy came to be in high demand. As a whole, Ethiopian Orthodox clergymen moved to North America as well as to other countries in two categories: those who left the country because of opposition to the illegal dethronement of the then-incumbent Patriarch by the current regime, which they viewed as a violation of the Orthodox canon law; and those who left Ethiopia on a religious work visa after securing a church sponsor.

Founding of the Holy Synod-in-Exile

Among Ethiopian immigrants in the Diaspora who fled Ethiopia included several Archbishops and other high ranking members of the clergy. These Archbishops created the Holy Synod-in-Exile in the latter part of the 1990s upon the arrival of His Holiness Patriarch Merkorios in the United States from his temporary exile in Kenya. They and several other high ranking members of the clergy spurned the forced removal of the Patriarch, under whom they served as members of the EOTC and/or the Holy Synod in Addis Ababa, and all of them except Archbishop Yishaq, who was already stationed in New York, made their way to either North America or Europe. The list of the Archbishops included the late Abune Zena Markos, Deputy Patriarch under His Holiness Abune Merkorios, the fourth Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church; Abune Elias, Archbishop of Europe and Africa; Abune Yishaq, Archbishop of the Western Hemisphere and the Caribbean; Abune Melkesedek, Archbishop and a prominent member of the EOTC Holy Synod; and Abune Gorgorios, Secretary of the EOTC Patriarchate in Ethiopia before the regime change in 1991. They all pledged allegiance to His Holiness Patriarch Merkorios. Archbishop Yishaq was particularly instrumental in facilitating the Patriarch's exit from Kenya, along with his fellow Archbishops, most of whom had left Ethiopia earlier. Abune Yishaq, consecrated as Archbishop of the Western Hemisphere and the Caribbean in 1979, lived in the United States since 1959, had declared on September 22, 1992 in New York City that his group was independent of the mother church in Addis Ababa. Accompanied by Archbishop Melketsedek, Abune Yishaq said during the announcement that the new Patriarch (Abune Paulos) was enthroned illegally and thus did not deserve the respect of the faithful. "We will not accept any order or instruction from the Patriarch," Archbishop Yishaq said of Abune Paulos, in

the presence of other Ethiopian Church leaders from California, Canada, Seattle, Bermuda and Washington, D.C. (*New York Times* 1992).

According to the founders of the North America Synod, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church can only have one Synod at a time and that Synod is in exile with the legal Patriarch. The one in Ethiopia, according to them, was illegitimate because it is headed by a Patriarch who was installed by the regime in violation of the canon law of the Orthodox Church. Because the Patriarch is the symbol of leadership and head of the Patriarchate, the legitimacy or legality of the Synod rests with him and the Archbishops with whom he confers and makes religious pronouncements, regardless of where they are located. Based on this argument, the founders claim that the Synod led by Patriarch Abune Merkorios in North America, supported by the Archbishops and the rest of the clergy, is the legitimate Synod, albeit its Patriarchate in exile. On the other hand, opponents dismiss this argument on the basis that Patriarch Abune Merkorios had abdicated his position on his own accord and thus ineligible to establish a rival Synod in exile. Many critics, among whom the faithful, suggest that if the Patriarch was indeed dethroned by the force of the regime, he should still have stood firm against the government and face the consequences of his action at home, even if it included imprisonment or death, rather than fleeing his country as he did (Hailu 2008).

From the outset, the issue surrounding the removal of Patriarch Abune Merkorios became so contentious that for several years it was almost difficult to separate the fact from the hearsay. The controversy brought to light two radically different versions of why and how the removal may have happened at the time. Those siding with the government's explanation of the Patriarch's dethronement contended that Abune Merkorios abdicated his position due to illness, while others vehemently denied that such an abdication ever took place. Those in favor of the former perspective claimed that the Patriarch was a collaborator with the Derg regime and that the majority of the Holy Synod in Addis Ababa wanted a change of leadership anyway. They further contended that the new regime had no choice but to facilitate the selection of another leader to replace the Patriarch, which resulted ultimately in the enthronement of Patriarch Paulos. Tekola Hagos, a renowned Ethiopian scholar and a critic of the Holy Synod-in-Exile, reflects this same view, by stating as follows: "The Synod that elected Patriarch Paulos was called into order included in its initial phase the same Church Fathers who are now making up the 'Synod in Exile.' They were in authority at that time, and were attempting to replace Patriarch Merkorios by one of their own choice less identified with Mengistu" (Hagos 2012).

However, supporters of Patriarch Abune Merkorios insisted that he was usurped his throne by the order of the then-new government, and that, fearing for his life, his handlers had to whisk him away to neighboring Kenya from where he eventually was brought to the United States and has lived in exile since then. While these two conflicting versions of the Patriarch's removal simmered for more than two decades, it was eventually settled by an authoritative source that shed some new light on this matter. The details came from none other than Wikileaks, an international, online organization launched in 2006 that publishes private, secret, and classified information from anonymous news sources, news leaks, and whistleblowers.

Wikileaks began publishing the Global Intelligence Files in February 2012, encompassing over five million e-mails. One of the e-mails, containing data from U.S. State Department diplomatic cables classified as confidential and covering the period between July

2004 and late December 2011, revealed that the former Prime Minister of the TPLF-led government had, in fact, dethroned the Patriarch with his order. Tamerat Layne, who was a Prime Minister for four years (1991-1995) before he was sentenced in 1996 to 18 years in prison for corruption and abuse of power, visited the American ambassador at the U.S. Embassy in Addis Ababa in January 2009 and admitted that he had played a key role in the removal of the Patriarch. Layne was released from jail in December 2008, after serving only 12 years for good behavior. When the ex-Prime Minister met Donald Yamamoto, who served as U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia from 2006 to 2009, he confided to the Ambassador that he regretted the action he took in regards to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church "...because he signed the order that removed the original patriarch and bifurcated the church" (Wikileaks 2012).

In light of the ex-Prime Minister's admission, it became apparent that the EPRDF regime indeed orchestrated the removal of Patriarch Merkorios from his throne, so that it would install Abune Paulos, who was of Tigray ethnicity, as was Prime Minister Melese and all other members of the ruling circle in the TPLF-led government. It was obvious that the new rulers wanted someone at the top of the Church leadership who shared their political vision, and Patriarch Paulos seemed to fit that mold. Given this fact, it was then no coincidence that the Patriarch never voiced words against any of the atrocities committed by the regime since his enthronement. This happened despite the growing condemnation by most if not all the international human rights organizations of the Melese one-party rule and its violation of the basic rights of citizenship in Ethiopia.

EOTC's Expansion to North America and Elsewhere

The expansion of the EOTC from Ethiopia during the last three decades has come about as a function of several interrelated events discussed in the foregoing paragraphs. To sum them up, these include the rise of military dictatorship in 1974 under the Derg; the creation of an ethnic-based reconfiguration of Ethiopia's administrative regions in 1991 under the current minority regime; problems of poverty and unemployment resulting from lack of good governance; political and social conflicts caused by a political system that gives more emphasis on ethnic identity than unity with diversity; and the upheaval caused within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the wake of the forced removal of the Patriarch by the regime. To a curious observer, therefore, there appears to be both a direct and an indirect parallel between these events, on one hand, and the consequential increase in the migration of Ethiopians to other parts of the world, on the other, which in turn has led to the upsurge of EOTCs in places where these immigrants live and work abroad.

The total number of Ethiopian Orthodox Churches outside Ethiopia is not known with certainty; however estimates have ranged from a minimum of 70 to as high as 100. The fact that these churches are most recent creations and scattered globally—stretching from the Caribbean and North America, to Africa and Europe, and to New Zealand and Australia— makes it almost impossible to provide an exact figure at this time. Albeit this uncertainty, the Ethiopian Orthodox Churches throughout the Diaspora may be classified into three categories: Those affiliated with the Holy Synod-in-Exile in North America, pledging allegiance to Patriarch Abune Merkorios; those whose loyalty was to Patriarch Abune Paulos until his death in August 2012 while supporting unequivocally the Holy Synod in Ethiopia; and those that are affiliated with neither

Synod, claiming neutrality.

Given that the paramount focus of this analysis is on those churches affiliated with the Holy-Synod-in-Exile, it is only appropriate to direct a fullest attention to this group of churches at this time. However, this is not to say that the study will not pay attention to the non-affiliated churches, because they are an important part of this exploratory analysis and thus must be addressed in the proper context in the subsequent discussion. On the other hand, the Diaspora churches that support the Synod back in Ethiopia are beyond the purview of this study because they are very few in number, first and foremost, and their membership is also predominantly, if not exclusively, Tigrean. It is a well-known fact that the overwhelming majority of the Orthodox faithful outside Ethiopia maintain membership in churches that are ethnically diverse and also not in alliance with the mother church in Ethiopia, or in cahoots with the regime that is currently in power.

Indeed, the formal establishment of the Holy Synod-in-Exile had a tremendous influence on increasing the number of Orthodox priests, deacons and monks leaving Ethiopia for North America or elsewhere. Those who harbored bitterness toward the illegal enthronement of Patriarch Paulos simply fled the Horn of Africa country at any given time that the opportunity presented itself. For instance, an informal personal interview conducted by this writer with several clergymen during the mid-2000s, who migrated to the U.S. and Canada by way of political asylum or a religious work visa, revealed that almost all of them left the country due to their opposition to the Patriarch's installment, which they regarded as a violation of the canon law of Orthodox Christianity. At the same time, they felt that the EOTC administration under Patriarch Abune Paulos was unfair, corrupt, and often prejudiced against those who are non-Tigreans, adding that the Patriarch himself acted as a "political appointee" of the regime rather than as a religious Father. Despite the controversy surrounding the removal of the former Patriarch, they also unanimously agreed that it was done on grounds of both ethnicity and politics. While the motive of the clergy leaving their country may appear doctrinal in nature, however, other driving forces such as earning a decent living in North America and elsewhere outside Ethiopia may have been a motivation for some. Just as the faithful were drawn to the United States, Canada, Europe and other destinations, due to both economic and political issues at home, so were those ordained to serve the Church.

At the same time, the interconnected dynamics of increasing Ethiopian immigrant population abroad, the growing presence of members of the clergy among the Diaspora community, and the founding of the Holy Synod-in-Exile, all made it timely and provided the window of opportunity for the expansion of the EOTC from its home base. Yet, as the number of churches increased, the need for more clergymen to serve them became further heightened. In other words, the number of priests, deacons and monks available throughout the Diaspora could not catch up with the growing demand for their service, as the expansion of EOTCs in major cities across North America and beyond grew even much faster. It became apparent that, as more Ethiopian Orthodox immigrants organized and established new places of worship closer to areas where they reside and work, the clergy were more in demand for their religious service. In spite of this apparent shortage, however, scores of Ethiopian Orthodox priests, deacons and monks still made their way to North America, as well as to other destinations. This has made the imbalance between the number of clergymen sought abroad and of the churches needing their

service somewhat manageable in the short term; yet, the need for more ordained churchmen to serve the rapidly increasing ETOCs outside Ethiopia could become even much greater in the years to come.

For their part, the spiritual Fathers of the HSEOTCE, following the tradition of the Orthodox Christian church and doctrine, have helped bring Orthodox missionary work and evangelization to a new height outside Ethiopia. The Archbishops in exile, particularly, have so far provided a sense of legitimacy to and validation of the religious work performed by those members of the clergy who left Ethiopia and joined them here in North America in a tribute to the Patriarch in exile. Furthermore, since the creation of the Exiled Synod, the Archbishops have played a pivotal role not only in sponsoring priests, deacons and monks so they may receive a religious work visa from American, Canadian and European embassies in Addis Ababa, but also in organizing Ethiopian immigrants to set up new churches while securing the resources necessary to build them through fund-raising projects. Many members of the clergy in the United States, for example, have been able to adjust their residence status through a political asylum once they came to the states via a visitor visa or religious work permit, and often did so with the help of the Churches that sponsored them initially. In particular, those clergymen working for HSEOTCE-affiliated churches often received their legal papers from the Bureau of U.S. Citizenship and Immigrations Services using supporting evidence for their asylum applications from the Archbishops of the Holy Synod-in-Exile. And the major justification advanced in their political asylum cases often has been the fear of persecution by the regime in Ethiopia for their opposition to the illegal enthronement of Patriarch Paulos.

Thus, the expansion of EOTCs throughout the Diaspora may be credited not only to the strong and vibrant Ethiopian Orthodox faithful, but also to the Synod-in-Exile, which has afforded those churches affiliated with it both the legitimacy and a sense of collective unity under a functioning Patriarchate. After all, the Synod-in-Exile helps clergymen to emigrate from Ethiopia to serve the Orthodox Ethiopian Diaspora community by validating their religious credentials, as they seek legal papers to reside and serve the growing number of EOTCs and their membership.

Consecration of New Bishops by the Holy Synod-in-Exile

While the establishment of the EOTC Synod-in-Exile has been the most significant development since 1991, it has been equally a historical event for the Synod to consecrate new Orthodox Bishops, as well. By so doing, it solidified its official split from the mother Church in Ethiopia. Then again, this happened with a chorus of disapproval from critics.

Patriarch Abune Merkorios and the Archbishops that make up the EOTC Synod-in-Exile, after years of reflections and discussions at their biannual meetings often held in Canada and the United States alternately, made finally a critical decision to sanctify new Bishops among the ranks of the clergy. This task became necessary to organize all HSEOTCE-affiliated churches throughout the states, Canada, Europe, Africa, New Zealand and Australia into several Dioceses, with each Bishop having an oversight on those churches under his jurisdiction. The organization of churches by state and countries under a Diocese has always been a practice of the Orthodox Church, and the consecration of new Bishops to fulfill this need was overdue in light of the growing number of EOTCs throughout the Diaspora. With this being the case, the Synod

identified 13 qualified monks from its affiliated churches and anointed them as Bishops at an elaborate ceremony held on January 21, 2007 at the Church of St. Gabriel in Washington, D.C. and, a few days later, at the Church of St. Mary in Toronto, Canada (see Appendix 2). Subsequently, the Synod designed to divide up its Patriarchate worldwide under 8 Dioceses, an ambitious feat that would require more Bishops and other members of the Orthodox clergy. While this is still work in progress, the Synod initially had a blueprint to establish 5 Dioceses in the United States, consisting of a Diocese each for North, South, East, West and Central regions. This will be in addition to a Diocese for Europe and Africa; a Diocese for Canada; and a Diocese for New Zealand and Australia.

At the same time, the anointment of the new Bishops right away sparked the ire of the Holy Synod in Ethiopia to the extent that the Synod there declared the excommunication of Patriarch Abune Merkorios and the Archbishops who presided over the installment of the new Bishops. For its part, the Synod-in-Exile took a counter action immediately by excommunicating the members of the Holy Synod in Ethiopia (Religion Wikia 2012). And the retaliation and counter retaliation between the two rival Synods at the time when Patriarch Abune Paulos reigned made the possibility of reconciliation in the future more remote than ever. Still, efforts were being made at the time of this writing by mediators on several occasions to engage the two groups in talks that might lead to a peaceful resolution of the schism. Realistically, though, a peaceful end to the crisis can only be achieved with the change of regime in Addis Ababa, as well as with recognition that the installment of Patriarch Abune Paulos while Patriarch Abune Merkorios was still alive was a violation of the core doctrine of Orthodox Christianity in the first place; at least this is the official non-negotiable position of the Holy Synod in North America, according to Abune Melkesedek, General Secretary of the HSEOTCE.

Since the Holy Synod in Ethiopia does not recognize the legitimacy of the Holy Synod-in-Exile, the reaction by the former to the anointment of the new Bishops by the latter was not unexpected. Nonetheless, some of the opposition to the consecration of the Bishops surprisingly came also from individuals and those church groups within the Diaspora that claim neutrality or regard themselves as independent. These non-affiliated churches have often questioned the legitimacy of the Synod-in-Exile, although some still recognize the rightful place of Abune Merkorios as the reigning Patriarch but reject his flee from Ethiopia, as well as his founding of a rival Synod in North America. Likewise, individuals like Tekola Hagos (2012) and others, who have written extensively about the Ethiopian Orthodox Church affairs for years, were quick to denounce the action of the HSEOTCE because they feared that sanctification of the new Bishops would further reinforce the split in the Patriarchate and thus create conditions amenable to a permanent rather than a short-term divide within the EOTC Holy Synod.

Nature and Makeup of HSEOTCE-Affiliated Churches in the Diaspora

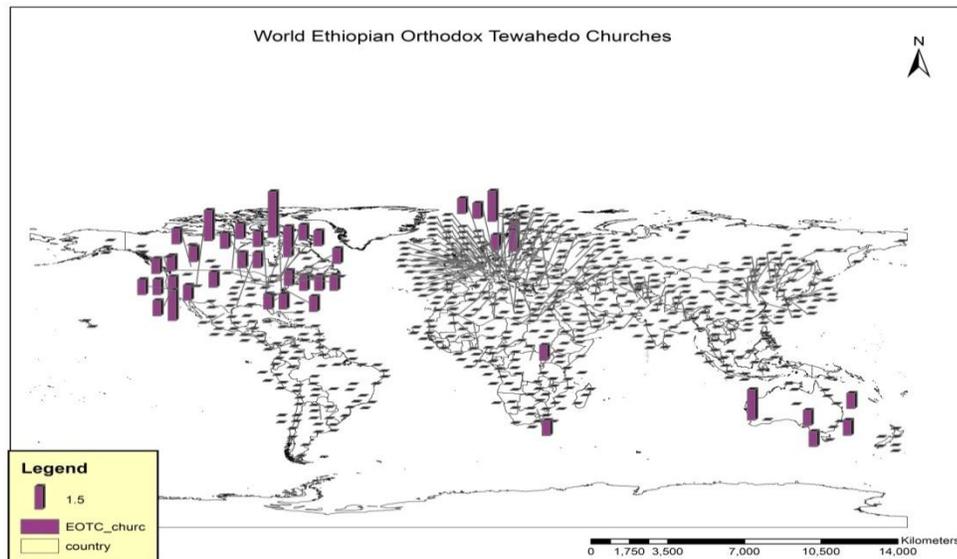
EOTCs that are affiliated with the Holy Synod-in-Exile in North America and elsewhere in the Diaspora are independent in the sense that a Board of Trustees elected by the membership of each church administers the business of the church, including the hiring and managing of the members of the clergy. In essence, their association with the Holy Synod in North America may be characterized as one of voluntary in nature, as the affiliation is not made legally binding per se. However, decisions that relate to regular church services and/or other religious matters still

are left to the clergy, who, in accord with the Orthodox doctrines and creeds, are expected to carry out their sacred duties, including the seven sacraments of baptism, confirmation, penance, holy communion, unction of the sick, holy orders, and matrimony. Since the clergy technically subordinate to the Holy Synod-in-Exile due to the affiliation of the church to the Patriarchate, it can be presumed that they are responsible to the Patriarch in a spiritual sense.

Ordinarily, a church is known to be affiliated with the HSEOTCE when a deacon pays homage to the Patriarch and the Archbishop(s) during the Divine Liturgy or Spiritual Mass by reciting their names and asking the congregation to pray for them, the priests, and other deacons. Affiliation can be further evidenced by the presence of the Patriarch or one or more of the 15 Archbishops that make up the Synod at a member church during a regular Sunday church service or any of the Orthodox holydays, or a special celebration held by that church. The blessing of the church and the congregation, for example, by an Archbishop during such events can be further indication that the church is affiliated with the Synod-in-Exile, unlike neutral churches that are Patriarch-less or bishop-less during any given time. Affiliated churches are also permitted to send one or two representatives to attend the Holy Synod's biannual meeting that takes place interchangeably either at a Canadian city or in one of the few designated cities within the United States.

In every case, each church is guided by by-laws and is registered as a religious, tax-exempt corporation. The by-laws often provide the legal parameters in which the church must function in compliance with the prevailing laws of the state or a country in which the church is located. By and large, the administrative structure of Ethiopian Orthodox Churches in the Diaspora includes an elected board of 7 to 11 members, with an executive body that consists of a chairperson, a vice chairperson, a secretary, a treasurer, and a public relations officer. In some cases, an oversight body, often called trustees, may be elected to oversee the functions of an executive board and whose duties also may include reconciliation and mediation efforts, as issues affecting the church crop up from time to time. The executive body is supported by several committees to transact the business of the church. Each committee is chaired by a board member, and the rest of the committee members are chosen among the constituents of the congregation who pay dues and are qualified. The clergy of each church have specific duties under the by-laws, and are obliged to work under the authority of the board. However, any issues that relate to church services or religious dogma or creed may fall under the jurisdiction of the Abune or the Synod. The map below shows the worldwide expansion of EOTCs during the last two decades (see Appendix 1 for the list).

The EOTCs marked on the above map do not include those churches that are either neutral or recognize the Holy Synod in Ethiopia. The 57 affiliated churches officially recognize the Synod in-Exile, and they do so by reciting Patriarch Abune Merkorios's name during the Holy Liturgy. This typically means that the Board of Trustees, the clergymen who serve these churches, and the rank-and-file members of the congregation all believe in the legitimacy of the Synod-in-Exile.



Non-Affiliated EOTCs in the Diaspora

The so-called non-affiliated churches, or better known as “neutral churches,” are several in numbers, and can be found across the globe, like their affiliated counterparts. However, since they claim to be independent and thus operate without having any association with a Patriarchate or a Holy Synod, or without the presence of any Orthodox Bishops during any of their services, no one knows for sure about how many of such churches exist in the Diaspora at this juncture. Because these churches exist and operate in opposite to the Orthodox norm, critics fault them not only for lacking vision but also for being the source of divide among the Diaspora Orthodox community, pitting the faithful supporting the Synod-in-Exile against those who are opposing it.

Still, non-affiliated churches typically have the same administrative structure and functions as those of the affiliated ones. The by-laws, under which they operate, and the boards and committees that run the business of the church are on the whole similar to those of the affiliated churches. The difference, though, has to do with the fact that their clergy are compelled to submit to the authority of neither Synods. In other words, the clergy in these churches are prohibited by their boards from giving homage to neither Patriarch Abune Merkorios nor the Patriarch in Ethiopia while conducting religious services, a practice hardly ever known in Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity. Rarely do these churches also find a Bishop, as neutral as they are, who would come to offer a blessing of the church and its congregation. Thus, their position of neutrality is often besmirched by critics who, for the most part, can be members of those churches that are associated officially either with the Synod-in-Exile or the Synod in Ethiopia.

Since there are no known doctrinal issues separating the affiliated from the non-affiliated churches in the Diaspora, it appears rather myopic for the neutral churches to cling to a position of non-association with neither of the two Synods. Many critics view their non-attachment to the Orthodox Fathers or by extension to a Holy Synod as a violation of accepted Orthodox Christian practices. At no time in the centuries-old history of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church has there been a case where neutral churches ever existed, let alone functioning without being a part of an

On the other hand, at the heart of the argument advanced by those supporting the non-affiliated churches is that no two rival Synods can ever exist at the same time in Orthodox Christianity and thus the decision to remain neutral is rationally justified. Simultaneously, among the advocates of neutrality, some also maintain that the reigning Patriarch should still be Abune Merkorios but only if he were to exercise his religious authority and lead the Synod at home, not from abroad in exile. Still, the most extreme of these advocates espouse a radically different viewpoint—the Patriarch was installed in the first place with the support of the Marxist Derg regime, therefore, his dethronement was a natural act of righting the wrong (Haile 2008).

Regardless of the rationale used by the non-affiliated churches to choose neutrality over affiliation, it has abundantly become evident over the years that being independent is tantamount to supporting one side or the other. Not only does neutrality violate the practices of Orthodox Christianity, looking at it from the point of view of the Church's dogma and doctrine, but it also provides a tacit approval of the Patriarchate occupied illegally in violation of the canon law of Orthodox Christianity. In this regard, some supporters of the Synod in North America regard the non-affiliated churches as “aiding and abetting” the “illegal Patriarchate” in Ethiopia by virtue of taking the neutral stand. Whether this charge has any merit or not, the fact remains that it would be both logically sound and doctrinally defensible for these churches to take the right course of action by either joining the Synod-in-Exile or the Synod in Ethiopia; neutrality on faith can be neither acceptable nor defensible. Otherwise, the very spirit of such an axiom as, “If you are neutral in the situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor,” might come to define the status of the neutral churches in the Diaspora.

Effects of EOTC Divide on the Diaspora Orthodox Community

One of the adverse consequences of the split in the Patriarchate of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church has been the further divide of the Diaspora EOTCs and the subsequent discontentment emerging within the Ethiopian Orthodox immigrant communities around the globe. This is more noticeably manifested in the rift between those churches that support the Holy Synod-in-Exile and those that are not supportive. Added to this unholy division are also those churches that officially recognize the Synod in Ethiopia and, by extension, the regime in Addis Ababa.

In effect, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the Diaspora has somehow become a product of three “religious denominations,” although not even a trace of dissimilarity in terms of dogma, or doctrine or belief can be found among them. Apparently, it is the politics of the Patriarchate that has been the source of this division. And the natural outcome of such a rift is often disharmony among the faithful, which also can become an impediment to mobilizing the community and its resources for the common good. Many Ethiopian faithful not only resent politics as a way of resolving issues through intense debate, but also abhor it to the extent of rejecting anything that, in their view, appears or sounds to be political. Yet, no organized group or community can be immune from politics and the challenges embedded in it. The politics of religion at churches is no different from the one that is played in other social and political milieus. Especially in Ethiopia, church and state have been interwoven, both practically and historically, in the body politic of the country for centuries. Thus, the notion that politics should not intersect with religion is simply a thought devoid of reality.

So long as there are shared interests claimed by members of an organized group, the game of politics gets to be played. Of course, the setting in which the members of the group compete for such interests (for example, values, morals, beliefs, vested interests, and honors, among them) may be different from one another. As such, the church can become an arena where shared values and interests can be expressed and aggregated, and, for the most part, such values or interests involve—although not exclusively—religious morals and beliefs, or any other principles associated with faith. So, when religious issues are debated and decisions are made based on these values and interests, the process in the end may come as close to politics as it is practiced in the conventional way.

In sum, politics and religion have never existed in separation since the dawn of human history. However, some common folks in the Ethiopian Orthodox Diaspora community that reach out to their Creator through prayers at churches see politics as a deceitful act that should have no place in religion. Unfortunately, this view is based on the lack of understanding about the real workings of human society. In essence, it would be nothing short of naïveté for anyone to think of religious issues that come into play at churches as having no political value or implications for a religious-based community, particularly, and the larger society generally.

Starting in 1991, the foremost religious issue that continuously helps perpetuate division in the Diaspora Ethiopian Orthodox community is the question of legitimacy regarding the head of the Patriarchate. However, this division is not limited to the one played out actively between supporters of the Holy Synod in North America and opponents. The legitimacy issue touches the very core of the Orthodox faithful, as well. More or less, an average Orthodox believer abominates any form of divisiveness in a church. However, without realizing that the church can also be like any other institution and thus be subject to some challenges and tribulations, many of the faithful simply blame the clergy for much of the divide in their community. With this being the case, the Synod-in-Exile has in that case become the focal point of their wrath even to the extent of considering it as the symbol of divide that they so abhor in their spiritual life. This sort of feeling certainly can be detrimental, first and foremost, to social cohesion and unity in a community of immigrants. Even more unfortunately, it presents a major hurdle to an institution, such as a Holy Synod, to advance its core mission of evangelization, as well as the glorification of God through the sacramental life and liturgical worship based on Orthodox Christian teachings.

For the Ethiopian Synod-in-Exile, in particular, it also would mean that its core mission of nurturing and enriching the spiritual life of the faithful through common prayer and ministries of pastoral care, education, service and fellowship may be difficult to fulfill. Without a doubt, any distorted view of the Patriarchate by the faithful could gradually make this vital institution weaker, while at the same time diminishing its value and relevance to its Diaspora Orthodox Church followers.

Conclusion

This study has revealed the fusion of politics and religion within the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. Even more so, issues and conflicts have marked the history of the Church. Perhaps, the politics of religion has been played more intensely in the EOTC than any other church within the Orthodox family of churches. Throughout its history, starting in the 4th

century A.D. passing through the medieval, modern and more recent times, the EOTC has seen many trials and tribulations, reflected both in growth and contraction as a result of the politics of the state or politics within itself, or both.

In recent years, the Church has not been immune from the wind of political changes that has swept Ethiopia since 1991. Politics has made an obstinate mark on the Church in the latest political spectacle, as the EOTC became the first of its casualties. The politics of religion within the EOTC, for instance, has had these consequences during the last two decades: the Holy Synod is split into two; the three-way divide of all Diaspora churches into non-affiliated (neutral), affiliated with the Exiled Synod, and affiliated with Home Synod, is a reality; and the Exiled Synod is undergoing a crisis of growing pain that comes as a natural manifestation of competition for legitimacy and advantage against the Synod at home.

Furthermore, the political acts of the Ethiopian state during the last two decades, coupled with the debilitating economic and social forces causing havoc on the majority of the populace in that country, made thousands to flee in search of better life opportunities in North America, Europe, and elsewhere, giving rise to growing and vibrant Diaspora communities. The EOTC followed the emigrant population across the world and has served the Orthodox faithful well by fulfilling their spiritual needs and helping them maintain fellowship and solidarity. But the Church has made these strides at a huge cost. First, the divide within the Patriarchate has caused the most constraints that the Church has ever seen in its storied existence. The three-way breakup of the Diaspora churches has been the undesirable outcome of the divide between the two Synods. The Exiled Synod, while expanding, has yet to earn the recognition of the neutral churches that exist in breach of the canon law of the Orthodox faith. These churches have operated for several years accepting neither of the Synods and still seem to be determined to remain as such until the unity of the Synods occurs through the acts of “divine intervention.”

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Appendix 1

List of EOTCs Affiliated with the Holy Synod in Exile

	Name of Church	City	State/Province	Country
1.	Debre Meheret Saint Michael EOTC	Las Vegas	Nevada	U.S.
2.	Sealit Mhired Kidist Mariam EOTC	Lithonia	Georgia	U.S.
3.	DebreHaile Saint Gabriel EOTC	Decatur	Georgia	U.S.
4.	Mekane Rama Saint Gabriel EOTC	San Jose	California	U.S.
5.	Debre-Genet Amanuel EOTC	W. Orange	New Jersey	U.S.
6.	Mekan-Berhan Saint Gabriel EOTC	S. Seattle	Washington	U.S.
7.	Debre-Medhanit Medhanialem EOTC	Columbus	Ohio	U.S.
8.	Virgin Mary EOTC	Los Angeles	California	U.S.
9.	Tserha Ariam Kidist Mariam EOTC	Los Angeles	California	U.S.
10.	Kidane Mihret EOTC	Rochester	New York	U.S.
11.	Saint Ourael EOTC	Saint Paul	Minnesota	U.S.
12.	Saint Michael EOTC	Sioux	Utah	U.S.
13.	Oran Debre-Genet Kidane Mihret EOTC	Jacksonville	Florida	U.S.
14.	Saint Mary EOTC	Layton	Utah	U.S.
15.	Hamere-Noh Kidane Mihret EOTC	Houston	Texas	U.S.
16.	Holy Trinity EOTC	Ilk-Grove	California	U.S.
17.	Saint Mary EOTC	New York City	New York	U.S.
18.	Saint Gebriel EOTC	San Diego	California	U.S.
19.	Tserha Ariam Dagmawit Gishen St. Mary EOTC	Aurora	Colorado	U.S.
20.	Debre-Haile Kidus Gebriel EOTC	Washington	D.C.	U.S.
21.	Meskaye-Hizunan Medhanialem EOTC	Tampa	Florida	U.S.
22.	Mekdane Selam Medhanialem EOTC	Oakland	California	U.S.
23.	Mekane Selam Eyesus EOTC	Baltimore	Maryland	U.S.
24.	Mekane Kidist Selassie EOTC	Sacramento	California	U.S.
25.	Debre Miheret St. Michael & St. Gebriel EOTC	Sioux Falls	South Dakota	U.S.
26.	Debre Leul Amanuel Kidane Mihret EOTC	Washington	D.C.	U.S.
27.	Mekane Berhane Eurael-Erufael EOTC	Washington	D.C.	U.S.
28.	St. Mary EOTC	Portland	Oregon	U.S.
29.	Medhanealem EOTC	Toronto	Ontario	Canada
30.	Kulebi Gebriel EOTC	London	Ontario	Canada
31.	Debre Meheret Kidus Gabriel EOTC	Calgary	Alberta	Canada
32.	Debre-genet Kidist Mariam EOTC	Winnipeg	Manitoba	Canada
33.	Medhanalem Church of Montreal EOTC	Montreal	Quebec	Canada
34.	Debre Selam Medhane Alem EOTC	Edmonton	Alberta	Canada
35.	Debre Kidusan Teklehaimanot EOTC	Ottawa	Ontario	Canada
36.	Geshien Debre Kerbie St. Mary EOTC	Vancouver	British Colomb.	Canada
37.	Debre-Sina Kedane Meheret EOTC	Kichener	Ontario	Canada
38.	Kidues Gebriel EOTC	Halifax	Nova Scotia	Canada
39.	Melbourne Medhanealem EOTC	Melbourne	Victoria	Australia

40.	Sydney Kidest Mariam EOTC	Sydney	New S. Wales	Australia
41.	Adelaide Urael EOTC	Adelaide	S. Australia	Australia
42.	Perth Medhanealem EOTC	Perth	W. Australia	Australia
43.	Perth Gebrailwakidane Mariam EOTC	Perth	W. Australia	Australia
44.	Brisbane Giorgis EOTC	Brisbane	Queensland	Australia
45.	New Zealand Kidist Mariam EOTC	Auckland City	Auckland	New Zealand
46.	Mekane Selam Medhanealem EOTC	Kampala	Central District	Uganda
47.	Holy Trinity EOTC	Newdoornfontein	Gauteng	South Africa
48.	Meskaye Hizunan Medhanealem EOTC	Frankfort	Brandenburg	Germany
49.	Kedist Kidane Meheret EOTC	Wiesbaden	Hesse	Germany
50.	Kedist Ledeta Lemariam EOTC	Stuttgart	Baden-Wurttemberg	Germany
51.	Debre Miheret Kidus Michael EOTC	Darmstadt	Hess	Germany
52.	Kedist Dingle Mariam EOTC	Munich	Bavaria	Germany
53.	Debre Selam Medhanealem EOTC	Stockholm	Sodermanland	Sweden
54.	Debre Haile Kidus Gebriel EOTC	Gothenburg	Bohuslan	Sweden
55.	Lund Mariam EOTC	Lund	Scania	Sweden
56.	Stockholm Mariam	Stockholm	Sodermanland	Sweden
57.	Norway Tekle Haimanot	Oslo	Vestfold	Norway

Appendix 2

List of New Bishops Consecrated in 2007 by the Holy Synod in Exile

1. Abune Sarios
2. Abune Mekarios
3. Abune Baslios
4. Abune Demetros
5. Abune Philipos
6. Abune Lucas
7. Abune Michael
8. Abune Samuel
9. Abune Yoseph
10. Abune Yohannes
11. Abune Yaecob
12. Abune Tekle Haimanot (Deceased)
13. Abune Selama