

THE Period of Conflict and destruction (The Fall of Axum)

Lack of Spiritual Guidance

This Age is the time where most of the golden achievements of Axumite Dynasty lost its integrity and faced massive destruction of local rebellion. During the mighty flood of the Islamic storm over the Horn of Africa, only Ethiopia remained being a free Christian country. During this Age, the Islamic external war and the equally aggressive internal civil war were a heavy blow to the historical Solomonic royal Dynasty which was knocked down to the ground for 40 years. In this critical period of national trial, the Church of Ethiopia took the initiative to demonstrate the resurgent spirit within the nation, in order to encounter the crises and preserve liberty. So, the Christian faithful succeeded in preserving the mighty power of the Cross of Christ and the crown of the Solomonic Dynasty, which are the historical symbols of national dignity for the nation of Ethiopia.

At that time Ethiopia was cut off from the world. The life before her was one of austerity, isolation and piety and she turned to a kind of inward contemplation in spite of the internal struggle that from time to time disrupted the life of the community. Perhaps, it was this prolonged period of pious mediation which enabled her to build a civilization so distinctively her own, such as the rock-hewn churches of Lalibela, the admirable construction of Ethiopian architecture.

According to John Baur Ethiopian's This Age is the time between the advent of Islam /640AD/ and the restoration of the Solomonic line in 1270AD. It is the age of isolation from the outside world. C. Harris, in his book the Highlands of Ethiopia, says that "Aethiopia ... nearly isolated from the remainder of the world, rested for the next ten centuries as sealed book to European history, preserving her independence from all foreign yoke, and guarding in safety the flame of the faith, which she had inherited from her fathers" (C.Harris, 1844: vol III, 87)

Especially, about three hundred years until the end of Yodit's reign one can hardly give an accurate account of the works of church affairs by the

Axumite kings. To the outside world there was a belief /rumor/ in the existence of a powerful Christian king called "Prester John". Between 918-1002, the Ethiopian church could hardly get a Bishop. This was due to the pressure from the Moslems in control at Cairo whose aim was to propagate the teachings of Islam in Ethiopia and elsewhere in the world. However, the Ethiopian Synxarum of Hidar(November) 12:294 tells us that in the time of Patriarch Qosmos III, /918-931/ Bishop Petros was sent to Ethiopia. He was received with great joy, for the Ethiopian Christians had not seen a bishop for many years.

After the death of the king (his name is not mentioned, but, it is said that the king was Anbessa Wudem and his elder son Dil Nead), the two sons antagonized for the throne and Bishop Petros was called to intervene and he decided that the younger should be a king. Unfortunately at that time two evil Syrian/by birth/monks that were guided by Satan and were dismissed from the monastery of St. Anthony, Abba Mennas and Abba Fictor came from Egypt with forged letter from the Patriarchate which states the dismissal of Bishop Petros, (who was considered as false bishop/imposter) and the appointment of Abba Mennas as a bishop in his place. They made the crown to be given to the elder son. Then, with the support of Mennas and Fictor the elder son became a king and Bishop Petros was sent to prison. After sometime, the two monks quarreled and Fictor having stolen the money/gold etc. / of the Bishop fled to Cairo and became a Muslim. After hearing this matter /information, news/ the Patriarch excommunicated Mennas and he was killed by the king's order. In the mean time, Bishop Petros died in prison. The king requested for another bishop but his request was denied by the Coptic Church that is during the reign of the following five Patriarchs Qosmos III, Macari I, Theopanius, Menna II, and Abraham I, bishops were not sent to Ethiopia. The work of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church was carried on by Egyptian monks, who were previously assistants to the late bishop Petros until a bishop was sent to Ethiopia by Patriarch Philotheos /979-1004/. In this time Islam was also penetrating on the periphery of Ethiopia and was occupying some parts of the country such as Barka, Ifat etc.

As it is mentioned above, after the death of Bishop Petros, the Coptic Church rejected to send bishops to Ethiopia for many years: nearly half a century. The country at that time had entered a very critical period on

her history, which was interpreted as an expression of the wrath of God because of the absence of a Coptic bishop in Ethiopia.

The Ethiopian king, Anbessa Wudem asked king George of Nubian to use his influence with Patriarch Philotheos to send a bishop to Ethiopia to encourage the Christian community who suffered too much by Yodit. Thus, through the mediation of King George of Nubia, Patriarch Philotheos appointed Abba Daniel bishop to Ethiopia. It was an occasion of joy to the Ethiopian Christians who had suffered persecution for forty years under Yodit. Upon the arrival of Bishop Daniel, peace was restored; churches were rebuilt, clergies were reinstated, and church literature was rewritten. (Taddesse Tamrat, 1972: 41). During this period, however, the kingdom of Axum had already declined completely.

The Destruction of the Axumite (Ethiopian) Kingdom and the Church by Gudit, Yodit, 852-892)

After the Axumite Kingdom began to decline, the production of coins also ceased in the early 7th century. Around this same time, the Axumite population was forced to go farther inland to the highlands for protection due to the increasing rebellion from different parts of the kingdom. Eventually the kingdom faced long lasting and several popular persecution and destruction of its high level civilization. History holds that Yodit (Judith) or "Gudit" defeated the Kingdom and burned its churches, literature, and other achievements. Many hypotheses have been forwarded for this event.

One of these possibilities is that since the introduction of Christianity and its becoming the official religion of Ethiopia under the rule of Abraha and Atsbeha (307-345) the religion has gained many followers, many churches and monasteries started to flourish in the subsequent years, replacing the Old Testament manner of worship. However, a small section of the population later called Bete Israelites; Felashas continued to observe their Old Testament discipline. Thus, to escape certain level of marginalization from the Christian community the people who maintained their Jewish beliefs.

By the ninth century their number had gradually increased and they became confident to the point of refusing to pay tribute to the Axumite court. This rebellion founded a notorious leader called Yodit.

Thus, Judith led the revolt against the Christian Axumite kingdom. She had destroyed Axum, burnt the church of St. Mary, which was built by Abreha and Atsbeha and other churches. She also killed the priests. She destroyed books, monuments and palaces. She is credited with having mobilized the first persecution on the church of Ethiopia and with having destroyed the monuments and all artifacts of the city. She also killed the Axumite princes who had been imprisoned on Amba Geshen, a remote mountainous region to prevent them from rebelling against her kingdom. She killed and enslaved the Christian population.

According to the custom of the Ethiopian monarchies of those days all the male descendants of the reigning king except his minor sons were kept under heavy guard on the inaccessible mountains' top like Amba Geshen, Debre Damo etc. When a king died it was from among the detained princes on mount Geshen etc, that his successor was chosen.

This skilful plan gave a high degree of political stability to the medieval Christian kingdom. This was done to prevent an unexpected disturbance against the king and the country by the followers of any prince. This rule remained intact up to the first half of the 16th century. And during the second half of the 19th century Emperor Tewoderos imprisoned Lij Menelik the later Emperor Menelik II in the same place. When news reached Yodit that Anbessa Wudem fled and was in hiding in Menz, she sent an army to crush his forces and capture him. However her army was defeated and the attempt failed. Then, she set forth herself for Menz with her army but King Anbessa Wudem and his army retreated to the even impregnable and hostile area of Merhabate. Yodit followed him but the rough terrain coupled with incessant harassment inflicted by the king's army forced her to return to Axum, where she ruled a further 13 years. Yodit died after 40 years of persecuting the king, while returning to her place after having burned the church of Abreha and Atsbaha, which was built in Gulbisha province (Asres Yayeh, 1989 E.C. 15-16) On the way God willed to misdirect her to a place called Adi-Nefas and here it is said a whirlwind carried and dropped her to death at a place called Ade-kaweh. Her grave is found at Ade-Kaweh near Wukro,

Tigrai, and is marked by a heap of stones thrown by the people who were pleased with her death.

Monasteries of Debre- Damo, Zarema Georgis, Gunda Gundo, Tana and very few others which were inaccessible; and some stelae and tombs of Axum escaped from being destroyed by her. Yodit's system of counting the army was as follows; during her march against the enemy she ordered every one of her soldiers as he passed along to put a stone on a certain spot; and on the return again to place a stone at a short distance from the former heap. The first is a large mass, the second very much smaller. In this way she was able to know the number of her dead soldiers and recruited fresh soldiers. One of the places where such stones were put is called "Kimer Dengea" found between Debre Tabor and Gaynt.

About the escape of " the Ark of the Covenant" from destruction it is stated that during the war waged by Yodit on the Christians, in order to save the Ark of the Covenant from destruction, it was brought from Axum to an Island of Zeway in Oromia by the priests and people who were able to flee, and was rested in the monastery of Debre Sion. Then after the death of Yodit it was brought back to Axum when peace was restored. (Archbishop Gerima, etal 2000 E.C 268). On account of her extreme cruelty and destructiveness, Yodit was given different names worthy of her deeds she was called Gudit (monster) and Isato (fire). (Archbishop Gorgorios, 1974 E.C: 34-35)

After the death of Yodit, Anbessa Wudem (892-912) re-organized his army and returned to Axum. The Christians in the city received him with great honor and joy. He then fought against the Felasha who opposed him and defeated them. After the restoration of peace and order, King Anbessa Wudem rebuilt the church of St. Mary with seven Mekdes (sanctuaries) and other churches, etc, and ruled for twenty years. At his death, his son Dil Nead (912 - 922) the last ruler of Axum succeeded him. Some of the Felasha people were converted to Christianity but many remained practicing their Jewish faith in Ge'ez language. Since they were given little attention they became hard working to support themselves. They engage themselves as weavers, ironsmiths, potters and carpenters. As mentioned in Part I, p25 many of the Bete Israelites repatriated to Israel in different operations.

THE RISE OF THE ZAGWE DYNASTY **(The Era for the Spread of Christianity and Building of Rock Hewn Churches)**

The Transfer of Power from Axumite Dil Nead to the Zagwe Mera Tekle Haimanot

Dil Nead's rule was shaky and full of trouble. Some of the people of Agew, Lasta and Semien, who resented in the return of the Axumite king, became unruly. Mara Teklehaimanot, governor of Lasta (922-935), Dil Nead's son-in-law and the General of the army killed Dil Nead; seized power and proclaimed himself king about 922 A.D. inaugurating the Zagwe Dynasty. Then he moved the capital from Axum to Wollo province, to Roha (now Lalibela). This marked the end of the Axumite Kingdom. He was from the line of ancient Agew blood. The term "Zagwe" which is a Ge'ez word is translated to mean "of Agew" belonging to Agew or chasing. Because Mera Tekle Haimanot chased the king and pierced his back, the dynasty was named Zagwe (chaser)

There were eleven Emperors of this dynasty who ruled over Ethiopia from 922-1268 (1270) A.D. They were Christian kings who devoted most of their time to building churches and preaching Christianity. Some of them were functioning priests. Thus, the medieval European view of them as priest – kings, as embodied in the legend of Prester John. They used Ge'ez as the official language both for speaking and writing, and they maintained Ethiopian traditions in their cultural and social life. The capital of the Zagwe kings was Roha, which was also known as Adafa, The town of Roha later changed its name to Lalibela to honor Emperor Lalibela.

Some of the Zagwe Emperors, Who Contributed a Lot to the Church and the Nation

The most outstanding contribution of the Zagwe kings was their activities in the Church affairs. Christianity spread far to the South and West during the Zagwe period; and it was preached almost everywhere in the Kingdom. The kings also built churches in their capital, Wollo-Lasta, Amhara, Tigrai, Begemedr, and Oromia -Adadi Mariam etc. In

the early period of the Zagwe dynasty, the Ethiopian Church opposed the new rulers strongly. But later they were regarded as legitimate rulers.

The Zagwe kings claimed a pre-Solomonic descent and their connection with Moses based on the book of Numbers 12:1 where it stated that Moses took a Kushite (in the Septuagint Ethiopian) wife. This is to legitimize their royalty. It suggests that they had found it necessary to raise a counter claim against the dynasty, which they expelled.

As it is mentioned above, the Zagwe kings were Christians and the only way to win over the church was to increase their missionary efforts and build churches and monasteries. They have proliferated Christian faith by converting pagan Agaws to Christianity in northern Ethiopia. This was the period of great religious activities. It was in this period that the famous Rock-hewn churches at Roha (later called Lalibela) were built by king Lalibela. The Ethiopian Church made Lalibela a saint for his great missionary, personal life and religious activities. He fought against the Arabs (Muslims) and tried to push them away from Massawa. In making monolithic churches in Roha, his one aim was to make second Jerusalem in Ethiopia, since Jerusalem in Palestine had fallen into the hands of Muslims. Lalibela (Roha) became world famous at the time of Crusades and a refuge to all the Christians of Arabia, of the Orient and Egypt who were fleeing from Islam. While the Zagwe kings were reigning, Bishop Daniel died and the country was left without a bishop again and the end plan of Muslims against Ethiopian Christians had become dangerous. The number of Christians converted to Islam had extensively increased. Such conversion was associated with trade and commercial expansion throughout the country. This was because the Zagwe kings conducted no serious wars of importance against the Muslims.

The usual request for a bishop was made during the office of patriarch Christodoulou (1047-1077). However, the patriarchate of Alexandria, which was transferred at that time to Cairo, was under the control of Muslims, who not only demanded the expansion of trade and protection of Islamic religion in Nubian and the Ethiopian kingdom, but also interfered, in the actual selection of the Egyptian candidate to be ordained as a bishop of Ethiopia. It was difficult to obtain a bishop canonically ordained at this condition.

During the reign of King Germa Seyum 1015-1055, Bishop Sawiros was sent by patriarch Cyril to serve the Ethiopian Christians. But instead of serving the Church, to fulfill his promise to the Amir Al-Juyush he started to support and protect Muslims in Ethiopia secretly and to do every thing in their interest. He also hoped by doing this, the Amir will enlighten the sufferings of the Christians in Egypt. After hearing the secret damaging activity of the bishop the people and the king turned against Sawiros and sent him to prison. Germa Seyum died and was succeeded by his son Ymrahana Kristos.

The Contribution of Ymrahana Kristos

During Ymrahana's reign the Christians in Egypt were suffered persecution under Muslim rulers. Upon hearing this, Yemrahana wrote a letter to the Muslim leader in Egypt threatening that if the persecution of the Christians in Egypt continued he would punish them by diverting the water of the Nile. This had brought a great fear among the people of Egypt assuming that the king could bring famine to their land by diverting the water if he so wished. Ymrahana Kristos (1087-1127) prohibited the pagan practice of magic through a decree. In addition, he prescribed monogamy for Christians to abide by, an example which he himself lived on. And in his capacity as a priest he regularly fulfilled his duty, celebrating the Holy Communion and hearing confession. Ymrahana Kristos is canonized as a saint in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. In addition to Ymrahana Kristos, Harbe, Lalibela, and Neakuto le'ab are canonized saints.

Abune Michael, Patriarch of Alexandria, was sent to Ethiopia to negotiate regarding this serious matter. His Holiness told the king that if the Blue Nile waters with its fertile earth were diverted, it would not only hurt the Muslims, but also affect the lives of the Christians. The king who had respect for the patriarch, agreed and after a successful mission, Abune Michael returned to Egypt with joy.

After Zagwe dynasty, Amde Tsion (1312-42) too intervened in defense of the Christian church of Alexandria, which was suffering persecution under the Mamluk Sultans. He threatened to deflect the course of the Blue Nile. The Nile carries with it not alone life-giving water but also

the rich red earth from Ethiopia thereby providing the agricultural wealth of Egypt.

Seife Are'd (Newaye Kiristos 1344-1372) was another champion of the Alexandrian Church. The Khalifah of Egypt having imposed excessive taxes upon the Church, the patriarch of Alexandria refused to pay and the Khalifah cast him into prison. Newaye Kristos, in defense of the patriarch, sent horsemen to drive back the Egyptian caravans approaching the Ethiopian frontier and took similar measures towards sea-borne trade. This punitive action proved so effective that the merchants and people of Cairo clamored against the avarice of the Khalifah, who was obliged to release patriarch Mark and to beg the Emperor of Ethiopia to permit the resumption of normal trade.

The Contribution of Emperor Harbe

Yemrahana Kristos died and was succeeded by his nephew Harbe (Gebre Mariam 1127-67) son of Jan Seyoum and brother of Lalibela. Harbe was a man who had a vision regarding the future of the church. He saw that one Coptic bishop who cannot speak the language of the country could not satisfy the spiritual needs of the millions of believers in Ethiopia.

Therefore, he asked the Alexandrian patriarch not only for several bishops to be consecrated, but also for the bishops to be Ethiopians. The Ethiopian Sinkisar (Synaxarium) of Miazia (April 10), without mentioning the name of the king, tells us that "the king of Ethiopia commanded the current bishop of Ethiopia Abba Michael to appoint bishops over the country". And Abba Michael said, "I can not appoint without the command of the patriarch". Then, the Ethiopian king wrote a letter to Abune Gabriel II, requesting him to allow Bishop Michael to consecrate Ethiopian bishops. He also sent a letter to the king (Sultan) of Egypt asking for his cooperation in this matter and to command the patriarch to appoint bishops. At first, both the king of Egypt and the patriarch agreed to command Abba Michael, bishop of Ethiopia, to do everything that the king of Ethiopia wished, however, some Egyptians who were residing at the Ethiopian imperial court came to know about the negotiations underway. They soon reported to the king of Egypt and said to him, if the bishops become many in the country of Ethiopia they will become bold, and they will appoint bishops as they please, and they

will never return to thee at all. Upon this advice both the king of Egypt and patriarch Gabriel reversed their decision and denied the request made by the Ethiopian king.

As a result, the relationship between the king of Ethiopia and patriarch Gabriel was at its lowest stage. Later, Harbe without losing hope, wrote another letter to patriarch Yohannes inquiring that at least one Ethiopian native be consecrated as a bishop, who would assist Abune Michael as he was getting old and unable to travel from place to place. This request was also refused, for the simple reason that the Alexandrian Church claims that Ethiopians are forbidden to appoint from among their learned men. Further reason of refusal was the fear that if Ethiopians have native bishop, the next step will be to demand autonomy and the annual tribute in gold and other gifts that was due to Alexandria might stop. Even though the just attempts of King Harbe were failed at that time, his effort was not in vain. Eventually, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church became fully independent, and his vision has been fulfilled in the 20th century.

The 11 Rock-Hewn Churches of Lalibela Assembled in Three Separated Groups

The Northern Group: group one

1. Bete Medhane Alem, its numerous internal and external columns symbolizes the 72 disciples of Jesus. It is one of the other largest monolithic churches in Ethiopia and the cross of king Lalibela “Afro Aygeba” is kept in this church.
2. Bete Mariam is the oldest of the churches, one storey monolithic building and has a holy water in which sick people are cured near to it, the most beautiful and highly decorated church. It is surrounded by Mame Gara (hill) where the annual birth day of Christ and Lalibela celebrated.
3. Bete Michael is a semi hewn church with lots of engravings and holy images.
4. Bete Meskel is a cave church. The external walls are decorated with great skill.
5. Bete Denagil is a semi rock-hewn church built in commemoration of the virgins who received martyrdom by the Romans.

6. Bete Golgotha is attached to Bete Michael, and both are semi hewn churches. Bete Golgotha contains the tomb of King Lalibela, his hand cross and his prayer stick, nearby symbols of the tomb of Adam, Keraniyo (Calvary), etc are found.

The Eastern Group: group two

7. Bete Emanuel, the second largest and beautiful one storey monolithic church is attached to Bete Merqorios by a long dark tunnel.
8. Bete Merqorios, a semi-hewn church, where the holy image of St. Mary exist.
9. Bete Abba Libanos, this church is said to have been built by Empress Meskel Kibra the wife of Emperor Lalibela, in the memory of Abba Libanos. The roof is attached to the main land and the walls in all direction are separated. A ray which comes out of unknown hole of the roof lightens the altar.
10. Bete Gabriel- Rufael: - The long flat stone which is found near the church symbolizes the road to heaven. This church is the tallest one and it is a one storey building, but the underground is submerged into water and church services are now performed on the upper storey

The Western Group: group three

1. Bete Giorgis is said to be the most finely executed and best preserved church. The monolithic rock-hewn church of Bete Giorgis was built in the shape of the cross far from the above mentioned groups. It is mostly popularized on different publications to represent the rock-hewn churches of Lalibela.

There are subterranean passages or tunnels that interconnect these groups. In order to get from one sanctuary to the next, one either has to go very carefully down along the subterranean passage or cross a mighty chasm by means of a narrow plank. The churches are not built stone by stone on top of the ground but have been cut out of the red volcanic solid rock from ground level downward. Especially for monolithic part large area was chosen and then trenches were dug, leaving one large solid piece of rock. This great rock was cut out inside with pillars left to hold up the stone roof and walls. And also small chambers, corridors,

entrance windows, floors etc., were hollowed out of the solid rock. The largest of Lalibela's rock-hewn churches is the church of the Redeemer of the world (Bete Medhane Alem). It is about 33.5 meters long, 22.5 meters wide and 11 meters high. It is supported by 72 pillars

There are about three types of rock-hewn churches well known in Ethiopia:

1. Cave churches;
2. Semi-hewn churches,
3. Monolithic churches.

The first type, the cave was changed into a church having some decoration inside, for instance, there is a rock-hewn cave church of Yeka, Washa Michael, found to the north – east of Addis Ababa and Adadi Mariam about 50 kilo meters south ward of Addis Ababa, while the second type included detailed interior decoration intended to represent a complete church and partial external decoration, without the whole being separated from the main rock. The walls of the third type are separated from the main rock. Then, both its interior and the exterior are decorated. Obviously other rock – hewn churches are found in Tigrai, Gonder (Zoz'Amba Giorgis), Wollo, and in Showa (Like Wahsa Michael and Adadi Mariam), etc... and most of them antedated those of Lalibela.

A stream, which flows from north – east to the southwest is called Jordan. In Christian tradition, it is believed that the river Jordan, in Palestine plays a most important part in the act of seeking salvation. The pilgrim should drink from it and be baptized in it. Thus he or she secures salvation for his soul and ensures that his body will remain intact after death. The source of the Ethiopian river Jordan is on Debrezeit, a hill east of Roha. At its source, the river branches, one stream called the Yor flowing down the north – eastern side and the other, the Danos, flowing south – western part.

A third stream, the Henon flows between these two, further to the west, where all three join, the river is called Yordanos; near Bete Giorgis at their meeting point the lake formed is known as Yohannes Amba after John the Baptist. The lake symbolizes the place where Christ was baptized by John and at Epiphany all the churches (Tabots) of Roha

gather there to celebrate the event. But today the celebration of Epiphany is conducted near Roha Hotel.

One of the main purposes to carve the rock churches of Lalibela was the demand for the place of pilgrimage. Hence Lalibela a city in northern Ethiopia become, one of Ethiopia's holiest cities, second only to Axum, and is a center of pilgrimage for much of the country. Like Axum, the population of Lalibela is almost completely followers of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. Emperor Lalibela has intended to build a new second Jerusalem in response to the capture of Jerusalem by Muslims, and many of its historic buildings take their names and layout from buildings, places and geographical places in Jerusalem. Thus, Lalibela is said to have imagined Jerusalem and then attempted to build a New Jerusalem as his capital in response to the capture of old Jerusalem by Muslims. As such, many features have Biblical names - even the town's river is known as the River Jordan. It remained the capital of Ethiopia from the late 12th century and into the 13th century.

The rock-hewn churches of Lalibela are one of the eight wonders of the world. The World Heritage Committee met in Washington, D.C., in September 1978 to establish the initial properties to be included on the World Heritage List. The rock-hewn churches of Lalibela, carved into the ground of mountainous north-central Ethiopia in the 12th century, constitute one of the 12 World Heritage Sites that were approved at this historic conference.

The first European visitor of Lalibela, Francis Alvarez, a member of Portugal embassy in the early 16th century was full of admiration for the rock-hewn churches of Lalibela. He wrote about them saying "... very well hewn churches excavated from the rock, like of which cannot be found any where in the world..." he conclude with the statement "I weary of writing more about these buildings, but it seems to me that I shall not be believed if I write more... I swear by God, in whose power I am, that all I have written is the truth."

During the reign of king Lalibela, the Zagwe kingdom was roughly divided in four administrative systems. The Northern Province was administered from the capital Axum, and it extended from the Red Sea (Massawa) to the river Werr, south of Axum, this province was administered by the Nibure 'Ed of Axum. And he has the privilege to sit

on the golden seat right next to the king. The second province is that which includes the central administration centered at Roha, the region extends its width from river Werr to Beshelo River and from the Blue Nile to Zoble, a mountain in Azebo. The head of the churches of Roha, Leke Kahinat, was responsible for governing of this area. He was also privileged to sit on the left next to the king. The third province which includes the whole North West part of the country, extended from the Alay to the Blue Nile was governed by Re'ese Reousan of Mertule Mriam. The man in-charge has a very great responsibility due to the wideness of the region and has the privilege to sit near to the Nibure 'Ed. The final and another most important province, highly exposed to the southern end of the country was the province administered by the Patriarch. This was the title of Tedbabe Mariam. He was supposed to sit next to the Leke Kahinat on the left side of the king.

Apart from this, each of these authorities has additional duties to fulfill in the royal court. For example, the Nibure 'Ed was responsible to the high court and serve as the highest judge, the Leke Kahinat was responsible to the whole administration of the state, the Re'ese Reousan was mostly engaged in the affairs of the Church, where as the Patriarch was doing a lot of work between the Church and the State. (Sergew HableSelassie, 1972: 268) In general the achievement of building the rock-hewn churches, which were the continuation of the ancient Axumite architectural heritage, became a lasting monumental legacy of the Zagwe dynasty.

REVIVAL OF MONASTICISM IN ETHIOPIA AND THE TRADITIONAL CHURCH SCHOOLS

Revival of Monasticism in Ethiopia and the Spread of Christianity. Some of the Prominent Indigenous Ethiopian Monks Who Ran Monasticism

In spite of its early introduction in the sixth century with the advent of the Nine Saints, monasticism could assume dominant position in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church only seven centuries later. Ethiopian monastic traditions before the last quarter of the thirteenth century revolved around Egyptian and Oriental founders. Thus, until the

mid thirteen century there was no new monastery had been founded outside the Christian area of Tigray. What churches existed elsewhere were served by married priests.

The most dominant monastic houses of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church were founded by indigenous (Ethiopian) monks namely those of St. Abune Iyesus Mo'a of Debre Hayq, St. Abune Tekle Haimanot of Debre Libanos, St. Abune Ewastatewos of Sarae and later the monastery of Waldiba was founded by St. Abune Samuel etc. All of these and other monasteries derived their origin from the Nine Saints.

The earliest traditions of monasticism in the region of Wollo goes back only to the middle of the thirteenth century, when Abba Iyesus Moa settled at the Island Church of St. Stephen in Lake Hayq in about 1248. He left the monastery of Debre Damo and started his own monastic school of Hayq, where many students from Amhara, Shewa, etc. joined him. He conferred the monastic habit on them, and later some left Hayq to establish their own communities. Abune Tekle Haimanot left for his native land of Shewa, and others appear to have dispersed in the province of Amhara. Within a short time, after his coming to Hayq Abba Iyesus Moa firmly established the position of monasticism which was to be the effective vehicle for the expansion of the church (Christianity) throughout Ethiopia.

The history and contributions of the three native saints to the expansion of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church are:-

Abba Iyesus Moa (1211 – 1292)

Abba Iyesus-Moa was the founder and abbot of Debre Hayq St. Estefanos monastery. He was one of the most eminent personalities of Ethiopian Monasticism. Abune Iyesus Moa was born around 1211 AD at Dahna district in Gonder (*Begemider*). His father was Zekristos and his mother Egziakibra both were pious and devoted Christians. He received primary religious education especially the commentaries of the Old and New Testaments in his home tutored by his uncle. At the age of 30, he went to the monastery of Debre Damo, which was established by Abba Aregawi. There under Abba Yohanni, the abbot and the teacher of the monastery in 1241 AD, he studied ascetic life, monastic rule and the living tradition of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. He stayed

in Debre Damo for seven years devoting much of his time to the learning, copying books and studying solitary contemplation. Due to this, he is renowned for having left a large collection of manuscripts including his own manuscripts of the four Gospel at Hayq. The gospel he wrote is the only illustrated manuscript of that time kept in Ethiopia. After Debre Damo, he traveled south towards to the island of Hayq where around 1248 AD he founded the monastery of St. Estefanos. Abba Iyesus-Moa played a chief part in the so-called “restoration of the Solomonic dynasty” in 1270 AD. That was done by helping Emperor Yikuno Amlak to obtain the throne.

Prior to his arrival there, it is apparent that the island only had a small church with no established educational and monastic institutions. Before the establishment of the monastery by Abba Iyesus Moa there was a church of St. Peter and St. Paul on the shore of the lake and Christianity was preached during the reign of Dil Nead. Emperor Dil Nead built the church of St. Stephen on one of the islands on this Lake, endowing it on a lavish scale and throwing it open to three hundred clergy from Axum. Close by the Lake, near the Church of Debre Egziabiher he built a palace. Abba Iyesus Moa opened a church and a monastic school. When the students graduated and left Debre Hayq, they were obliged to establish their own monastic and educational centers in different areas. Among his most successful students were: Abba Baselote Mikael who founded Däbrä Gole in Amhara; Abba Hiruta-Amlak who founded the monastery of Daga Estefanos on the Island of Lake Tana; Abba Tekle Haimanot the patron of Ethiopian Church who founded the monastery of Debre Libanos; Abba Yohannes founder of the monastery of Kibran Gabriel on the island of Lake Tana; The famous scholar, writer and Saint Abba Giorgis founder of the monastery of Gassicha in Amhara; likewise Abba Gebre Enderias, Abune Aaron, Abune Estinfase Kristos, Abune Yoset and many others can be mentioned. After many years of service and a righteous life, Abune Iyesus-Moa died in 1292 AD. His holy relics are kept in the Hayq monastery. He is commemorated every year on the 25th of Hidar/ 4 December. As it is stated above many young men from among the local Christians and from areas further afield joined the monastic school. When they graduated from there, they have left Hayq. And established their monastic centers in different areas.

Abba Tekle Haimanot who was the student of Abba Iyesus Moa founded the monastery of Debre Libanos, and helped Yikuno Amlak to hold

power and many others who later founded a number of independent monasteries in the whole region of medieval Ethiopia were graduates of this monastic school. Even Yikuno Amlak the founder of the so-called Solomonic dynasty who was born and brought up in the near by district of Sagarat is mentioned as one of the pupils of Abba Iyesus Moa. The traditions of close association with Yikuno Amlak are a basic factor in the history of Debre Hayq, and the historical significance of the island monastery in the whole period under consideration is entirely built on these traditions. Yikuno Amlak, a former pupil of Iyesus Moa is said to have had the blessing of his master (teacher) and advisor in his revolt against the last Zagwe king, Yitbarek. Iyesus Moa's readiness to co-operate with his former pupil is attributed to his acceptance of Yikuno Amlak's claim that he descended from the ancient rulers of Axum, from the Queen of Sheba and king Solomon of Israel. On his return from a successful campaign against Yitbarek where the latter was killed, Yikuno Amlak is said to have entered into a pact with Iyesus Moa, one of the terms of the agreement being that the title of Aqabe Seat would thenceforth be conferred on Iyesus Moa and on all of his successors as abbots of Debre Hayq. From that time onwards until the wars of Ahmed Grag, the abbots of Debre Hayq held the title of Aqabe Seat and the island monastery was one of the greatest cultural centers of the newly established Solomonic dynasty. Thus, the island monastery of Lake Hayq continued to be one of the most important cultural centers of the "Solomonic" kings until the advent of Ahmed Grag in the first half of the sixteen century and until its abolition in 1974 (1996 E.C.) by the military socialist government of Ethiopia. Thus, the most important ecclesiastical official in court was the Aqabe Seat, the titular head of the island monastery of Debre Hayq. The Aqabe Seat was in actual fact responsible for affairs of state whether internal or external.

Abba Tekle Haimanot (1215-1313)

Abba Tekle Haimanot was born around 1215 in the place which is now called Itissa /Silalish/, Bulga. His first name was Fesseha Sion. His father was Stegazeab and his mother Egziharya. He was a descendent of Zadok, the High Priest of Jerusalem, who with Nathan the Prophet, made Solomon king. He was one of the most outstanding pupils of Abba Iyesus Moa at the monastery of Hayq. St. Tekle Haimanot visited Axum, the monasteries of Tigray such as Debre Damo, which was founded by one of the Nine Saints. Some said that he had made a pilgrimage to

Jerusalem. Iyesus Moa's spiritual father, Yohanni, was still alive and welcomed him to his fold in Debre Damo. In the monastic schools of Debre Damo and Hayq, he studied the monastic life and activities.

The period in which Tekle Haimanot stayed in Tigray and Hayq saw a tremendous revolution in the history of monasticism in Ethiopia. In the long period between the sixth and the thirteenth centuries, Ethiopian monasticism had always revolved around the old establishments founded by the Nine Saints. Monasteries and Churches, which enjoyed royal or local princely patronage, provided the cultural leadership that kept Ethiopian Christendom alive. As it is mentioned above apart from some individual ascetics who have abandoned their homes to wonder freely in isolated forest and desert regions, no independent monastic communities have been established before the middle of the thirteenth century outside Axum and its surroundings.

Later St. Tekle Haimanot was summoned by God to become a missionary. Thus, equipped with much learning and with a great monastic reputation, he returned to Shewa as emissary of the church to establish a permanent center of Christian learning and monasticism through which the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church would soon make its influence felt on the pagan people of Shewa, Damot, Wolayta and Gojjam. Thus, many of the evangelical achievements in Shewa and Damot attributed to him and his disciples. Regarding the spread of the Christian faith in Gojjam and its surrounding areas; the island church of Tana Qirkos from where Christianity spread, claims its foundation by the early Axumite missionaries in the fourth century A.D. And later a Christian community existed in the area such as in Gojjam, Begemider, and Agewmider etc before the end of the Zagwe dynasty.

About the end of the second decade of the fourteenth century, King Amde Sion had firmly consolidated his power in the region between the river Tekezze in the east and Lake Tana, and the stage was set for the expansion of the Church further a field. Thus, the early campaign of Amde Sion had resulted in the consolidation of his power in Gojjam and in the region immediately to the north and east of the Lake; and his reign saw a speedy development in the establishment and expansion of the church. The island monastery of Tana Qirkos had been the major center of Christian activities in the Lake region through the evangelical

activities of Abba Aron, Abba Zekarias, Abba Zeyohnnes, Abba Yafqiranna – Igze, etc.

During the reign of King Amade Sion, Abba Gebre Iyesus, the disciple of Abba Ewastatewos preached in the Fallasha (Bete Israel) region. While some of them received the Christian faith, most of them resisted and kept their Jewish religion. Later during the reign of king Yishaq (1414 – 29), they (the inhabitants of Semen /Gondar) rebelled and were suppressed. For king Yishaq the only solution for this chronic problem lay in bringing an end to the religious differences by imposing Christianity on the Falsshas. With this in mind he passed a decree from which the Fallashas are sometimes said to have derived their name. “He, who is baptized in the Christian religion, may inherit the land of his father; otherwise let him be a fallashi”. Since then, they have been called Fallasha (Exiles). He built many churches in Dembya and Wegara. These have served as another stage for further Christian expansion in Fallasha areas. But the Bete Israel of Ethiopia continued their hostilities to the church.

Tekle Haimanot’s work in the pagan areas involved baptizing converts, such as the pagan’s leader Motolomi, king of Damot (Hdya, Wolayta). Motolomi is said to be the arch enemy of the Zagwe emperors, who refused to pay tribute and among Christians he labored to consolidate the faith and to teach Christian ethics. Especially to those Christians who were influenced by the surrounding pagan practices, he exhorted his audience of the prescriptions of the church. For this purpose St. Tekle Haimanot traveled widely throughout the country and his prestige grew. His influence had spread considerably before he finally decided to settle at Dabre Asbo. His successful missionary activities secured him a title of “New Apostle” of Ethiopia, because he became bishop and Itchege.

During the Crusades after the death of Abune Mathewos, it was not possible to get another bishop from Egypt. St. Tekle Haimanot, the abbot of Debre Libanos was elected by the clergy and was appointed to be the head and bishop of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. He was ordained by God, and served the Church until the Egyptian bishop Abune Yohannes came to Ethiopia. Then, he left the bishopric office to Abune Yohannes.

Until 1951 E.C., there has always been an Itchege (head of the church), who was a native Ethiopian, as the successor of St. Tekle Haimanot at the monastery of Debre Libanos. Since the time of Yikuno Amlak the functions of the church leaders were divided between the Egyptian bishop and the Itchege. The bishop was responsible for religious matter, while the Itchege was responsible for the control of the church property and administration. Thus, the chief role of the Coptic bishops was to crown the king, to ordain priests and deacons, to consecrate Tabots and to excommunicate heretics. (Sergew Hableselassie, 1972: 287). In all matters, the approval of the bishop was important.

In cases of disputes arising among the clergy, the Itchege had the judicial power to settle them. He was the indigenous defender of the true faith so that whenever heresy appeared after consulting with the bishop he refuted it by correctly formulating the teaching of the Church. The power of the Emperor over the Church was to send envoys to request a metropolitan from Alexandria, sending a considerable gift for that privilege. He also had a free hand in selecting and appointing the Itchege.

When controversies involving dogma arose, the two parties discussed the issue under his chairmanship, presenting evidence from the Holy Bible and the writings of the Church Fathers. In these cases, the Emperor was supposed to assume the role of arbitrator but instead, he often supported this or that party according to his inclinations, and matters some times ended in bloodshed. He was also responsible for appointment of heads to some important churches and monasteries, such as the Nibure Ed of Axum Sion Church. Until 1966 E.C., the Ethiopian view of relations between Church and State was summed up in the image of two eyes, two hands and two feet. After the independence of the Church, the first two Patriarchs were performing the duties of Itchege. The Abbot of Debre Libanos is called “Sebate”.

In 1284 St. Tekle Haimanot founded his own monastery at Debre Asbo, which was located in a pagan area in the province of Shewa, and Zara Yaqob renamed it Debre Libanos. He enriched it with possession and entrusted its abbot, the Itchege with wide pastoral responsibility for the control of other monasteries. At first, the monastery of Debre Asbo only consisted of a small cave divided into two to make room for a church, and also for the living quarters of Tekle Haimanot and his disciples. He

kept the Tabot of St. Mary in half of the cave, which he partitioned with a curtain of straw. He lived with his fifteen disciples in the remaining half. Tekle Haimanot's disciples began clearing the forests and cultivating the land and a simple monastic organization soon began to take place. The monks of Debre Libanos were becoming one of the pillars of the kingdom. Their abbots, the Itchehes were recognized as the most influential of Ethiopian clerics. Following the Oromo migrations the monastery of Debre Libanos in Shewa had become sharply isolated and the order's center moved to Azezo, south of Gondar. But after being reorganized again hundreds of monks and nuns are found in Debre Libanos (Shewa) today.

St. Tekle Haimanot spent the last years of his life in prayer standing in a small cell he had built for this purpose. In the cell, he inserted nails and knives on the walls to hinder him from seeking rest. After he had been standing up for a long time, one of his legs broke and fell off. His disciples took it and rolled it up in strips of cloth and buried it under the table of the Ark in the church. Afterwards, he stood up on one leg for seven years. He died in 1313. He was canonized a saint by the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. He is the only Ethiopian to be canonized by the Coptic Church. (Sergew Hableselassie, 1972: 282)

His successor Abune Philipos with his eleven disciples evangelized the pagan inhabitants of Shewa. During the reign of Amde Sion, bishop Yaqob came from Egypt to Ethiopia. He encouraged Abune Philipos, the abbot of Debre Libanos, after Abba Elsia to evangelize the pagan inhabitants of Shewa. Bishop Yaqob devoted most of his time organizing and encouraging the evangelists. Philipos with his eleven, (twelve including himself) disciples "Neburane Edi" Yohannes, Qawistos, Tadewos, Matyas, Anorewos, Merqorewos, Adhani, Iyosyas, Yoseph, Gebre-Kristos, ZenaMarkos, evangelized those who were worshipping rocks, trees, rivers and the sorcerers i.e. the pagan priests who were sacrificing the blood of cows and goats to devils. They lived by eating, drinking and committing adultery all their lives, (I Cor 15:32). The religious leaders and priests of these pagan communities had a very strong power over their people. They offered the greatest resistance to the work of the disciples of Tekle Haimanot or of Philipos in the South. Their regions were only later opened to Christian influence in a religious sense, and they naturally staged a long and desperate struggle against the establishment of Churches and monasteries among their peoples. After

the military successes of Amde Sion, the local chiefs had accepted the fact of the expansion of the boundary and the spread of Christianity. Their religious leaders nevertheless continued their hostile policies on their own. Even though the above mentioned eleven missionaries were the disciples of St. Tekle Haimanot, this had made the name of Abune Philipos most renowned in the traditions of Debre Libanos (Bete Tekle Haimanot), only second to that of St. Tekle Haimanot. The immediate successor of Abune Yaqob, Abune Selama II, who was named “the interpreter”, was also famous for his activity in the evangelization of the pagan and Moslem areas and for promoting monastic life. He gave great attention to the work of translation from Arabic to Ge’ez of important books such as the Synodos, Didaskalia, Sinkisar, the Acts of Martyrs, Filksious, Gabre Himamat, and other several homilies. The victory (military success) of Amde Sion and other kings over the local pagan and Muslim chiefs helped the clergy (i.e. monks of different monasteries) to preach the Gospel and baptize the new converts, and establish churches and monasteries there. The monastic community was also offering spiritual services to the Christian troops stationed in the recently added area.

Abba Ewostatewos (1273-1352) and His Teaching about the Observance of the Sabbath

Abba Ewostatewos, the staunch supporter of Sabbath observance, was born in Garalta, in central Tigray, and he studied under his uncle, Abba Daniel, who was the abbot of Debre Mariam. Abba Ewostatewos established the monastery called (named) Ewostatewos in Seraye which is in the present day Eritrea, and Seraye became the center of his monastic activities. There he was joined by many students such as Absadi, Bakimos, and Marqorewos etc. and taught (preached) vigorously. He is credited with the destruction of several pagan shrines. In addition, he cut and burnt several trees of idols worshipped by the inhabitants.

The Ethiopian Synaxarium of Meskerem 18 /September, pp. 84-86 writes that Abba Ewostatewos left his country for Egypt as a result of religious controversies in Ethiopia. Before his departure, there was an attempt on his life, organized by a rival group of the clergy in Seraye. At the court of the Patriarch in Cairo, his fellow Ethiopian pilgrims accused him of refusing to communicate with them and of observing the Sabbath

as well as Sunday. The question of Sabbath was the central in the conflict, and Ewostatewos admitted the charge. He defended his position by resorting to the Ten Commandments. He bitterly complained to patriarch Benjamin, who apparently asked him to live in peace with his countrymen. Because, his reception in Egypt was clearly unfavorable, he passed on to Jerusalem, then to Cyprus and Armenia. It is said that on his journey Ewostatewos with his disciples crossed the sea by laying his garment on the water.

When he left Ethiopia, Ewostatewos was accompanied by some of his followers, but he entrusted the leadership of the rest of the community to his senior disciple, Abba Absadi. He had a difficult task in keeping the small group intact, and only on the return of some of Ewostatewos' disciples from abroad did his efforts begin to bear fruit. Bakimos, Marqoreos and Gebre Iyesus went with their master to Armenia and returned after his death.

All the followers of Ewostatewos soon gathered around Absadi and established the community of Debre Mariam in Qohayin. The leading members also founded other communities, and a chain of monastic groups, collectively known as the "Seven Disciples of Ewostatewos" was soon established. Apart from Gebre Iyesus who was preceded to Infranz in Begemidr and the region around Lake Tana, two of the communities were in north Tigray and the remaining four in Seraye and Hamassen. Thus, the geographical distribution of the "house of Ewostatewos" was more heavily represented in the northern provinces of the Kingdom. The controversy over the Sabbath in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church was much older than the fourteenth Century. For instance, in a report on Ethiopia, bishop Sawiros once requested patriarch Cyril II (1077-92) to write to the Ethiopians "forbidding them to observe the customs of the Old Testament" (i.e. polygamy, the observance of the Sabbath, etc).

On the contrary, the Egyptian bishop, the monks of Debre Hayq and of Debre Libanos (i.e. the Itchege and monks of Debre Libanos were devoted ally of Alexandria and always followed the leadership of the Egyptian bishops) considered the Sabbath celebration as Jewish practice and rejected its celebration. Because of this, the anti-Ewostatewos (anti-Sabbath) party persecuted him and his followers. But it is said that his

departure with his pupils for Egypt, Jerusalem and Armenia was self-exile.

The followers of Ewostatewos who had remained in Ethiopia with those who returned home effectively organized themselves and they become one of the two monastic houses of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. The other is Bete Tekle Haimanot of Debre Libanos. The followers of Abba Ewostatewos later founded important cultural and educational centers like Debre-Mariam of Qohayn, and later Debre Bizen (on the eastern edge of the Hamasen plateau). The memory of the exile and death of Ewostatewos gave his followers a strong sense of unity, and they continued to defend his position on the Sabbath, for which they were excommunicated by the Coptic bishop.

King Dawit (1380-1410) opposed and forbade the observance of the Sabbath. Later he changed his mind and permitted the observance of the Sabbath for the followers of Ewostatewos. But he maintained at the same time that at the royal court and in all the non-Ewostathian churches only the official Alexandrian position on the Sabbath (Sunday) should be strictly followed. In doing this king Dawit was clearly anxious to please both parties, but this timid approach to the problem did not bring about a permanent solution. Neither the diehards among the Ewostathians, nor the anti-Sabbath party, were fully satisfied by his half measure. The most drastic effect of his intervention was only to undermine the prestige of bishop Bartolomewos, and so weakened the position of Dawit's ardent supporters who were completely loyal to Alexandria.

Bartolomewos had been too deeply involved in the conflict, and there was very little chance of peaceful settlement to the controversy until the end of the bishop's reign. In 1438, two Egyptian prelates - Bishop Michael and Gabriel whose names have become in-separately connected with that of Emperor Zara Yaqob in the ecclesiastical traditions of Ethiopia, succeeded him. The king sought their full cooperation in his plans to restore the unity of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. Soon after 1404 the whole Eritrean region became once and for all, an exclusive domain of the "house of Ewostatewos" that emerged from the struggle with tremendous success.

Thus, the attention of the king was first drawn to the problem of settling the internal conflicts among the Ethiopian clergy and to the creation of a perfect union within the church. This is because the hottest issue that had divided the clergy for him, as long as he could remember was that of the Sabbath. For some (limited) time the Ewostathians abstained from taking Holy Orders (ordination) since they refused to accept the ordination by the Egyptian bishops. As a result, they appointed a lay abbot, who did not have the ordination of a priest, to teach and administer them according to their own rules. Thus, the Ewostathians declined to receive the Holy orders. Only for the celebration of the mass and for hearing confessions did they require ordained priests, and these they apparently recruited from other communities on their own terms. (i.e. they admitted the priests into their group only after giving them penance for having been members of other communities (anti-Ewostathian)).

As it is mentioned above, the monastery of Debre-Bizen that is founded in 1390 by the follower of Ewostatewos, Abba Philipos in Hamassen was the strong center of the "House of Ewostatewos". The renowned theologian and the tutor of Zera Yaqob, Abba Giorgis of Gascha taught the legitimacy of observing the Sabbath together with the Lord's Day, and wrote about this in his Metshafa Mister. (Taddesse Tamrat, 1972: 224) In 1450 Zera Yaqob convened a council at his new church Debre Mitmaq, in Shewa. The two Egyptian bishops (Abba Michael and Abba Gabriel), the followers of Ewostatewos and the abbots of the leading monasteries attended the council which was presided by ZeraYaqob himself. It appears that the gathering was intended for the formal reconciliation of the Ewostathians with the Egyptian bishops and their Ethiopian followers, for the restoration of the unity of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church.

The bishops formally authorized the observance of the Sabbath in all the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. And the Ewostathians agreed to receive Holy orders from the Egyptian prelates, which they refused before. The acceptance of Sabbath observation was a decisive concession to the followers of Ewostatewos. Even though the observance of the Sabbath is not practiced in the Coptic Orthodox Church, the two Egyptian bishops endorsed its practice only in the Ethiopian Church for the earnest entreaties of ZeraYaqob. And this was the only means, which was enabled the clergy to unite with each other.

Thus, he succeeded in bringing about a definite settlement of the nondoctrinal controversy that had divided the Ethiopian Church for over a century and this enabled him to spread Christianity to the pagans and Muslims that surrounded the country and to undertake on a series of religious reforms, which characterized the period of his reign.

He attributed the religious imperfection of his people to the bad influence of their non-Christian environment. It seems that after the Council of Debre Mitmaq, his major pre-occupation was to reorganize and reform the Ethiopian Church, and make full use of its resources by stamping alien religious practices among his Christian subjects. On the other hand, the most lasting achievement of ZaraYaqob certainly laid in his encouragement of Ethiopic (Ge'ez) literature, in the development of which he actively participated (i.e. by writing many books), and in his re-organization of the Church and in encouraging the clergy (evangelists) to spread the Christian faith. In 1679, during the reign of Tsadiqu Yohannes, (Yohannes the Just) a part of the relics (bone of the hand) of Ewostatewos was brought to Ethiopia by the Armenian Bishop Abba Yohannes.

After resolving the Sabbath celebration crisis, unfortunately another group of monks, led by Abba Estefanos started to teach against the honor, which was due to the king and St. Mary mother of God. Emperor Zera Yaqob after arguing with them, even though they were not heretics at all, being fade up with their harsh and inappropriate dishonoring reproach, he couldn't have more patience. Then, being unable to tolerate another threat of schism he took hasty and unnecessary measures on them. After ZaraYaqob, during the reign of his descendants Iskindir (1478-94), Amde Sion II (1494-95), Naod (1495-1508) and Libne Dingel (1508-1540), internal political unrest and power struggles and conflicts started up among the high-ranking Christian officials. And the civil war, which was caused by the power struggle, aggravated the weakness of the army and caused great harm to the freedom of the country and the spread of Christianity. The previously defeated Muslims of Yifat, Fatagar, Dawaro, Hadya, Bale and Adal got the chance to fight and defeat the Christian army which was stationed there. Thus, about half a century of political strife among the warlords of the Christian kingdom provided the immediate, favorable background for the swift Arab and Turkish Muslim conquest under the leadership of Imam, Ahmed Ibn Ibrahim Gagn.

The Traditional Church Schools and Their Contribution to the Church and Nation

About the start of the traditional church schools in Ethiopia, some suggested that its origin was the Synagogue's instruction; others say that its origin coincided with the establishment of the church itself. Thus, the church school system, which is one of the oldest in Christendom originated in the Axumite Kingdom with the introduction of Christianity about the 4th century. In the course of the centuries, the school system has grown and changed in many ways. With the expansion of the Kingdom and Christianity to the South and Southwest churches and monasteries were founded, which became, for centuries important centers of learning.

Until the introduction of the modern (Western) system of education to Ethiopia by Emperor Menelik II, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church was the chief center of education. From early Christian times every village had its church and every church its school, within the outer wall of the church enclosure. Generally, the schools were created originally to serve the community of believers, to instruct their children in Christian moral and literature and to impart to them such familiarity with the church ritual and its prayers and hymns as was fitting to every devout member of the congregation. It was also the mission of the church elementary schools to prepare some of the children to proceed to more advanced schools of the church whereby they might enter the priesthood, or qualify as 'Debteras' (cantors) and teachers, scribes, etc. Thus by its schools the church assured its own continuity.

In the churches and monasteries religious, historical and literary books were written by hand and by trained scribes in Ge'ez, and many schools were conducted. What is thus written on parchment then takes the form of books prepared from manuscripts in a way that is not inferior to modern forms of printing. The contribution of these works to Ethiopian civilization in advancing education and art in general is immense. The manuscripts are found today in large numbers in various churches and monasteries, and in the hands of some clergies laymen and foreigners. But unfortunately many of these books were taken abroad illegally. Consequently, foreign universities and libraries are in possession of

many precious ancient Ethiopian manuscripts. Thus, those books are bearing testimony to ancient Ethiopian history, culture and civilization.

The church scholars and priests were not only confined merely to the administration of education in the church. They were also serving their country competently in various capacities ranging from political leadership to the lowliest public functions. The church scholars who had studied law (i.e. Fetha Negest) were placed in the relevant government departments for administering justice, etc.

Until 1974 (1966 E.C.), theologians were teaching religious and moral subjects in the modern schools which were run by the Ministry of Education. In addition, the society in general and the younger generation in particular owe a great deal to the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church which happens to be the originator of the only indigenous alphabet in the African Continent and Ge'ez script, the foundation of education in the country. The Ethiopian people have not only their own alphabet but also their own numerals. These numerals have existed contemporaneously with the alphabet for thousands of years. Many nations in the world and some Ethiopians currently are using the Arabic numbers. There were (and are) four main schools connected with the churches and monasteries. The courses, which were given by the church schools, were mainly religious.

The teaching profession in the traditional church schools is not collective but individual. The teacher cannot teach the same subject to more than two persons at the same time. For this reason, he uses the knowledge of more advanced students to teach the beginners.

The four schools and the courses offered are:

In the First Stage (Nibab Bet) there was the primary school in which children learnt the alphabet. They were trained step by step how to read. They also learned prayers by heart.

The exercise of reading and recitation of religious texts in Ge'ez can be quite difficult for the beginner, particularly because the text is in Ge'ez, a language no longer spoken and therefore far from the experience of the child. However, with this stage the pupil is introduced to the art of reading Ge'ez texts. Theoretically, both boys and girls are eligible to

enroll in church schools. However, in rural districts, some parents discourage the education of girls, since their function is to be housewives.

The Second Stage was the school of Church Music (Zema Bet) in which the students received training in religious singing. The basic book of religious songs is the “Deggua”, which was originally composed by St. Yared.

Some of the pupils who accomplished the Nebab Bet join the Qidassie (Liturgy) school and learn Gibre Diquan and Gibre Qissina (the liturgy which is sung by the deacons and priests at the time of serving the mass). Then, after being ordained, they serve the church and use the church’s land, which was used by their fathers who were priests until 1966 E.C.

The Third Stage was the school of Poetry (Qine Bet). The students studied grammar and the techniques of composing good poetry in the “Qine Bet” school.

The Fourth stage was the school of the interpretation (Metsehaf Bet) of all the canonical books of the church, i.e. the Old and the New Testaments as well as the works of the Church Fathers, such as the Fetha-Negest, Haymanote Abew, etc.

The man who is familiar with only one area is considered a well-educated man, and he is automatically classified as a scholar in the circle of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. He is then a candidate for a higher position in the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

After completing their education, some of the students went to different places and opened similar schools. Many of the graduates served and still are serving the church. Thus, Christianity spread far, monasteries grew up in different regions, and education was available for those who wished to learn. The teacher normally does not set a formal examination to judge the work of the pupil. However, he follows the progress of his student daily, so no special written examinations are needed.

A student of Nebab Bet or Qidassie Bet, who would like to join the higher schools, usually leaves his parents and joins the wandering students who travel from parish to parish and from monastery to monastery. Mostly, he changes his name in order not to be traced (caught) by his parents, who seriously were in need his service for cattle tending and cultivation. He gets his daily bread through begging, which is accepted by the people as legitimate right (sponsorship) of the student to live on until he completes his studies. Traditionally a boy can receive only the Nebab Bet instruction at his village. In most rural areas, a school, which offers higher education, does not exist. With the spread of modern education and a modern school system, this institution (i.e. the higher church school) is declining. One of the main reasons for this change is that the graduates of the traditional church schools have lost their traditional elite status in the social order. And they are not able to get enough income to live on.

In the early days, some of the kings also studied in the monastic schools. Emperor Zara Yaqob and Naod were, for example, among the well-known scholars who wrote books and poems. In addition to the numerous traditional and clergy training church schools, at present there are also some theological colleges, which were opened in the middle of the 20th century and follow the modern (Western) system of education such as Holy Trinity Theological University College, St. Paul's Theological, Kesate Berhan St. Frumentius Theological College of Mekele, etc. their graduates are serving the church in the country and abroad. The church has Sunday Schools in almost every church. Tensae Ze Gubae Printing Press of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church is also responsible for printing theological books, magazines and periodicals.